



Developing a grey character for an animated film in light of postclassical character theory

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted for the degree Master in Graphic Design at the North-West University is my own original work and it has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher education. I further declare that all sources cited or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of a comprehensive list of references.

HERMAN GEORGE SCHOLTZ

SIGNED ON: 08/11/2024

Signed by: Herman George Scholtz

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I want to acknowledge the work and support of my voice actors, who contributed to producing the animated short film, and the patience, guidance, and tolerance of my three supervisors, who have supported me on this journey.

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to create and develop a theory-led practice research project for the completion of a master's degree in graphic design at the North-West University. The study comprises two components: the first is theoretical, and the second is practical. This study integrates theory-led research methodology with postclassical narratology and a specific focus on the narrative element of character. The application of character theory will demonstrate the development of a grey character. That finds expression in the practical component of the study, a 3D animated short film. Building on Krakowiak (2015), Kleemans *et al.* (2017) and Majewski's (2023) notion of the grey character, the grey hero is an atypical hero who manifests and functions as part hero and part villain. The study will demonstrate how such a character is created, portrayed, and identified within the narrative of a 3D animated short film. Through a survey of various heroic characters from movies, series and comics, three factors that determine the grey hero's character are identified: trauma, interpersonal relationships and bendable values. Informed by this investigation, the grey hero's personality and morally ambiguous nature will be expressed by designing specific visual cues, character traits, and narrative events.

Key terms: Animated character, Character development, Grey character, Character development for 3D animation, Animated film, Animation, Post-classical narratology, Postclassical character theory

Fog of war, Animated short film: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1wXgltp0DVToS2wq5Re0Vf6gYkGVV9RNJ?usp=share_link

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OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie studie is om 'n teoriegeleide praktyknavorsingsprojek te skep en te ontwikkel vir die voltooiing van 'n meestersgraad in grafiese ontwerp aan die Noordwes-Universiteit. Die studie bestaan uit twee komponente, waarvan die eerste teoreties en die tweede prakties is. Hierdie studie integreer teoriegeleide navorsingsmetodologie met post-klassieke narratologie en 'n spesifieke fokus op die narratiewe element van karakter. Die toepassing van karakterteorie sal die ontwikkeling demonstreer van wat ek 'n "grys held" sal noem, wat uitdrukking vind in die praktiese komponent van die studie, 'n 3D-animasie-kortfilm. In voortbouing op Krakowiak (2015), Kleemans *et al.* (2017) en Majewski (2023) se idee van die grys karakter, is die grys held 'n atipiese held wat as deels held en deels skurk manifesteer en funksioneer. Die studie sal demonstreer hoe so 'n karakter geskep, uitgebeeld en geïdentifiseer word binne die narratief van 'n 3D-animasie-kortfilm. Deur 'n ondersoek van verskeie heldhaftige karakters uit films, reekse en strokiesprente word drie faktore wat die grys held se karakter bepaal, geïdentifiseer: trauma, interpersoonlike verhoudings en buigsame waardes. In die lig van hierdie ondersoek sal die grys karakter se persoonlikheid en moreel dubbelsinnige aard uitdrukking vind deur die ontwerp van spesifieke visuele leidrade, karaktertrekke en narratiewe gebeure.

Sleuteltermes: Geanimeerde karakter, Karakterontwikkeling, Grys karakter, Karakterontwikkeling vir 3D-animasie, Animasie-rolprent, Animasie, Post-klassieke narratologie, Post-klassieke karakterteorie

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1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

The following study concerns the creation and development of a theory-led practice research project for the completion of a master's degree in graphic design at the North-West University. The study involves two components: the first is theoretical, and the second is practical. Together, these components form the basis for the study. This study integrates theory-led research methodology with postclassical narratology and a specific focus on character. The application of character theory will demonstrate the development of a grey character for a short 3D animated film.

To understand a grey character, we must distinguish between heroes and villains, who are extreme opposite character types. Heroes and villains are characters found in narratives facilitating binary opposition: generally, the hero represents good, and the villain represents evil. The roles of the hero and villain set the stage for the recognition of specific narrative conventions. Heroes are often considered to be good-doers (Chin, 2009; Kaveney, 2008). Typically, a hero will have admirable qualities, such as courage, bravery, integrity, loyalty and honour.

In some cases, heroes are attributed superhuman qualities, such as heightened senses and physical abilities, to assist in their benevolence. In these cases, such heroes are referred to as superheroes. Heroes and superheroes act selflessly for the sake of others or are challenged to overcome adversity (Kaveney, 2008: 2-22; Chambliss & Svitavsky, 2008; Blanchard, 2018). The term *hero* often signifies the universal pattern of human experience that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries (Campbell, 1948; Jung, 1959; Kaveney, 2008; Rubin, 2008). On the other hand, a villain represents opposition to the hero's qualities, such as rebellion, corruption, and darker human tendencies. A villain usually stands in opposition to the hero, challenging the values and morals of the hero – for example, Batman and his nemesis, the Joker. Batman represents justice and morality, whereas the Joker represents disorder and anarchy (Brody, 1995). These rudimentary mental images are classified as archetypes. The term *archetype* describes patterns, themes, symbols or character types that recur in stories. Archetypes are universally understood as primitive images that constitute essential building blocks of human psychology and storytelling, allowing for explaining complex ideas (Jung, 1959). Apollo and Dionysus¹, two figures from Greek mythology, exemplify opposing character types and serve as a template for distinguishing between heroes and villains (Graf, 2009). Apollo is heralded as suitable for representing qualities such as order and harmony, and Dionysus is viewed as bad

¹ Apollo and Dionysus are contrasting figures in Greek mythology who represent opposing, yet complementary forces within human nature.

for harbouring traits of chaos and irrationality. But what happens when a hero or villain moves outside the boundaries of good and evil?

Morally ambiguous characters are unique in occupying space between the more conventional characters, such as heroes and villains (Kleemans, 2017). Morally ambiguous characters, unlike villains and heroes, can do both good and evil because of their moral complexity. Characters such as Odysseus², who cannot resolve problems peacefully without violent force, is a prime example of a morally ambiguous character. Fitch (2005: 2-17) deconstructs the mainstream, contemporary depiction of American heroes as they are portrayed in media such as film and television. Parallels are drawn between contemporary heroes and Odysseus in how they engage in conflict and do not resolve problems without some form of combat or deception Fitch (2005: 2-17), thereby suggesting that contemporary heroes are all morally ambiguous to some degree. It is thus clear that boundaries are blurred between the moral values of heroes and villains, resulting in morally ambiguous characters, often referred to as *grey characters*. Grey characters, also known as *ambiguous characters*, are generally recognised by their moral ambiguity: they are flawed and can do good or bad things (Kleemans, 2017; Sevi, 2024). Often, stories of morally grey characters question the nature of good and evil, the boundaries between right and wrong, or which circumstances validate violent responses (Bramlet, 2013; Kleemans, 2017; Krakowiak, 2015). Their simultaneous villainous and heroic traits create a more flawed and authentic portrayal of a human, allowing viewers to empathise with their struggles and the consequences of their actions (Krakowiak, 2015). As to whether grey characters reside between the binary lines of conventional heroism, this study argues that grey characters occupy a spectrum of morality within narratives. These characters are neither good nor bad; neither heroes nor villains. However, the foreshadowing of specific attributes may present the character leaning towards one side or the other (Bramlet, 2013). Through a theory-led practice research study, this study explores how a grey character can be designed, developed and deployed within a 3D animated film. Because I am engaging with character development in a narrative 3D animation, the need exists to establish a connection between the practical output and the theory that guides it.

1.2. Narrative theory

Parts of this study concern distinct studies within narrative theory, specifically postclassical narrative theory, to further the objective and arguments in this study. While narrative theory is not the main focus of this study, I acknowledge the broad and complex nature of the field. A narrative can briefly be described as representing a series of events sequentially linked by causality and temporality (Landa, 2005). Within any narrative, there are essential elements, referred to as *narrative elements*. The narrative elements of interest are space, time, event and

² Odysseus, a hero in Homer Odyssey, who is known for his intelligence, complex personality and resourcefulness. Odysseus plays a key role in the Greek victory in the Trojan war and throughout the story, Odysseus's character is explored in depth, chronicling his growth and development (Britannica, 2024).

character. The role of character as one of the narrative elements proposed by narratologists like Bal (1985), Margolin (1986; 2006), Ryan (2014), Herman (2006), and Fokkema (1991), concerns a shift in focus: instead of viewing characters as functional entities, characters are perceived as being multi-dimensional, mental constructs that interact with other narrative elements. This study necessitates investigating character as a narrative element and the participating narrative elements such as event, space and time to arrive at a suitable theoretical underpinning for a narrative inquiry into a grey character for a 3D animation. The role of each of these elements in arriving at a suitable grey character will be established. For the character's moral complexity to come to light, the study requires a narrative in which the character can manifest as a grey character. This necessitates a brief introduction to narratology and the narrative elements involved in constructing stories. In the past, structuralist approaches focused more on uncovering universal patterns and structures such as character roles and plot stages within literary texts. This study focuses on a post-structural approach towards narrative because the focus shifts towards the cognitive aspects of the narrative and includes other nonliterary texts such as film.³ This will benefit the study, because it gives rise to dynamic, interactive and even more layered storytelling, ensuring more engagement of the audience or the viewer.

By extending Bal's approach towards the post-classical ambit, I argue that narrative is constituted by a set of elements: time, event, space and character. The study brings attention to these elements (time, event, space and character) which are necessary to demonstrate the grey character. It is impossible to tell a story about a character that does not occur over time while featuring a series of events that occupies a set space. To demonstrate that the character this study proposes to design is grey and unconventional, this study must construct a narrative in which the observed character is sufficiently developed and challenged to reveal their ambiguous morality and values. Ryan and Thon (2014: 4) also consider the inseparable role that time, setting, space, characters, and events play in the narrative experience. Ryan (1985: 718) elaborates on this by detailing the modal states of the narrative world. This refers to the causal nature of the events, as events serve as the means to transition from one state to the next (Landa, 2005). A series of events are needed that allow for the narrative function of change to transpire; these events must unfold over time in specific settings (spaces). Thus, to demonstrate a grey character, a narrative or story set in particular spaces that permit the occurrence of events is required. These events are determined by the story's context, which allows for exploring the character's actions. Over time, the viewer can witness the character's decisions and actions and the consequences of those actions. Chapter 4 will highlight the critical role of space, time and events in creating a character. The following section introduces the function of characters in narrative worlds.

³ The difference between structuralism and post-structuralism concerns their primary functions as theoretical outlines. Structuralism looks for repeatable patterns within literary works while post-structuralism retains the identified patterns raised by structuralism but offers room for deconstructive discourses concerning those patterns within a wider field that includes non literary work such as film and visual arts.

1.3. What is a character?

Literature in both classical and post-classical narrative theory⁴ defines the character as a mental image within a story world⁵ that can be interpreted by the viewer (Janidis, 2012; Ryan, 2012). Characters are entities that exist within narrative worlds (Jannidis, 2013; Ryan, 2012). These entities are often human-like, and they exhibit human qualities and appear to have a life of their own (Fokkema, 1991: 8). Characters feature in various narrative worlds and may manifest through different media, such as films, comics, books and video games (Ryan, 2012). Erving Goffman (1959) theorises that characters in media can be categorised into four types: the leading character (known as the protagonist), the deuteragonist (secondary characters), the bit player (minor characters that the audience are not aware of), and the fool (a character used to convey messages) (also see Neel, 2014). The protagonist is understood by Goffman (1959) as simply a character that the narrative focuses on, regardless of the morality or intentions of the protagonist. Thus, Goffman's (1959) theory provides flexibility to create atypical, ambiguous, or grey characters and narratives for this study (also see Zaidi, 2014). Jannidis's (2012) postulations correspond with the argument proposed by Fokkema (1991: 34-35), arguing that each viewer understands the real world; and as a result, the viewer is responsible for interpreting the character based on their understanding of the real world. These entities or characters may be factual, counterfactual, hypothetical, subjective, or conditional (Jannidis, 2012). The viewer's real-world knowledge and experience with regard to other narratives influence the interpretation of these characters. Although the characters unfold when the viewer's real-world knowledge is applied, the creator must still encode the character with specific attributes. These notions will be expanded upon in Chapter 4, which addresses the theory, to arrive at a suitable understanding of the underlying theory needed to create a character. The following section investigates different elements required to introduce and establish a character.

1.4. Characterisation and character development

In any narrative, characters cannot function in isolation and without events occurring (Bal, 1985). Narrative progression, referring to how a story unfolds, is needed to make a character's attributes known. Characterisation is the process of ascribing traits to a character (Margolin, 1986). This process has several dimensions, but for this study, characterisation is treated in the manner of characters being accepted as non-actual but well-specified individuals. This approach allows the analysis to characterise the characters by assigning a series of psychological traits that make up the character (Margolin, 2006: 88). Furthermore, character development is regarded as the process of change that a character undergoes during the

⁴ Postclassical narrative theory is an approach towards understanding narrative that expands on the classical analysis of narrative by incorporating mental interpretations of narrative.

⁵A storyworld is spatio-temporal domain that – depending on the events of the story transpiring in that world – undergoes global changes (Ryan & Thon, 2014).

narrative by facing various circumstances and events that challenge and transform the character (Bal, 1985; Fishelov, 1990; Fokkema, 1991). The characters will develop or regress, depending on how they act and react to the events they encounter during the narrative. Bal (1990) argues that a critical aspect of the narrative is the presence of change throughout the story. According to her, events are “the transition from one state to another”, implying that a process of change occurs (Bal, 1985: 189). Elements such as time, location and character feed directly into the narrative cycle, which is referred to by Bal (1985: 195-197) as a collection or series of events. Investigation into post-classical narrative theory suggests that change is a function of the narrative; therefore, since the character is a narrative element, the character is also subject to this function of change. As a result, the characters found within a narrative must change.

As a narrative progresses, locations, time and characters change (Fishelov, 1990). Some characters may change excitingly, affecting their identifying traits, while others may stay the same (Bal, 1985: 76-79). The changes that a character may undergo imply that the character has an initial set of distinguishable traits (Margolin, 2006: 73). For example, Luke Skywalker in George Lucas’s *Star Wars* (1977) changes from a simple farm boy to a mighty warrior called a Jedi knight. To arrive at a set of traits when developing a character, the need exists to first categorise the character in terms of its roles and functions. Character classification allows for the discernment and categorisation of characters, depending on their importance in telling a story. In short, Forster (1927) suggests that characters that are not important to the plot, require less development than those that are pivotal to the story. Primary classifications set out by Goffman (1959) theorise that characters in media can be categorised into four types, as explained in 1.3 above: the leading character (known as the protagonist), the deuteragonist (secondary characters), the bit player (minor characters that the audience is not aware of), and the fool (a character used to convey messages).

Therefore, significant development time is spent on the main character (in this instance, the grey character), and less time is spent on secondary characters. This also means that the secondary characters can be assigned roles that serve a single function that does not require a comprehensive explanation. As the character develops, the character may acquire new traits that alter how the character presents themselves (Fishelov, 1990). A process of change can thus be inferred from the narrative because of causality, which is an integral part of narrative structures (Bal, 1985). As mentioned, narrative is discerned by its use of time, space, event and character, but these elements are subject to change. By this logic, as argued by Bal (1985), one can infer that change is a crucial narrative function. Chapter 4, which lays the theoretical groundwork for the study, will focus on these and other issues regarding characterisation and character development for this study.

1.5. Designing the grey character

Conclusions drawn from chapters 3 and 4 on existing grey characters concerning the tropes they fall into, physiological and psychological traits and the relevant theories that were explored, are applied to implement design parameters suitable to achieve this study's objectives. The objectives include to design, develop and deploy a morally ambiguous character in an animated short film produced by the researcher. This section will discuss the main protagonist's backstory and the development of the narrative. Additionally, the protagonist of this animated short film, who is, by extension, the focus of the study, is Captain James Miller. Captain James Miller is a career soldier in a fictional world where he is a military unit leader. Captain Miller cares deeply for his friends and the men who serve under his leadership. He is a team player who values his compatriots, including his brother (Liam). Miller's personality and values often clash with the mission's priorities and the protocols of his army training and duties, which ultimately value national and strategic goals. Because of his characterisation, Captain Miller often prioritises the safety and well-being of his men, friends and brother, going against military orders to save his compatriots and honour his values and beliefs.

The story of Captain Miller is one of contradictions. Miller will make two decisions: in one, he chooses to save his friend over completing his mission, and in the second, Captain Miller decides to complete his mission over saving his friends. Each choice that Miller makes is highly controversial, and these decisions will put him in a position where he is to be trialled through a military court (court-martialled⁶) for his actions. The scenes of the court-martial in the narrative will serve as a means to revisit the actions taken by Captain Miller in the past that illustrate his moral ambiguity and internal conflict by choosing his mission over his values, which ultimately make Miller a morally grey character. The story's transcript, from the initial to the final draft, can be seen in the process documentation (see process documentation titled *Book two: Artefact and film production*).

1.6. Problem statement, research questions and objectives

The problem that this study investigates relates to how a theory-led investigation into postclassical narratological theory on the narrative element of character can be utilised to guide and propose a model or template to design and develop a grey character for a genre specific war drama 3D animated short film.

1.6.1. Research questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

⁶A court-martial is a special military tribunal held by members of the armed forces.

1. From a postclassical narrative perspective, how can narrative theory be utilised to develop a morally ambiguous character?
2. How can common recurrences in the narrative, character physiology, and psychology be discovered through a series of selective case studies?
3. How can character theory guide and contribute to establishing a morally ambiguous character, such as the grey character, which subverts the typical hero depiction?
4. How can narrative and character theories be utilised to create and portray a grey character, specifically in an animated short film?

1.6.2. Objectives

The following objectives describe what this study aims to achieve:

1. To demonstrate how a morally ambiguous character can be developed using postclassical narrative theory.
2. To discover recurring commonalities in narrative and character physiology and psychology through selective case studies.
3. To demonstrate that the theories on narratives, and specifically characters, can be employed to develop an atypical, morally ambiguous character that can be labelled as a grey character.
4. To demonstrate that a grey character (of questionable morality) can be designed and portrayed in an animated short film by applying narrative theory and character theory.

1.7. Thesis statement

The current study explores the application of postclassical narrative and character theory towards developing a morally ambiguous character, specifically focusing on deploying a grey character within an animated short film. By examining narrative theory and character theory, an investigation into existing narratives that feature grey characters is conducted to identify recurring commonalities in character and story. The study highlights the theory's capacity to inform subversion of conventional depiction of characters, in order to shape a grey character. This research demonstrates how a morally complex character can be designed, developed and portrayed in animation, and how it can challenge conventional representations of morality within storytelling.

1.8. Methodology

This section will elaborate on the two methodologies used to complete the project. This section will primarily be concerned with defining and explaining Stephen Scrivener's (2004) model for creative production, while adding film production to inform the production of the animated short film. The present qualitative study involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data such as

textual, visual, or spoken words. Qualitative research aims to better understand abstract things like ideas, concepts, experiences, and even the opinions of others (Scrivener & Chapman, 2004: 2). In addition, Scrivener's model for creative production will mostly serve as the methodological framework for the completion of this study. Since the desired artefact is a grey character observed through a 3D animated short film, it is essential to elaborate on film production's lengthy and intricate workflow and to incorporate animated film production into the methodology for creating the final artefact. According to Bordwell (2000), film production consists of three stages: pre-production, production, and post-production (also see Spicer, 2020). A summary of the considered models follows, but more details will be discussed in Chapter 2.

1.8.1. Scrivener's model for creative production

Scrivener's model for creative production is a method for conducting qualitative, practice-based research in art and design. Scrivener's model for creative production (2004) provides a comprehensive framework with six stages of development, which covers the project's conceptualisation, production and finalisation, and offers flexibility across the six stages of production. Scrivener's (2004: 5) model suggests that any artistic or design decision should be reflected upon. This means that reflection occurs when the decision is proposed. Reflection is done to understand what motivates a specific decision. If the decision can lead to effectively completing the project's goals, it should be pursued. After that, reflection follows to determine if the decision successfully met the project's objectives.

1.8.2. Animated film production

The grey character of this study will be demonstrated through an animated short film, hence the need for animated film production to be used within the broader framework of Scrivener's methodology. The pre-production phase deals with the conceptualisation of the story, characters, and aspects of production, such as budgeting, casting, staging of scenes, and determining camera specifications (Mamer, 2013: 7). Bordwell and Thompson (2008: 122) assert that pre-production concerns the planning of every aspect of the film. This planning continues up to the production stage. Pagan (2020) describes an animated movie as a product made by a team of people and a combination of software and hardware (such as Autodesk Maya, Adobe Photoshop, AVID, ARRI cameras, Sony cameras, and Panasonic cameras and lenses). Production is the stage where all the planning made during pre-production is executed, and filming begins. In the case of live-action productions, films involve actors and a film crew recording performances on location or a soundstage⁷. However, in the case of an animated movie, the characters, models, and scenes planned during pre-production are animated and

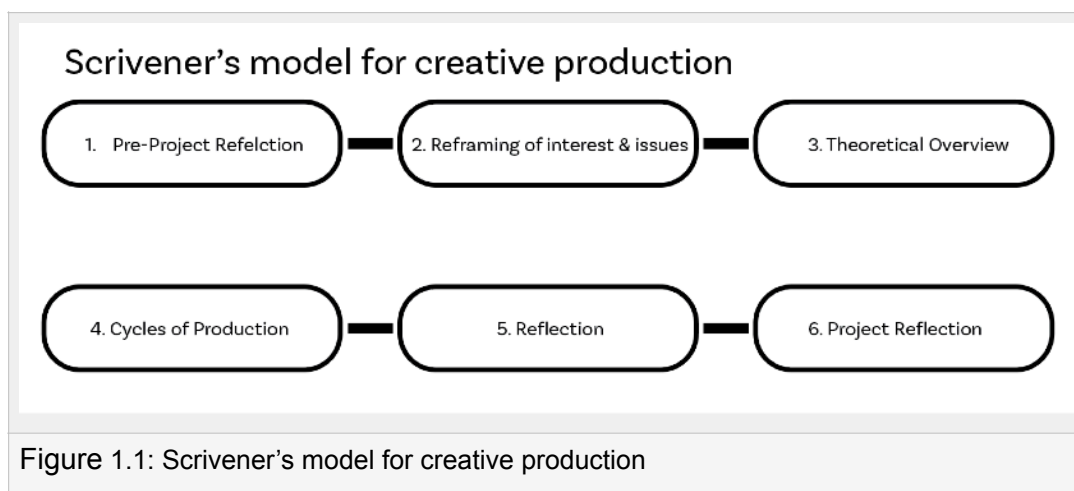
⁷ The soundstage is a large, soundproof structure, an expansive room that is used for the creation and production of film and television series usually located on a studio property.

composed into a scene that is animated and rendered out to be edited (assembly of scenes into a sequence) during the post-production stage (Arijon, 1976; Bordwell, 2000; Cleve, 1994). Finally, post-production involves refining and enhancing the material captured during production. Editing of the visuals and mixing of the audio captured during the production phase take place here (Bowen & Thompson, 2003). This is essentially where the scenes in the film begin to form a sequence or timeline. During post-production, footage captured or rendered out is iteratively edited and assembled until the final version is made (Cleve, 2006: 63-65).

1.8.3. Deployed methodology

Chapter 2 will highlight and streamline the relationship between Scrivener's model and film production. In short, for this study, the deployed methodology concerns Scrivener's creative production model as a broad framework that entails a pre-project reflection phase followed by a theoretical overview. This phase considers various case studies relevant to the goals of this project objective. After that, the concerns and interests of the project are reframed. This leads to the fourth stage, which is the cycle of creative production and which adopts film production to create the animated short film after the creation of the film that depicts the artefact: the grey character. Reflection takes place in stage five of the creative model to review and reflect on the creative artefact, discussing the challenges encountered during the creation of the artefact. Lastly, the final stage of Scrivener's creative model follows and entails a reflection of the entirety of the project, addressing key findings while also addressing the emergence of new themes and issues about the completion of the study.

The diagram below (Figure 1.1) depicts the six stages of Scrivener's creative production method. As this is a theory-led practice research project, it requires a theoretical framework and methodology that will form the basis of the investigation and guide the development of the character and story of the film.



Animated film production (Figure 1.2) is a well-established workflow (cf. Bordwell, 2000; Bowen & Thompson, 2003; Cleve, 2006) essential to this study. Film production consists of three broad established phases. The fourth phase of Scrivener's model (cycles of creative production) overlaps with these phases and offers greater specificity in developing an animated short film.

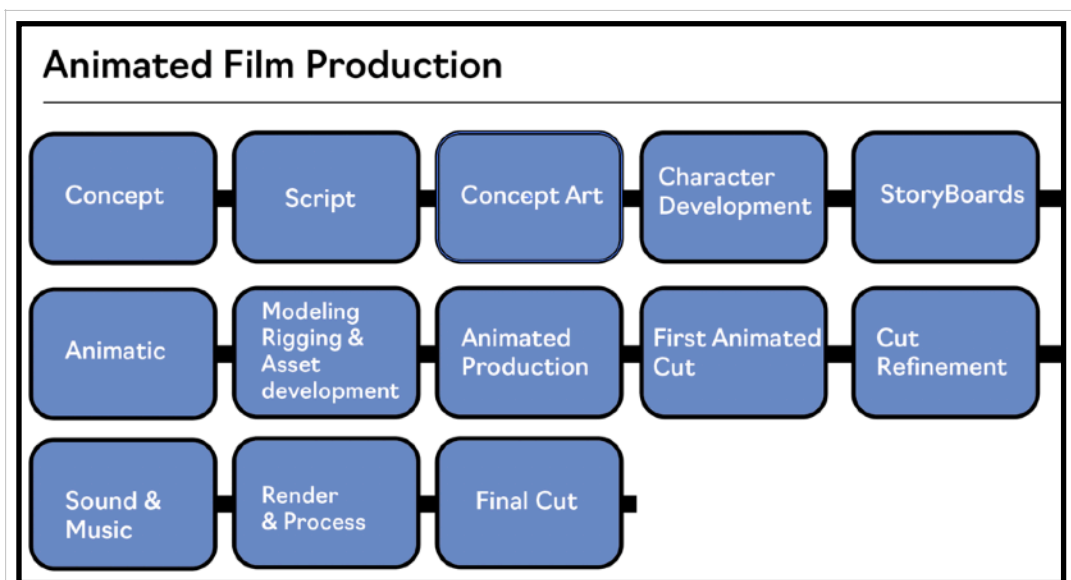


Figure 1.2: The production cycle for animated filmmaking

1.9. Ethical considerations

The present study is a risk-free study, as the theoretical component is a literature review, and the practical component involves the creation of an animated short film.

1.10. Chapter layout

As explained above, the study requires the completion of two distinct components: theoretical and practical. Each component bears upon the other. The study involves an iterative process that ensures that the theoretical framework informs and supports the valuable outcomes of the study. The work plan comprises six chapters that expound on the theory and practical application thereof, which underpins the practical output of this study. The first chapter offers an introduction to this study. This introductory chapter presents the argument, research questions, and study objectives.

The second chapter discusses the methodological outline that employs theory-led practice to guide this study. All progress toward completing the master's degree in graphic design was

captured through written reflection as the project advanced. The progression of the project was captured in the process documentation. The process guided the development of the creative output under the guidance of the methodology and underpinning theories relevant to this study, which are elaborated on in Chapter 4.

The third chapter elaborates on the background and context of this study, by conducting investigations into relevant characters and identifying key concepts and design cornerstones needed to complete this study. Case studies about existing grey characters provide insights into the design and development of these characters by highlighting recurring patterns in their narratives and characterisation by focusing specifically on their physiological and psychological make-up. These insights into their physiology, psychology and visual design are formulated into a design framework informed by the theoretical investigations conducted in Chapter 4. Together, these are applied in Chapter 5 and throughout the documentation process (Books one to three) that concerns the development of the artefact and animated movie. Therefore, this chapter alludes to the conceptualisation of Captain Miller (protagonist of the story) and the production of the animated film.

The fourth chapter deals with the theoretical investigation into relevant theories that were utilised in completing this study, such as narrative and character theory. Chapter 4 discusses critical theories needed to construct and design a grey character. The application and creation of the grey character are then discussed in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 covers the practical application of the relevant theories identified and explored in chapters 3 and 4. The final artefact is presented in an animated short film that can be viewed through Google Drive with a provided link.

The fifth chapter captures the process of developing the story and utilising animation and filmmaking methods to portray the grey character in a narrative format. In conclusion, Chapter 5 reflects on how the characters and narrative are designed and implemented.

Lastly, in Chapter 6, reflection on the project is conducted, addressing the key findings made in the study while highlighting the emergence of critical themes and acknowledging the issues and challenges faced throughout the project, while also suggesting avenues for potential further research.

2.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Methodology for an animated film featuring a grey character

This chapter proposes a methodology for designing and developing a grey character for an animated film. The first section of this chapter stipulates the methodological approach for research in creative arts. The chosen model for this creative research endeavour is Scrivener's (2004) model for innovative production, a practice-led model for research within the creative arts. This model highlights the connection between theory and practice in creative practice. As this study focuses on developing a grey character for an animated film, a subsection in the methodological approach will consider character development by adopting Uri Margolin's (2006) strategy of developing characters as non-actual but well-specified individuals (also see 1.4). This postclassical theoretical approach to character identifies critical aspects needed in creating and designing grey characters through an observational investigation conducted in Chapter 3 into existing grey characters in film, television and video games to arrive at a theoretical parameter to guide the design of this study's artefact and central character. The second subsection of this chapter explores the practical output through animated film production practices as part of the creative practice within Scrivener's model. Scrivener's model for creative production in the creative arts will thus set the methodological foundation for developing and depicting the grey character as illustrated through an animated 3D short film.

The practical and theoretical aspects of the research must be bridged, most notably in terms of how the theory informs character development and underpins the entire creative process by introducing the practice model foundation for the design of the grey character. Theory-led practice research places theoretical concepts at the core of the creative process. The development of a successful character is guided by practical considerations and a theoretical framework. Margolin's character development theory is applied in conjunction with a broader theoretical lens, in a research-driven creative process that is also reflective. Character development is achieved by combining Scrivener's model with theory-led practice. This ensures that the methodology supports the character design of the animated film while also rooting it in empirical observation, making the creative artefact a meaningful output of the research process.

Theory-led practice research uses theory to lead creative practices within artistic disciplines. Theory-led practice is a method of conducting research, with the generated creative product or artefact as an output of that research (Candy, 2006: 01). This means that theory-led practice research is an approach to conduct research that prioritises theoretical frameworks and concepts as the basis for the design, implementation and analysis of research studies with creative outputs. In theory-led practice studies, the researcher develops a theoretical framework from a set of research questions based on the existing theoretical and empirical literature. The

objective is to answer the study's research questions through a synergy of theory and practice. Quinn (2007) acknowledges a unique dilemma in the theory-led practice process, where the researcher of the artefact is simultaneously the producer of the artefact. The researcher is undertaking a dual role where the product and the research are studied and conducted as they transpire. However, Darren Newbury (1997) provides positive examples of this process, such as the realisation of new design solutions, aesthetic development, and new methods and techniques that can be applied in artistic and design practices, implying that the very nature of practice leads to knowledge that has operational significance. The following section provides an overview of Scrivener's model for creative production to establish the foundation of the model and how it can be adapted for theory-led practice.

2.1.1. Overview of Scrivener's model for creative production

This section discusses Scrivener's model for creative production. It introduces the methodology and elaborates upon the model to demonstrate what it is and how it functions in the development of an innovative project, which is the artefact of this study. This chapter also explains how the model is adapted to fit the needs of this study by adjusting the steps involved in Scrivener's model to fit the objectives of this study, which is a theory-led study in pursuit of theoretical design and development of a grey character that can be portrayed within an animated short film.

Scrivener's model for creative production is a framework for conducting qualitative and practice-led research within various creative disciplines. This method for creative production emphasises the importance of the researcher, who is systematically recording, documenting, and reporting on the creative process undertaken during production. By doing so, the model provides a nuanced understanding of the methods, decisions and developments that occur during the creation of an artefact; thus generating insights that contribute to both practice and academic knowledge in the field. Scrivener (2000) describes this model for creative production as reflection in action; a process that continues until the project concludes and the text becomes descriptive instead of analytical. In this sense, the text describes a series of actions and decisions made by the producer of the artefact, instead of merely analysing the product or steps involved (Scrivener, 2000: 09). To understand what motivates the decision, reflection occurs when a decision is proposed. If the decision can lead to completing the project's goals, it should be pursued.

The appeal of Scrivener's model is its ability to be broadly applied and adapted to fit the needs of creative projects in various creative disciplines. Scrivener's (2004) model for creative production provides a comprehensive framework with six stages of development, covering the project's conceptualisation, production and finalisation, offering flexibility across these stages of production. The role of this creative production model is two-fold: the model can either describe

the process of production as evidence that supports a theoretical argument, or it can communicate knowledge that text cannot demonstrate (Douglas *et al.*, 2000: 5). For example, in a project concerning the production of a film, Scrivener's model can outline the process from the initial idea up towards the final edit and delivery of the film. The filmmaker might consider focusing on ideas that help to develop the narrative and, during the production stage, use Scrivener's model to guide the practical execution of the film. This involves sound design, filming and editing. Lastly, the film is refined and prepared for distribution in the finalisation stage. Scrivener's model allows for reflection during practice, as each production stage generates insights and knowledge that can be used to refine and develop the creative artefact.

Scrivener (2004) observes that the first phase in the creative production model is pre-project reflection. This stage involves exploration, where the practitioner researches the context of the project, involving divergent thinking⁸ and investigating a range of ideas and existing material, such as media related to the project's subject matter. This ensures the project is novel and warranted by existing knowledge and practices in the field. This stage of pre-project reflection furthermore provides context and informs the researcher of what has been done by others before starting their project. During this initial phase, the researcher establishes the project's relevancy by exploring and analysing the context from where the problem arises. This establishes an informed foundation from which the study can depart.

According to Scrivener (2004), the second phase involves reviewing information, which includes exploring theories, concepts and frameworks relevant to the issues and interests identified in the first phase. This review process is crucial for the researcher's understanding of the problem and shapes the creative project's direction. It also establishes the project's interests by identifying the issues it needs to address. In this phase in the study, the interest is determining what a grey character is. The review identifies obstacles that concern the design and development of a grey character. This interpretation stage of identifying and establishing challenges and objectives enables the practitioner to identify the problem within the context of this study, which is the design and application of a grey character. This study's second phase allows the practitioner to identify unique insights concerning grey characters. These insights gathered about grey characters can be conceptual, technical or aesthetic and can translate into tangible objectives to be completed.

The third phase of Scrivener's creative production model concerns identifying and exploring pertinent theories (Scrivener & Zheng, 2012). This phase focuses on translating abstract ideas and concepts within relevant theoretical frameworks into actionable strategies that can be implemented, while simultaneously pursuing the most promising approaches and techniques

⁸ Divergent thinking is the cognitive process used to generate creative ideas. It explores many possible solutions simultaneously through non-linear thinking in a free-flowing manner. Convergent thinking, on the other hand, focuses on finding a single solution for a problem (Kerr, 2024).

during production (Scrivener, 2004: 5-8). These efforts are directed toward developing the grey character (the artefact central to this study) and applying these strategies to manifest the grey character.

The fourth stage of Scrivener's model is the cycle of creative production. This study's fourth stage incorporates film production, since an animated short film supports the creation and development of the grey character. The story is written during this stage, and the character's prototyping is done. Afterwards, other assets, secondary characters and voice-overs are developed and prepared. Once pre-production of the animated film assets concludes, the film enters the production phase, where characters and backgrounds are animated. The sections below (2.1.2 and 2.1.3) discuss the use of character development and the film production process in more detail. As a theory-led practice study, the theory informs practice; therefore, the project must proceed towards the production phase.

The fifth stage of Scrivener's model is a reflection on the artefact. This stage considers the work produced by the study and the creative process itself. It evaluates and reflects upon the grey character's production and resulting output, appraising the successes and failures during development. The research contributes knowledge about approaching similar creative endeavours by documenting these observations.

2.1.2. Postclassical character development

In Scrivener's model's pre-project reflection stage, it is already clear that the development of a grey character requires an investigation of existing narratives relating to grey characters and the qualities inherited from those stories and characters, in an attempt to achieve a better understanding of the possible attributes of a grey character. These attributes must then be examined systematically to arrive at guidelines for creating a grey character. These guidelines can be mastered and compared to models and theories suitable for narrative character development.

As this study takes a theory-led approach to developing and designing grey characters, there is a need to delve into character design theories and related theories on narrative structure. Narrative theories formulated by Uri Margolin, Fotis Janidis, Marie-Laure Ryan, and Aleid Fokkema were found to provide guidelines for character development and focus on the complexities of characterisation in contemporary storytelling. Their work is relevant as it emphasises the need for nuanced and multifaceted nature of characters within narrative design. The approach undertaken by this study predominantly regards characters in narratives as non-actual but well-specified individuals who are mental images created by real-world knowledge. This is unpacked at length in Chapter 4.

This study's interweaving of theory and practice and the various iterations of reflection and production are captured in three books of process documentation (see Books one to three). Thus, in this dissertation, Book one (titled *Book one: Pre-project reflection*) of the process documentation captures the pre-project reflection and investigation into theories, stories and characters of interest, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 focuses on the various case studies, to arrive at findings that inform the theoretical inquiry into character development in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 deals with the theory, identifying and understanding the theoretical inputs needed to design and develop the grey character. *Book two: Artefact and film production* of the process documentation captures the cycle of creative production, documenting the production of the character and animated short film. In Chapter 5, the findings garnered in Chapter 3 concerning the traits of grey characters, along with the tailored theoretical frameworks needed to understand and explain the findings in Chapter 3 concerning grey characters, are applied to develop the character and the narrative that is featured in the animated short film. *Book three: Reflection* concerns the reflection of the produced artefact within the context of the animated movie.

For a character to be characterised as “morally grey”, this character needs to be applied in specific scenarios. An animated film is ideal for this purpose as it demonstrates a character's decisions and actions, contextualised in time and space, through a succession of scenes. Thus, the following section in this chapter considers film production for 3D animation as part of the stage cycles of the creative production stage of Scrivener's model.

2.1.3. Overview of film production for 3D animation

The following section concerns film production for 3D animation. 3D film production and live-action film production are very similar in what they aspire to do and how these models share similar approaches towards filmmaking. There are, however, differences between these approaches to producing a film.

David Bordwell (2008) characterises filmmaking as a collaborative art form where co-creative authorship is shared among diverse skilled practitioners. This collective of the film crew endeavour encompasses vital disciplines, such as cinematography, which orchestrates the interplay of camera work and lighting, and production design (which brings together costumes, props, and set environments) (Arijon, 1978). Filmmaking also embraces visual effects, including awe-inspiring illusions, grand explosions, and fantastical elements like flying spaceships or visceral depictions of blood and dismemberment, often brought to life through computer-generated imagery (CGI). In addition, special effects such as animatronic creatures, prosthetic

makeup, and pyrotechnics enrich the cinematic world through sound design, editing, and colour grading⁹. Furthermore, it shapes the final aesthetic and emotional tone of a film.

Film and animated film production share many commonalities in approach and execution. Critical differences in various departments across the board are worth elaborating upon for this study. At the same time, this study adopts and adapts many similar approaches to film production for a 3D animated short film. Thus, some of the steps required to produce the movie, will differ. The most apparent difference between these approaches to filmmaking is the collaboration process, since film production is a team effort. Also, a cooperative experience in film production requires synchronous collaboration between various departments, such as cinematography, costume design, and production design, which often occurs on a film set, and regularly, these cooperative interactions coincide with crew members working together in real-time during the shoots (Shahbazi, 2024). This is not the case for a 3D animated film production. In this case, collaboration is sequential, with different teams handling the film's modelling, rigging, animation and lighting. Since everything is digital, they will work on distinct parts of the production pipeline. The work can happen remotely and in isolation, giving more flexibility with the production timeline.

A critical difference between the two approaches lies in the creation of characters for the film. For instance, in 3D animated film production, digital artists design, model and texture characters. In contrast, in live-action productions, the character is portrayed by an actor who is cast for the production, and they are dressed accordingly by the production designer and costume team (Spicer, 2020). Another vital aspect of film production is cinematography, and in live-action film production, cameras are often used with concrete equipment and people. The cinematographer and his team select the cameras, the lenses, and the equipment. Furthermore, they are also responsible for preparing and setting up the camera according to the needs of the director for the specific scene. The cinematographer must consider constraints such as the space lighting set and the physical camera equipment.

In contrast, the 3D animation production is virtual, allowing for cameras with unrestricted movement and manipulation. No physical constraint inhibits the film's production, as the animators and technical directors have complete control over the cameras, position, angle and focus, which offers them greater flexibility in composition and production. Another critical difference is in film production's approach to unique visual effects. Visual and special effects are often practical, including stunts, pyrotechnics, prosthetics, and several post-production processes to enhance the scene for animated film production. In animation, these effects are entirely digital. They are integrated seamlessly into the workflow, ranging from explosions,

⁹ Colour grading is the process of manipulating the final image's colour to create a stylised look that fits the creative vision of the project.

digital creature designs, to digital effects that artists can use to create simulations and realistic effects that can be stylised to accommodate the 3D animated film production.

In a 3D animated film, meticulous planning and preparation are paramount because of the complexity and intricacy of the production process; unlike its live-action counterpart, where adjustments to the camera, lighting and actors' performance can be made spontaneously. Spontaneity allows directors to adjust an actor's performance or modify camera angles in response to creative impulses, technical constraints or new creative solutions (Pagan, 2020). The 3D animation process requires thoughtful preparation at every stage to avoid costly revisions and ensure production efficiency (Shahbazi, 2024). 3D animation requires a deliberate approach to its design. There is no room for spontaneity; every detail must be carefully considered and planned, from the character's look and the character's movements to lighting and camera positioning. Once the animation process is underway, any alterations necessitate substantial rework, as the digital nature of the medium offers little room for sporadic and revisionary changes. Consequently, the success of a 3D animated film greatly hinges on precise foresight, planning and coordination during the early stages of development.

Therefore, a detailed storyboard and animatic and technical planning are crucial to ensure that the final product aligns with the director's creative vision and is executed within the projected schedule. This strategic process starts with the story's development (Shahbazi, 2024). Story development entails the crafting and development of a narrative. Story development also concerns the creation of the settings and characters, while outlining the sequence of events that the story will unfold. This study will follow Scrivener's fourth stage, which includes brainstorming ideas to outline events and ensure that the story communicates the grey character aligned with the project's outcomes. During this stage of development, the themes, characters, character motivations and key story points are created to ensure that the final product is engaging, cohesive and entertaining. Furthermore, this process includes the development of the script, which is adapted from the screenplay.

The script is like the blueprint for the film. In animated films, scripts are almost always accompanied by a storyboard, a pre-visualised set of illustrations that shows how a shot or scene can look (Gibbons, 2018; Reich, 2017). The production of an animation is a critical chain where one step must be completed before the next step in the production chain can begin. With an animated production, every step, from the script to the storyboard, is completed and approved by the director before moving to the next step. This means all the components – such as characters, designs, props and sets – are approved and finalised in a specific order during pre-production. After the assets are made, they are prepared for animation by being rigged and textured. Rigging involves creating and assigning a type of 3D skeleton (also called the armature) to a character, making it a controllable, animation-ready asset. During the production phase, these assets are assembled into various shots and animated in 3D software such as

Autodesk Maya (the software this study also uses). Animation occurs in stages, starting with a block-out, a rough animation pass, and a final pass, refining all actions and movements within the shot (Shahbazi, 2024).

The block-out is a very early stage in the production process, during which a very elementary version of the animation is created (Pagan, 2020; Shahbazi, 2024) . This version of the animation features the basic structure of the shots but is mainly concerned with the timing of critical poses and characters' actions within the animation. It is a crucial step for planning and organising the sequence before any detailed movements and actions are added to the animation. Animation after the block-out stage predominantly centres on iterative development and prioritises the fundamental principles of animation. The block-out only concerns crucial elements, such as timing, rhythm, spacing and critical poses, established during rough animation. There is no focus on or concern for intricate details. At this moment, the step serves as the cornerstone of the production process; rough animation provides the structural framework for the animations of repeated refinements, adjustments and enhancements. The animation gradually evolves into a more polished form, referred to as the cleanup phase, in the final animation level of quality, reflecting the highest standard achieved for the shot.

During post-production, which correlates with Scrivener's fifth stage, the project enters its second-to-last phase, which entails refining and finalising the animated film. The first part of this phase concerns the assembly and editing of the rendered images ordered into sets that represent scenes. These sets of images are added to an editing programme, such as Da Vinci Resolve, and composed into a timeline. The images play out in sequence, appearing as moving images that can be manipulated. Once all the scenes are assembled, sound effects, dialogue and music are added.

An essential role of Scrivener's fifth stage is evaluating and reflecting on the creative process and the artefact, which in this case is the grey character, Captain Miller, who is depicted in the animated short film. Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 above highlighted Scrivener's model's foundational relevance and how it guides the creative processes for character development and film production (2.1.3). The following section will tie these steps together to provide a defined methodology to achieve the study's specific design objectives.

2.2. Defined methodology

Scrivener's creative production model is a broad framework for conducting this study. The model's flexibility is shown in how it is tailored to accommodate two specific needs. One is to design and develop a grey character and a narrative that an animated film can house. The phases of the creative production model, as demonstrated above, are adaptable to serve the objective of this study. Based on the foundation of Scrivener's model, this section details the steps needed, supplemented by postclassical character theory and film production. To complete

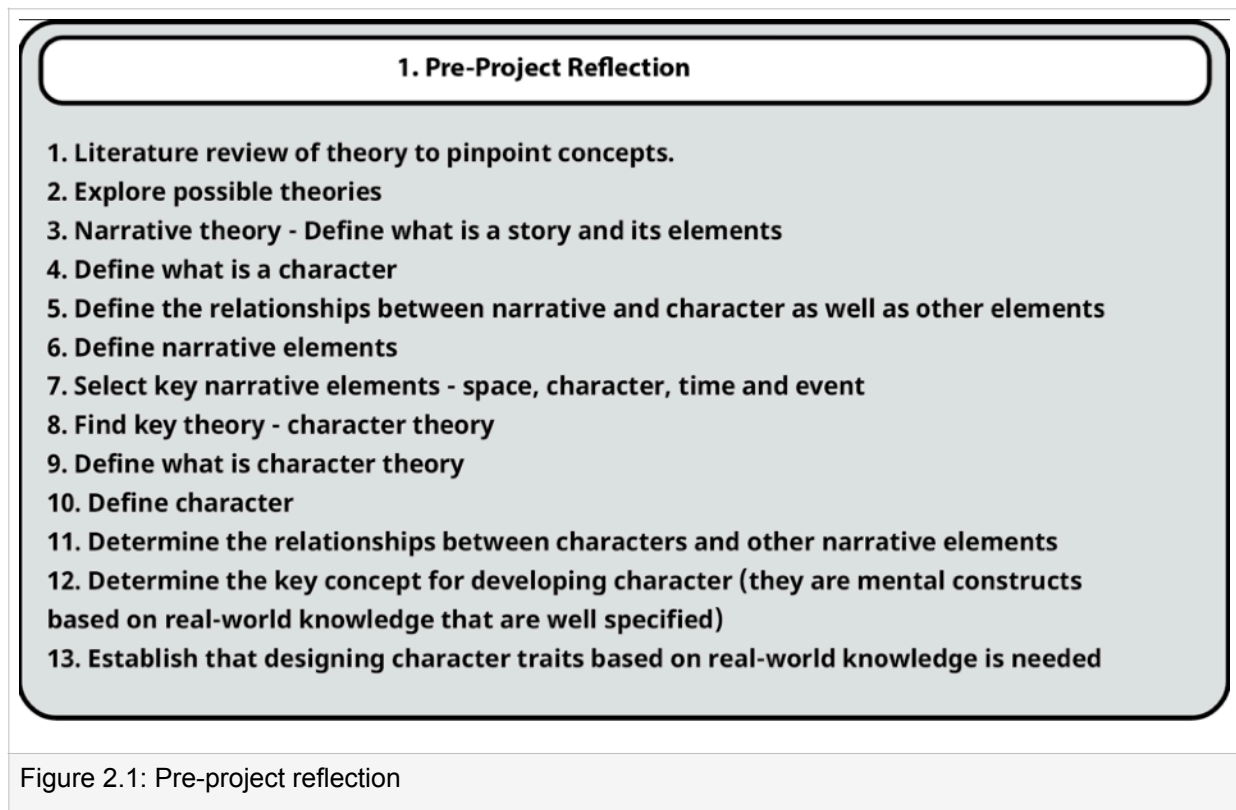
this study's objectives, the adapted methodology uses 47 steps bundled together over six phases to approach the theoretical design and development of the grey character.

2.2.1. Phase one: pre-project reflection – the theoretical foundation

This study's pre-project reflection phase is theoretical. Thus, the pre-reflection phase in this investigation provides a relevant theoretical understanding of narratives and characters, focusing specifically on grey characters. This defined methodology for this study builds a theoretical foundation established through a literature review, exploring structuralist and postclassical narratology theories to identify key concepts relevant to the design of grey characters. Determining which theoretical framework best supports this objective is essential to the study's success. The investigation into narrative theory, as set out below in Figure 2.1, helps define what constitutes a story, the nature of characters, and the relationship between character and narrative. In doing so, critical narrative elements such as space, character, time and event are identified as crucial theoretical underpinnings that will shape the direction of this research. After that, the scope of the theoretical inquiry is narrowed towards character theory, as it is the most relevant theory that will assist in developing the grey character. It is paramount to define what a character is in the postclassical sense. From here, the definition is refined and narrowed to focus on ambiguous characters. It will be highlighted how characters relate to other narrative components, such as space, event and time. This analysis then leads to the reflection, which highlights that characters are mental constructs built upon well-specified, real-world knowledge, underscoring the need to design character traits that reflect this informed understanding.

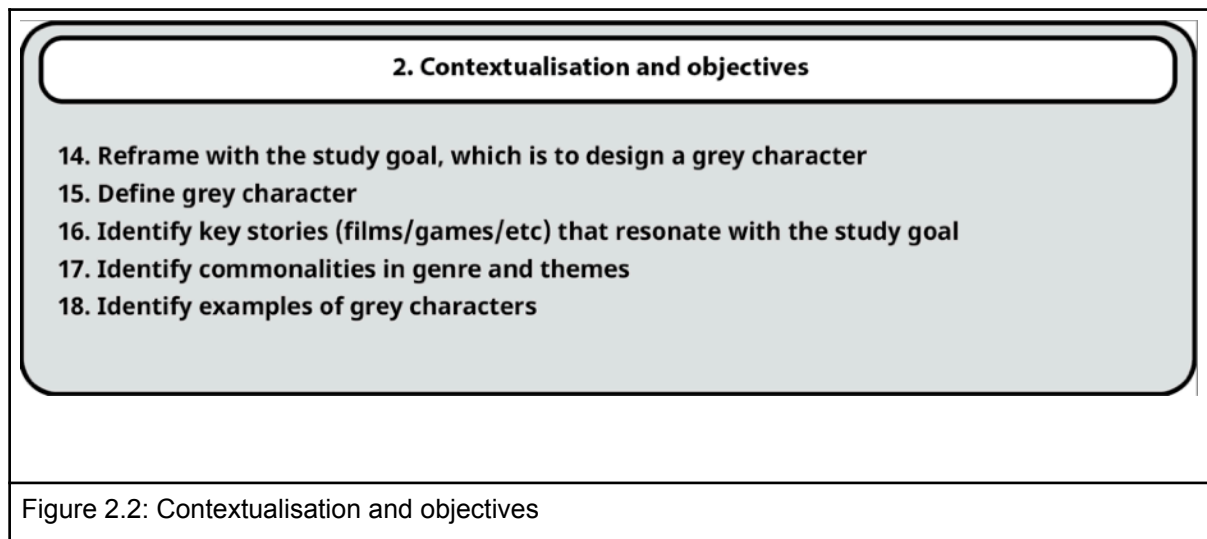
Since the study requires a vehicle through which the grey character is conveyed, it is a suitable point to address the chosen vehicle and medium for the project, which is an animated film. The investigation considers the medium of animation as a means of completing the objectives of this study. Animation as a medium offers significant flexibility in the visual style, enabling exaggeration and even abstraction of a grey character's traits. This exaggeration and abstraction demonstrate the character's internal conflicts and moral dilemmas. The medium of animation also provides more control over aspects such as the storyworld captured in the animated short film, including colour, lighting and space. This exact and intentional control creates specific atmospheres and tones that complement the grey character's story. Another strength of animation is the medium's ability to employ visual metaphors woven directly into the narrative. For a grey character, subtle or overt visual cues can remind the audience of the character's moral ambiguity. Because it reflects on the character's inner turmoil or the ambiguity of their moral standing, this level of symbolism is often more naturally integrated into animation than live action, where it can sometimes feel forced or unnatural. In animation, effects can be realised that live action may struggle to achieve without extensive CGI or special effects. For instance, changes in the character's physical form or environment can be used to express shifts

in morality or psychological states visually. Figure 2.1 illustrates the pre-project reflection on a step-by-step basis.



2.2.2. Phase two: contextualisation and objectives

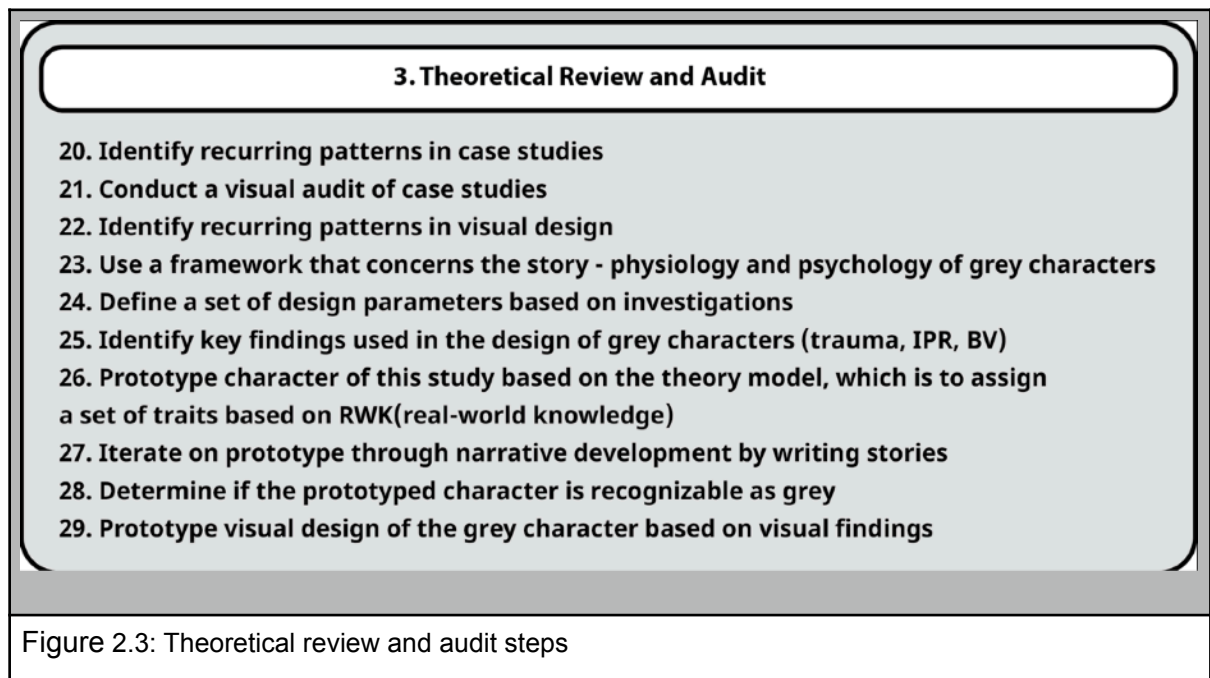
The focus during this step shifts, as outlined in Figure 2.2. This methodology phase concerns the contextualisation and setting of objectives, and the study is reframed to align with its primary goal of designing and developing a grey character for an animated short film. This begins by clearly defining what a grey character is. The theoretical investigation in phase one determined that space, event, time, and particularly character are fundamental to the goal of this study. Thus, there is a need to address character theory specifically. Character theory is established through a postclassical lens, and by narrowing the scope towards ambiguous characters by identifying key stories from various mediums like films, television series and video games that resonate with this study's particular objective. These narratives draw out commonalities within the genre and themes, highlighting patterns central to depicting morally ambiguous characters. Additionally, examples of grey characters are identified that provide practical reference points that inform the creative process and the overall direction of the study.



2.2.3. Phase three: case studies (theory review and audit)

The theoretical review and audit process begins with identifying recurrent patterns within the case studies. Figure 2.3 depicts the theoretical review and audit. The next step in this process considers key stories that resonate with the study's goal of designing a grey character and explores the stories and characters through a framework to identify essential commonalities. This is achieved by selecting stories that are thematically related to the interests and objectives of this study. The case studies refine the direction of this study by identifying the most pertinent aspects of designing and portraying grey characters, emphasising critical areas such as their physical and psychological makeup. This is followed by a visual audit of the same case studies to uncover consistent themes in visual designs. By analysing examples of grey characters in different media such as film, television series and video games, commonalities in genres, themes, backstories, physiology, and psychology that support the design and development of grey characters are identified. A framework is then deployed that addresses the psychological and physiological aspects of grey characters, allowing for a detailed understanding of their construction based on these investigations. A set of design parameters is then determined, which informs the rest of the design process. Thus, a series of design parameters is established based on the investigation into suitable grey characters through the case studies. To effectively represent a grey character in an animated short film, it is essential to incorporate critical elements, including their physiology, psychology and recognisable traits that distinguish them as morally ambiguous. Key findings – such as trauma, interpersonal relationships and behavioural values – are identified and then integrated into the design of the grey character. With this theoretical foundation, the prototype character for the study is developed to incorporate a set of traits rooted in real-world knowledge. The prototype character is refined through narrative development, with scripts explicitly written to explore the character's complexity. Once the narrative is completed, the qualities of the grey character are evaluated to ensure that they remain recognisable. The character's visual design is prototyped based on the visual audit and

narrative process findings, aligning the character's appearance with the psychological and narrative traits.

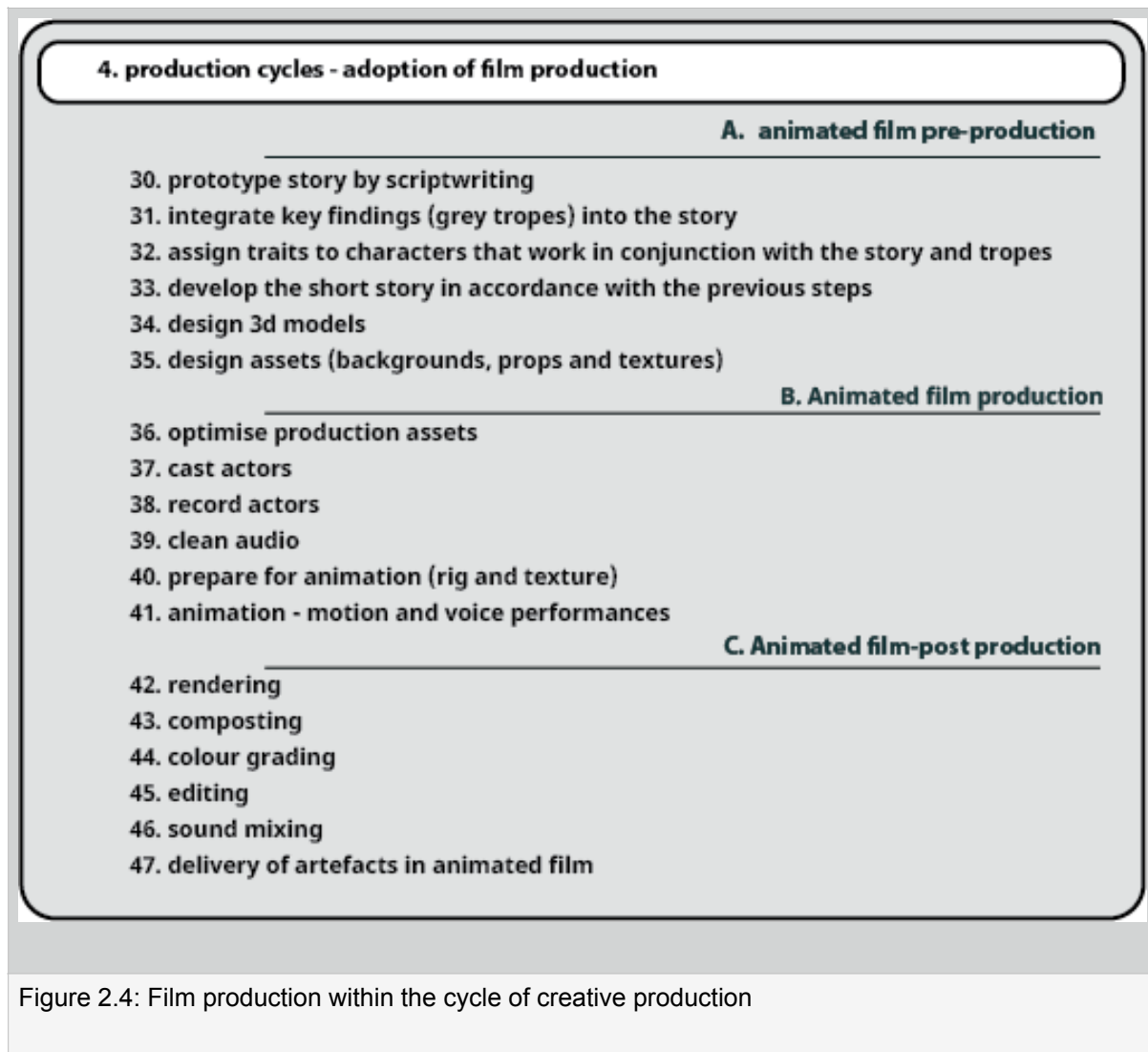


2.2.4. Phase four: prototypes, iteration and cycles of production and development

This study's prototyping involves creating guidelines for developing a character, specifically a grey character, based on theoretical insights gained and iterations made in narrative development, visual design and scriptwriting. These guidelines should be followed to ensure the character's grey nature is sound and recognisable. This process begins by prototyping the story through scriptwriting, to ensure that the key findings – such as the tropes of grey characters – are integrated into the narrative. Character traits are then assigned in alignment with the story and the established tropes, while these foundational elements assist in the short story's development. The story is further refined by integrating these findings and assigning traits to the character that align with the narrative. Following this, the 3D models are designed alongside the creation of assets, such as backgrounds, props and textures, which are all essential for producing animated films and the characters involved.

The production of the animated film follows this phase of animated pre-production. Once pre-production for the animated short film is finished, the focus pivots to optimising production assets and ensuring that everything is ready for the next steps: actors are cast, their voice lines are recorded, and the audio is cleaned up to ensure that high-quality sound is used in the production of the animated film. Simultaneously, the animated movie is prepared, including the rigging and texturing of models. The animation process finally begins by synchronising the

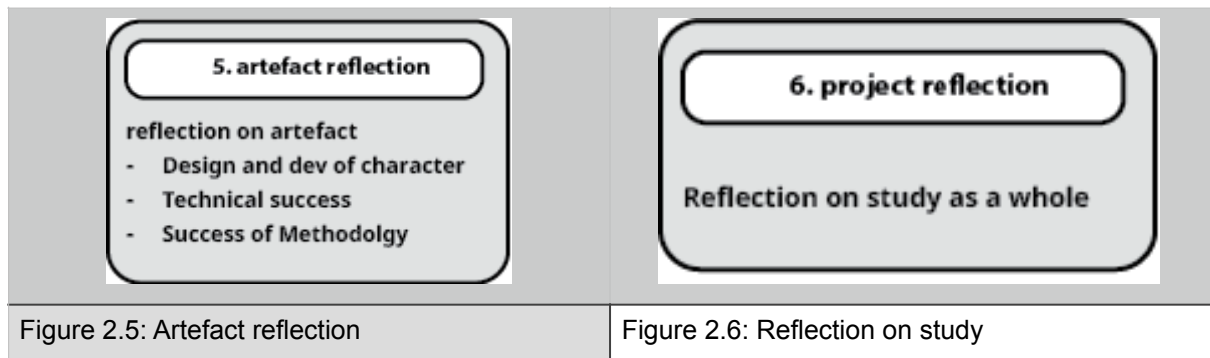
character's motion and voice performances to bring the story to life. Figure 2.4 illustrates the prototyping and production cycles. At this point, post-production of the animated film commences. This phase includes rendering the animation, compositing and colour grading to achieve the desired visual aesthetic. Editing refines the film's flow, while sound mixing ensures an immersive audio experience. The last step is the delivery of the completed artefact.



2.2.5. Phase five: artefact reflection and post-project reflection

With the production of the artefact and the animated short completed, reflection on the design and development of the artefact can commence. It is essential to consider how effectively the character's traits and moral complexity were conveyed through the visual design and the narrative context established through the story's writing and the execution of the animated short film. In addition, the implementation of narrative elements such as space, time and events must be evaluated in terms of how these elements shaped the character's journey and the story's impact. Similarly, it is necessary to reflect on the narrative's structure, emotional resonance and

pacing, in order to determine how it aligns with the intended themes and character development. Beyond the narrative, it is also essential to assess the technical success of the film in terms of its animation quality, sound design, and visual effects, so as to conclude whether the animated medium supported the character and story effectively. Finally, the methodology of this study is also reviewed to determine how well it succeeds in providing insight into the creative process; and to highlight strengths and areas for improvement in the approach and execution of the development of grey characters and narrative and technical elements of animated filmmaking. See figures 2.5 and 2.6 on artefact and study reflection:



2.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the chapter outlines a methodology for designing and developing a grey character within the context of an animated short film. This theory-led research study establishes a methodological foundation rooted in creative practice. Scrivener's model for creative production is used as a broad conceptual framework for the investigation, exploration and utilisation of methods, as it was deemed most suitable for this study's objective of designing a grey character and for emphasising how the interplay between theory and practice guides the creation of the artefact (i.e. the grey character).

The chapter explores how character development is approached, by drawing on Uri Margolin's theoretical approach. Characters are considered as non-actual but well-specified individuals through the observational analysis of grey characters from existing media, such as films, television series and video games. Key theoretical parameters are identified, informing the study's design and narrative of the grey character. The creative process therefore involves theoretical inquiries and practical application by following Scrivener's model to ensure that the character complexity is well represented within the parameters of a 3D animated short film. This theory leads to the practice-based research methodology framework for creative practice as an outcome of the theoretical inquiry, where the narrative and character are shaped by analysis, implementation of theories and reflective practice.

The methodology also deals with both conceptual and technical aspects of grey character design, bridging the gap between abstract narrative theory and tangible character creation. The film production for animation details the difference between live-action and animated filmmaking, and explicitly focuses on the unique advantages of animation in portraying grey characters. This chapter outlines a workflow for producing the movie, and stresses the deliberate planning required for 3D animation. The chapter concludes with an emphasis on the importance of reflecting on both the artefact (a grey character) and the overall creative process of the study. The reflection also assists in evaluating the success of the character's design, the overall effectiveness of the narrative, and the technical execution of the animated film. The methodology review provides insight into this study's strengths and challenges. This ensures that the development of the grey character within the animated story is thoroughly explored and understood, and that the process can be used to create other creative artefacts.

The following chapter examines existing grey characters through case studies in order to arrive at a set of design parameters that can be deployed.

3. CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDIES

“We get dirty, and the world stays clean, that’s the mission” – Captain John Price, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare.

Characters are entities found in stories and narrative worlds (Jannidis, 2012; Ryan, 2012). The narrative prompts these entities, which emerge as mental constructs in the viewer’s mind (Ryan, 2012). Characters draw on characteristics from the real world that make them more relatable to the viewer (Jannidis, 2012). Conventionally, characters present themselves as either good or bad. However, it has been noted that a type of character exists that is neither entirely good nor entirely evil. This type of character is called a grey character, referring to the “grey” area between good and evil, where they reside (Sevi, 2024; Krakowiak *et al.*, 2015; Kleemans *et al.*, 2017). This intriguing notion sparked the study’s focus, and the need to identify the characteristics of a grey character. This is especially relevant because grey characters challenge the traditional moral dichotomy of good versus evil. They offer a nuanced and realistic representation of human nature, unlike heroes and villains, who are either purely virtuous or purely villainous.

Grey characters are morally ambiguous and unpredictable, and they are challenging to develop because they are unexpected (Majewski, 2023; Sevi, 2024). If there is no clear understanding of what makes characters grey or what compels them to act in the ways they do, they may come across as inconsistent and inauthentic. A salient example is Daenerys Targaryen, a lead character in the HBO series *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019). *Game of Thrones* is a story based on the novels by George RR Martin, set primarily in the fictional world of Westeros, and follows several noble families as they are caught in a power struggle over the seven kingdoms. The story is known for its complex characters, intricate plotlines and shocking twists. *Game of Thrones* is a drama that incorporates medieval political war drama and fantasy elements such as knights, kings, monsters and dragons. Daenerys Targaryen stars as a complex character with noble intentions. Throughout the final season, Daenerys Targaryen – who believes she is entitled to the throne – undergoes an abrupt turn, in which she grows into a destructive tyrant when she becomes paranoid over her ally-turned-rival, Jon Snow, after her followers celebrate him as their leader, and after the death of her beloved friends at the hands of Cersei Lannister, Missandei and Ser Jorah. The loss of her loved ones and perceived betrayal by Jon Snow negatively affect her, to the point that she acts out of character. She forcefully changes from a benevolent and well-meaning heroine to a paranoid tyrant as she experiences an abrupt breakdown of trust and paranoia after her losses.

The abrupt turn during the final season left many viewers dissatisfied, deeming the final season rushed. Reviewers quickly pointed out its abruptness, with critics like Laura Prudom of IGN (2019) calling it a convenient heel turn. Prominent critique was directed towards Daenerys

Targaryen's character transformation by viewers and critics alike. Most notably, the transformation was unearned, and her descent into madness lacked proper buildup, nuance and execution, making her grey morality feel forced rather than authentic (Cruz *et al.*, 2019). This example illustrates how the portrayal of a grey character can fail, and that there may be a need for proper design and development guidelines for grey characters. The example of Daenerys Targaryen shows that without proper understanding and planning, such a grey character may be perceived as inauthentic and forced.

The following section analyses case studies, exploring and investigating applicable characters relevant to this study's objectives. The selected case studies concern the characteristics and, in particular, the background, psychology and physiology of grey characters in various media, such as film, television and video games.

The framework for these case studies, broadly based on Lajos Egri's (1972) bone structure for developing characters, concerns an overview of the particular character's backstory. This is followed by a detailed analysis of their motivations, actions, relationships and internal conflicts, as well as the consequences of those engagements, which involves the impact of their decisions and how they evolve. The case studies will explore the characters Batman (from the 2022 film *The Batman* by Matt Reeves, starring Robert Pattinson as Batman), Joel Miller (from the 2013 video game *The Last of Us* by Naughty Dog and later the 2023 TV series *The Last of Us*, produced by HBO), Captain Price (from the video game *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, developed by Infinity Ward in 2007), and Bud White (from the 1997 film *L.A. Confidential*). These characters are selected because they are prominent male protagonists in the action and superhero genres and war games, with compelling characters and narratives, and each is captivating within their respective narratives. Each character exhibits traits and qualities such as unpredictability, vengeance, bitterness, resentment, courage, determination, resolve, loyalty and moral ambiguity.

Furthermore, like the character and narrative created for this study, these fictional characters are all featured in stories that explore the theme of moral ambiguity. This exploration considers these characters as non-actual but well-specified individuals¹⁰. Therefore, the case studies take a particular interest in these characters' psychological and physiological traits and include a visual audit of them. Finally, after gaining insights from these case studies, this chapter concludes with the planning of Captain Miller, the main character for the planned animation.

The grey character, Captain James Miller, is the protagonist conceptualised and created for a 3D animated short film that will explore the theme of moral ambiguity. Moral ambiguity resides at the heart of the design of grey characters because it is this moral ambiguity that positions the

¹⁰ Characters as non-actual but well-specified individuals is a post classical approach proposed by Uri Margolin (2006) to develop characters.

character in circumstances where right and wrong are questioned and it compels the viewer to engage with the characters' complexities and their own choices and judgement. The grey character's uncertain loyalty and unpredictability make them compelling and authentic. To understand the moral ambiguity of grey characters, the methodology guides towards a deeper exploration of existing narratives where characters are faced with various challenges.

3.1. Case studies and observations

The following section investigates the creation of characters considered to have grey character attributes in film, television and video games. This study approaches these characters from a postclassical perspective, which means that these characters are treated as non-actual but well-specified individuals. As mentioned above, grey characters are generally recognised by their moral ambiguity. It is, however, clear that a more specific set of guidelines (signifiers) is needed to arrive at a grey character. With the analyses of the case studies, the goal is to identify signifying patterns, similarities and commonalities in these grey characters to establish a set of parameters. This set of parameters will guide the conceptualisation and creation of the grey character and creative output for this study, namely Captain James T. Miller. The following subsections investigate different background stories of characters and the psychology and physiology of these characters while also taking their motivations into account.

3.1.1. Case study 01: Captain John Price

3.1.1.1. Introduction to the character

Captain John Price, from the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* series (2007-2011), is one of the protagonists of the series developed by video game studio Infinity Ward. Captain John Price is the leader of the 22nd SAS¹¹ (Special Air Services) regiment and, later in his career, the captain of Task Force 141, a joint operation task force assembled from the best soldiers, who are the most capable and highly trained soldiers in the world (Kontour, 2007: 113). Captain Price has a very recognisable appearance. He has a grizzly look, an asymmetrical face, and a large scruffy beard. He has solid facial features: Price is tough, and his physical features, such as his face and body, are well-defined. His hair is short, and he has a receding hairline. Captain Price smokes cigars and often wears his signature boonie hat – a distinct and recognisable part of his appearance that is closely associated with him. Captain Price wears military attire, which he adapts depending on the environment, location, mission, and equipment needed. He is a combat specialist, and his attire usually has some camouflage pattern. He is equipped with various tactical gear and vests.

¹¹ Special Air Service (SAS) is a special forces unit known for its high level of training and expertise in counterterrorism, hostage rescue and direct action as well as covert reconnaissance, considered to be one of the most respected and well-known special forces in the world.

3.1.1.2. Overview of background story

Fifteen years ago, Price and his commanding officer, Captain Macmillan, were tasked to assassinate an ultra-nationalist Russian arms dealer called Imran Zakhaev. Price and Macmillan travel to Pripyat, where the duo prepares to kill Zakhaev. Price, armed with a high-power sniper rifle, shoots at Zakhaev from a distant hotel that has a perfect viewpoint over the site where the arms deal will take place. The shot does not kill Zakhaev but severs his left arm entirely. Price assumes the shock and blood loss will take care of the rest. The duo attempts to escape, but Macmillan is wounded. While fighting small patrols of Russian soldiers trying to capture them, Price must carry the wounded Macmillan to the extraction point, where a helicopter will pick them up. The failed assassination of Zakhaev leads to the escalation of global tension and to the execution of President Yasir Al-Fulani – the leader of an unnamed Middle Eastern country – by insurgent leader Khaled Al-Assad, Zakhaev's new right-hand man. Fulani's death leads to a global conflict involving the United States, Russia, England and the fictional Middle Eastern country, which results in the deaths of 30 000 United States Marines after Al-Assad detonates a nuclear bomb. This calamity could have been mitigated, had Price succeeded in killing Zakhaev.

Captain Price bears personal responsibility and guilt for prolonging the conflict. Now in command of Bravo Unit Six, Captain Price leads a series of covert operations inside the borders of Russia to stop Zakhaev and Al-Assad's attempt at a nuclear barrage on America. Bravo-Six's efforts were successful at first, when they identified the location of Al-Assad. Through underhanded tactics and torture, Captain Price and the Bravo-Six unit learn of the location of a missile silo harbouring nuclear weapons that are poised to strike America. Soon after that, Al-Assad's phone rings. Captain Price answers the call and recognises the voice. With this revelation, Price instantly executes Al-Assad. The Bravo-Six unit, led by Captain Price, successfully disabled the nuclear warheads, but at a cost. Several of the Bravo-Six members were lost in an attempt to kill Zakhaev. In a final effort, Captain Price and "Soap" MacTavish work together to kill Zakhaev during their desperate attempt to escape and pass the Russian border into allied territory.

During the events of *Modern Warfare 2*, Price and Soap, now the commanding officers of Task Force 141, led a global manhunt to capture and stop a new threat: Makarov, a bloodthirsty Russian ultra-nationalist. However, Makarov is a few steps ahead of Price (Banks *et al.*, 2017: 18-19). With Task Force 141 failing to stop him, Makarov declares war on the United States after leading a false flag operation on Russian soil, framing the U.S. for terror attacks in Russia. The world subsequently enters into a new global conflict. In the story of *Modern Warfare*, pivotal moments shape Captain Price. The first is the failed assassination of Zakhaev, and the second is the betrayal of General Shepherd, who intends to commit to a large-scale war against Russia following the death of his marines during the events of *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*. The

final straw is the death of his long-time friend and comrade John “Soap” MacTavish at the hands of Makarov during the events of *Modern Warfare 3*. The death of Soap, as he is often called, is the catalyst that pushes Captain Price over the edge to eliminate Makarov and avenge his fallen comrades long after the war’s conclusion. Captain Price is driven by the trauma of not completing his mission and losing his men and friends. It can be argued that Captain Price bears grudges against characters such as Zakhaev and Makarov.

3.1.1.3. Physiology of Captain Price

Captain Price’s physiology reflects his experience and years as a capable, seasoned soldier. Price is strong and resilient, having endured several firefights and performing complex combat manoeuvres. Captain Price is also skilled in hand-to-hand combat and is proficient with various weapons that demand substantial coordination, upper body strength and stamina. Price’s strength, stamina and endurance allow him to undertake long, gruelling missions under physically demanding conditions. Captain Price also exhibits a high pain tolerance and has survived numerous life-threatening situations, from ballistic wounds to explosions, as well as physical trauma. In spite of these adversities, he always manages to accomplish his objectives and complete his missions. He has sharp reflexes and reacts quickly to danger, demonstrating his awareness. Price’s characterisation is supported by his experience and physical prowess: his strength and endurance, accompanied by strategic thinking, make him a force to be reckoned with (see Figure 3.1 for character appearance).

3.1.1.4. Psychology and motivations of Captain Price

Captain Price’s behaviour and motivations are primarily informed by three specific points: his loyalty to his men and friends; his views; and his profession as a career soldier. Captain Price is driven by an unwavering sense of duty and patriotism as an experienced and dedicated British SAS officer. His loyalty to his country and the military fuels his resolve to accomplish any mission, regardless of difficulty or danger. Price’s fierce patriotism extends to defending the United Kingdom and protecting the broader Western world from those perceived as rogue enemies, terrorists and extremist leaders. His determination is especially evident in his views toward the Russian ultranationalist Zakhaev, whom he sees as a grave threat to global security. Price’s deep sense of duty compels him to lead his team in preventing a nuclear catastrophe. This means protecting and acting in the best interest of his country.

Captain Price is motivated by external forces such as the goal and desire to win the war and defeat the enemy forces. Internally, Price is driven to redeem his past mistakes of failing to kill Zakhaev and failing to protect the lives of his men. His motivations take a darker turn when he confronts Makarov: Price is determined to bring him to justice, driven by a personal vendetta for Makarov’s role in orchestrating global chaos and the deaths of countless soldiers and civilians. Price’s sense of duty becomes intertwined with his thirst for revenge, making his pursuit of Makarov relentless and unforgiving.

3.1.1.5. Consequences of Price's actions

In pursuing noble intentions, Captain Price's actions are executed in very questionable and morally ambiguous ways. While Captain Price develops more friend-like relationships as the story progresses, his character remains, for the most part, the same. His views are challenged, but remain unchanged despite the loss and suffering he endured. Captain Price's actions breach several war protocols. Protocols of war are the rules and conventions aimed at regulating armed conflict. For instance, his methods and actions at times are recognised as war crimes. Murdering Makarov consequently makes Captain Price a criminal. Torturing and threatening prisoners of war are criminal acts. The Geneva Protocol argues against such actions. While we may understand what is at stake and why Captain Price acts in such a manner, his actions are not heroic or noble.

On the other hand, as we know of his loss and trauma, we may sympathise with him as a character.¹² Price not only wounds his prisoners but also takes justice into his own hands by killing them and preventing them from receiving a fair trial. Captain Price embarks on a journey to avenge his fallen comrades after the events of the war.

3.1.2. Case study 02: Bruce Wayne (Batman)

3.1.2.1. Introduction to the character

In the movie *The Batman* (2022), Batman is first introduced to the viewer as he fights against a small gang. Batman brutally strikes down the gang's leader and continues to assault the leader, even though he has won the fight. His behaviour resembles someone lashing out (Brody, 1995; Fitzgerald, 2004). In this character iteration¹³, Batman is inexperienced and immature, showing a lack of sympathy and nuance in his interactions with others. This interpretation of Batman is that of a person who only sees right and wrong in a situation and cannot appreciate complexity. He is reckless, his combat style is unrefined, and this iteration of Batman lacks nuance and sensitivity. For Batman, there is no in-between. He is the kind of character who is ignorant of the grey space in which so many characters live and act, including himself (Reeves, 2022).

3.1.2.2. Overview of background story

The premise of *The Batman* (2022) focuses on Batman hunting down the Riddler as the latter leaves cryptic clues in each of his elaborate and sinister murder scenes. In this film's narrative, Batman is interpersonally linked to the story's villain, the Riddler. The Riddler is portrayed as a

¹²The Geneva Protocol is a treaty drawn up to prohibit certain actions and behaviour during wartime.

¹³ DC's Batman is a character that has seen several adaptations over the years, with each adaptation varying slightly from the next and exploring different facets of the character and subject matter.

disturbed and calculating villain who sees himself as a dark mirror of Batman; they have an interpersonal relationship. Both characters view Gotham as a city that is in decay. The town is plagued by corruption, but while Batman seeks to restore justice through vigilantism, the Riddler, unfortunately, uses extreme violence to expose the city's corruption with the help of Jim Gordon, a detective in the Gotham Police Department.

Batman begins to unravel a web of conspiracies and corruption. This corruption which he uncovers, directly ties to the most potent figures found in Gotham City, including Bruce Wayne's family. This prompts Bruce/Batman to question whether he can make a difference or if he and his family heritage perpetuate the scourge of corruption in Gotham. Bruce Wayne's relationship with the Riddler is complex and rooted in shared experiences of trauma and disillusionment with Gotham's corruption. The Riddler leaves clues addressed to Batman, which draws him into a deadly game. The Riddler believes that Batman, as a masked vigilante, shares his vision of retribution and justice. In his mind, they are a team working outside the system to dismantle the corruption of Gotham's elite (Reeves, 2022).

The Riddler's game reveals that Batman's vigilante persona inspired him to pursue his twisted form of justice. The narrative climaxes as Batman races against time to prevent the Riddler from destroying the city, killing thousands, and to expose and end Gotham's corruption. At the film's conclusion, Batman realises he must evolve beyond being a mere instrument of fear and vengeance. He must become a figure of hope – something the Riddler cannot understand. This revelation forces Batman to confront his legacy and reconsider his role as a symbol of vengeance.

3.1.2.3. Physiology of Batman

Batman is versed and highly trained in hand-to-hand combat, as described by director Matt Reeves (2022), who likens this iteration of Batman to a street brawler. The street-brawler approach portrays his raw power and aggression. The physique of Batman (Bruce Wayne) is grounded in realism, highlighting his physical strength, endurance and vulnerability. Batman can withstand significant physical punishment, demonstrating his toughness, resilience and endurance, which suggests he has a high pain tolerance. His physiology also shows that Batman is very agile, moving quickly from target to target, and moving with intent, methodically and deliberately. His agility ties into his situational awareness. He is, however, susceptible to fatigue, and at times he is vulnerable since he is just a human. While his suit is armoured and protects him, he is not immune to wounds or damage (see Figure 3.2 for character appearance).

3.1.2.4. Psychology and motivations of Batman

Due to his trauma, Batman perceives and experiences crime in Gotham as a profoundly personal attack against him (Reeves, 2022). Following the death of his parents at the hands of a criminal, he holds himself accountable for what happened (Brody, 1995). However, Batman rejects the Riddler's violent methods and distorted view. The film highlights how Batman struggles with his very identity. As the plot unfolds, the Riddler exposes the corruption in Gotham and the truth about the Wayne family's involvement in the city's dark history, particularly Batman's father's connection to the mafia.

Batman's motivations originate from his desire for vengeance. Nevertheless, as the story unfolds, his motivations evolve into a more profound sense of responsibility and a willingness to fight crime and bring hope and healing to Gotham City. Batman realises that justice is about more than just punishing wrongdoers; it inspires lasting change. In the beginning, Batman regards himself as the embodiment of vengeance. He is driven solely by the goal of punishing criminals by invoking fear and dismantling the criminal underworld of Gotham City (GQ, 2022). He believes that fear and brutality are the necessary tools for achieving justice. This revelation shifts Batman's perspective on his father's intentions and ultimately reaffirms his commitment to justice, but now with a clearer, more mature sense of purpose.

3.1.2.5. Consequences

Throughout the film, Batman undergoes a moral evolution. After witnessing the devastating consequences of the Riddler's actions, he realises that simply being a force of vengeance is not enough and that he must surpass the notion of mere vengeance. Batman must be a symbol of hope if he is to inspire the lasting change that he wants. Batman understands his actions must inspire positive change, not just punishment, to restore justice to Gotham (Reeves, 2022). As the narrative progresses, the Riddler's campaign of terror targets the city's elite. It compels Batman to confront the street criminals and the institutional rot inside Gotham's law enforcement and politics. Solving the Riddler's clues reveals a web of corruption that links back to his family's legacy, making his mission intensely personal. This forces Batman to confront the truth about his parents' involvement in the city's darker history.

3.1.3. Case study 03: Bud White

3.1.3.1. Introduction to the character

Bud White is a Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officer in the film *L.A. Confidential* (1997). White is a hard-boiled detective with a strong sense of justice, particularly when it comes to protecting women from abuse. He is haunted by his childhood trauma regarding the death of his mother, who was beaten to death by his father. Moreover, he is fixated on saving

abused women (Lyons, 1997). Bud is known by his peers and civilians for his physical strength and short temper. He often relies on force to resolve situations. Still, despite his aggressive demeanour, Bud is deeply protective over vulnerable abuse victims, like people who are subject to domestic and physical abuse. These protective and aggressive traits stem from his own experiences with abuse. Bud White is intensely loyal towards the police force and follows his orders diligently. He often comes off as stoic and hides his emotions behind his hardened exterior, but he is profoundly vulnerable and wounded. This juxtaposition of a hardened police officer and a vulnerable man makes him an excellent example of someone who is morally ambiguous. White has a violent personality, which contrasts with his deep moral convictions. However, beneath the surface of his well-aimed intentions lurks a wounded darkness ready to strike. For instance, when Bud learns that his love interest, Lynn Bracken, betrays and manipulates him, his insecurities are invoked, and he attacks her. This action is in direct opposition to his values. In this instance, Bud's values bend, which stems from his repressed trauma and manifests unconsciously when his autonomy is challenged.

3.1.3.2. Overview of background story

The story of *L.A. Confidential* develops as Bud White uncovers the corruption within the police department and struggles to come to terms with his demons. After a series of murders are reported at a local diner, officers White, Exley and Vincennes begin their investigation. They each find evidence that suggests a more troubling problem. Their findings lead them back to the Los Angeles Police Department, indicating that the LAPD is involved in a dark power struggle over control of prostitution rings and heroin smuggling.

The three policemen are initially at odds with one another, but they are forced to work together if they want to resolve this problem and expose the corruption of the LAPD. White and Exley discover that the Night Owl diner massacre is connected to and was orchestrated by Captain Dudley Smith, a high-ranking policeman who is revealed to be tied to an organised crime syndicate. The officers determine that Captain Smith intends to control the crime scene in Los Angeles and use the police force as his enforcers.

This leads officers Bud White and Exley into a deadly shootout in a motel against Captain Dudley and some other criminals tied to the organised crime syndicate. Exley and White are lured into the motel by Smith, who has prepared an ambush. Though the duo of officers is badly wounded, they manage to kill Smith and his men. The LAPD decides to cover up Smith's death, claiming he died a hero. Officers White and Exley agree to remain silent about the events that transpired to protect the LAPD's image (Hart, 2018).

3.1.3.3. Physiology of Bud White

Bud White is physically large and muscular. His physical strength and size define his physiology, aggressiveness, and endurance when approaching conflict, making him a

somewhat intimidating figure. Bud is exceptional in combat, especially hand-to-hand combat. His tolerance for pain and high endurance levels make him an excellent fighter. In that regard, he is considered a brawler; Bud White is a character who uses his body as a weapon.

He is quick and agile despite his size. White relies on brute force, backed by his size and strength, to solve problems, sometimes leaving him vulnerable in more complex and dire situations such as gunfights. It is his imposing presence and physical power that are key to his identity as someone rough and emotionally driven by trauma, making him a considerable enforcer of the law. Bud White's physiology is linked to his emotional state. His strength and aggression are, therefore, driven by his strong sense of justice accompanied by a deeply rooted hatred towards men who abuse women. His physicality is an outlet for Bud's inner turmoil, which makes his violent tendencies emotionally charged instead of calculated decisions (see Figure 3.3 for character appearance).

3.1.3.4. Psychology and motivations of Bud White

Bud's psychology is marked by anger, trauma, aggression, emotional scars, justice, loyalty and moral ambiguity. Bud's aggressiveness is channelled through his anger toward suspects. The aggression stems from his past trauma and his hatred toward abusers, particularly men who attack women (Sheila, 2007). His father's abuse towards his mother has left a significant impact on Bud. As a result, he is quick to resort to physical force. He often crosses the line in the pursuit of what he considers justice. His aggressive tendencies and moral rigidity stem from his traumatic past. The death of his mother at the hands of his father awakened in him a fierce protective instinct and a distorted view of justice. This past trauma informs White's emotional volatility.

However, his vulnerability and emotions are hidden behind his tough exterior and his inability to process his pain and emotions beyond expressing them through violence. Yet Bud carries a strong sense of justice and moral conviction. Even when operating outside the law, he does so with the greater good in mind. White is willing to bend or break the law if it means he can deliver justice. His moral code guides him and causes his internal conflict.

Bud struggles with his emotions, which becomes apparent in his relationship with Lynn. He is often torn between his duty as a police officer and his moral code. He simultaneously fights against the corruption within the police department and his inner demons (Hart, 2018). Bud is characterised by his anger, trauma and conflicted sense of justice. While driven to protect the vulnerable, he struggles to cope with his violent nature.

3.1.3.5. Consequences

Bud's actions throughout *L.A. Confidential* (1997) suggest a subconscious desire for redemption. White is aware of his brutality, while he struggles with his violent nature and traumatic past, which indicates a longing to be more than just a brute enforcer. This desire to protect, yearning for loyalty and affirmation of his vulnerable side, leads him to Lynn Bracken. Consequently, the relationship with Lynn catalyses Bud's need for this change. He starts confronting his inner demons, seeking a more compassionate way of being. This journey towards self-awareness and redemption makes Bud White morally ambiguous, showing he is more than just a violent cop.

3.1.4. Case study 04: Joel Miller

3.1.4.1. Introduction to the character

Joel Miller is the main character from *The Last of Us* video game and television series developed and produced by Naughty Dog Games (2013) and HBO (2023) respectively. Joel is a survivor of an outbreak that caused a fungi-fuelled zombie apocalypse. Joel is an exceptionally complex character, whose personality is primarily shaped by trauma, loss and survival. He is a hardened and ruthless survivor who is deeply affected by the trauma of losing his daughter at the beginning of the outbreak (Max, 2023).

3.1.4.2. Overview of background story

During the outbreak, Joel, his daughter Sarah and Uncle Tommy (Joel's brother) attempt to escape the city of Austin, Texas in the U.S.A. But they are caught amid the panic as army soldiers are ordered to quarantine the civilians and dispose of anyone who could be infected. They find themselves close to a nearby river when they are caught by a soldier who then receives radio instructions to kill them. In a moment of chaos, Joel, while carrying his daughter, tries to dodge the oncoming bullets. He swirls and falls without noticing his daughter getting shot (PlayStation, 2014; Miyamoto, 2023).

Joel's brother, Tommy, intervenes and kills the soldier, but they are unable to save Sarah. She dies in Joel's arms, leaving him utterly devastated and traumatised. This shattering loss transforms Joel into a mistrustful and cynical man, isolating himself in the harsh realities of the post-apocalyptic world he inhabits. Beneath his hardened exterior, however, lies a powerful protective and paternal instinct. This instinct resurfaces when Joel is tasked with smuggling a package across the United States, only to discover that the package is a girl named Ellie, who is immune to the virus. His deep-seated need to protect becomes the driving force in his growing bond with Ellie. As Joel embarks on the journey to escort Ellie, his cynicism and doubt about humanity's potential for recovery persists. This doubt and developing bond with Ellie inform his decisions throughout the narrative. Miyamoto (2023) observes that Joel and Ellie's relationship

develops into a pseudo father-daughter-dynamic, unveiling the depths of Joel's capacity for care and connection amidst the desolation of their world.

As Joel and Ellie travel across the devastated United States, they form a deep bond. Along the way, they face numerous dangers, from infected creatures to treacherous human survivors. The duo encounters various factions, including bandits, cannibals, and rogue militias, each presenting new threats and challenges. Their journey culminates at a rebel hospital, where Ellie is set to undergo surgery to create a cure for the infection. However, Joel learns that the surgery will be fatal for Ellie. Left with an impossible choice, Joel decides to save Ellie, prioritising her life over the potential cure (Carrière, 2023). In a desperate and violent act, he kills everyone at the hospital and escapes with her. When Ellie later confronts Joel about what happened, he lies to protect her, claiming that the doctors and researchers could not develop a cure. This decision complicates their relationship, as Joel's choice to save Ellie ultimately sacrifices humanity's future, leaving her unaware of the whole truth.

3.1.4.3. Physiology of Joel Miller

Joel is shaped by the cruel and post-apocalyptic world he lives in. Therefore, he is moulded by the events and circumstances surrounding him. He is portrayed as physically strong, with a solid muscular build, reflecting the years of labour and brutal environments he has been exposed to. Joel Miller uses his strength to overpower enemies in hand-to-hand combat or with blunt weapons and firearms. His physique suggests a life of physical hardship, making him a formidable and, above all, a resilient man. Because of his cruel and unforgiving surroundings, Joel needs high stamina and endurance, and he travels long distances on foot while managing limited resources. Despite everything working against him, he keeps going, demonstrating his immense physical and mental endurance. Miller is also skilled in various types of combat, from weapons to hand-to-hand combat. His fighting style is gritty and brutal, and his attacks focus on efficiency. His emotional state informs Joel's physiology. The loss of his daughter and desire to protect Ellie, combined with the constant need for survival, has left him emotionally hardened, which is reflected in his physical demeanour. Often, Joel will appear weary, tense and burdened by the weight of his losses (see Figure 3.4 for character appearance).

3.1.4.4. Psychology and motivations of Joel Miller

Joel's psychology is influenced by his trauma of losing his daughter, as well as the very harsh realities of the post-apocalyptic world in which he now resides. Joel is shaped by grief, survival instincts, and complex blends of cynicism and protectiveness; but it is primarily shaped by the loss of his daughter Sarah.

Sarah's death essentially defines the trauma experienced by Joel at the beginning of the outbreak(Miyamoto, 2023). This opening event leaves him emotionally scarred, which leads to a profound sense of grief as well as the inability to open up or trust others. Trauma tends to manifest through his composure and deep reluctance to form emotional connections, as he fears experiencing a similar and devastating loss again. The harsh realities of the world he lives in can lead to death. Joel becomes highly cynical and mistrustful. His primary motivation is survival for himself, and later also for others he starts caring about (Carrière, 2023). This survival instinct makes him pragmatic and willing to take extreme measures, such as resorting to violence to protect himself and those he cares about, which leads him to operate within a moral grey area; Joel thinks about what is necessary for survival. This moral ambiguity allows him to make ruthless decisions without being paralysed by ethical considerations.

He possesses a strong paternal and protective instinct. This is significant in his identity, which stems from his past as being a father. When he agrees to escort Ellie, this instinct gradually reawakens, and he also steadily forms an emotional bond with Ellie as they travel across the United States. Protecting Ellie becomes his primary motivation and goal of survival, to the point where he is willing to sacrifice the possibility of a potential cure and the lives of many to keep her safe (Banks *et al.*, 2017: 87). Consequently, his fear of loss drives his decision-making. It is his fear that makes him someone who is emotionally guarded at all times, believing that if he allows himself to care for someone, it will only lead to more pain. Eventually, his protective behaviour towards Ellie confirms this notion of preventing another catastrophic loss, reflecting his need to control the circumstances around him and to avoid the feeling of vulnerability.

The decision to eventually save Ellie, by rebelling against the hospital, results from his fear of losing Ellie (Carrière, 2023). His choice to save Ellie at the expense of a potential cure, while also massacring the doctors and personnel involved, is an act driven by his fear of reliving the trauma of losing his daughter. This shows how deeply the death of his daughter, Sarah, has traumatised him in the past and how it still impacts the choices he makes.

3.1.4.5. Consequences

.Joel Miller's actions and decisions lead to significant moral compromises. His actions invoke several personal and more considerable consequences that impact the world in which they reside. Joel's willingness to operate within moral grey areas results in ethically questionable actions. For instance, he takes violent measures to protect Ellie. Joel's actions, in particular at the hospital, leave him with a heavy burden of guilt, with which he must live. The choice Joel makes, potentially costs humanity their only chance of a cure (Banks *et al.*, 2013: 87). This guilt results in a substantial emotional burden, as he must live with the consequences of prioritising his personal needs to protect Ellie over the lives of the countless remaining survivors. This

decision also forces him to lie to Ellie about the events at the hospital and about the potential cure, creating a deep inner conflict in which he is constantly aware of the moral compromise he made. The lie becomes a source of emotional turmoil, affecting his inner peace and relationship with Ellie. His strained relationship with Ellie becomes a ticking time bomb that will severely damage their relationship if the truth is revealed. His actions ultimately represent a complex moral legacy, as he chooses personal attachments over humanity. Joel leaves behind specific questions concerning the nature of sacrifice and survival. His actions also ask what it means to protect those we genuinely love, while the viewer feels his moral ambiguity and challenges (Miyamoto, 2023).

3.2. A visual audit of the grey characters presented in the case studies

The following section explores the visual presentation of each grey character featured in the case studies. Each of these characters is carefully selected for their moral ambiguity and complexity. The case studies draw from diverse narratives, including contemporary cinema, video games and film television. These case studies provide a collective backdrop highlighting how visual design can contribute to portraying morally grey characters. These characters' physical traits, attire, facial expressions and overall aesthetic are analysed. This section intends to uncover how visual elements can communicate the nuances of these characters and reinforce their complex personalities. Specifically, the following visual audit examines how the external representation of these characters aligns with their internal motivations and moral conflict, by understanding these visual cues that are used to signal their moral ambiguity. This visual audit contributes to the study's goal of visually designing a grey character. This section looks at the appearance of grey characters, investigating how these character designs invoke empathy, moral uncertainties, and tension – all essential in establishing these complex roles within the narrative. The section aims to inform the development of a character by providing insight into the visual design choices that shape the audience's perception of the character.

3.2.1. Captain John Price

Price is a seasoned and rugged soldier who embodies the look of a battle-hardened veteran. As a special forces operative, he is well-groomed. Overall, Captain Price has a robust physical appearance and an authoritative look that commands attention and respect. A stern expression often marks his face, and there are subtle signs of age and experience, including wrinkles and scars, which hint at the time spent in combat. Price often wears tactical military gear designed to be functional and durable. This includes camouflage outfits and tactical vests with multiple pockets and compartments for weapons, ammunition, knives, ropes and radio equipment. He often wears his boonie hat, one of his signature pieces. His gear is usually practical and fitted for combat, and is adapted to the various environments as needed, whether covert, mission or urban.

His practical build is suited for someone who has undergone rigorous physical training and countless missions. His eyes are sharp, and he constantly assesses his surroundings, which adds to his commanding presence. His overall appearance conveys an experienced, no-nonsense leader who has seen the realities of war and is prepared for the next fight (see Figure 3.1 for the character design breakdown).

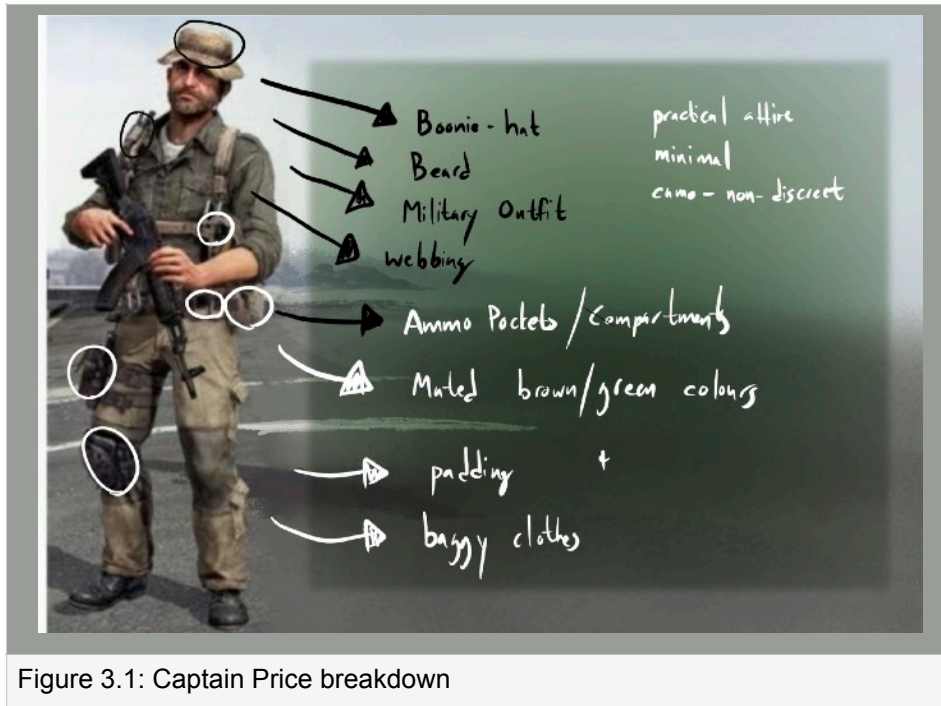


Figure 3.1: Captain Price breakdown

3.2.2. Batman

The Batman's appearance in *The Batman* embodies a practical do-it-yourself aesthetic that is designed to look as grounded as possible. The bat suit is assembled with various parts that Bruce Wayne has assembled himself (Reeves, 2022). This suit variation is marked by visible handmade elements, such as stitching and detailing, that give it a robust and practical appearance. Each component of the bat suit is a distinct piece of body armour, with the chest area being heavy and fortified, featuring a sizeable metallic bat decal. The emblem serves a dual purpose, as it can be used as a bladed weapon. Several ballistic pads segment the suit's overall bulky design.

The suit references several military practices in approaching ballistic protection. For example, the suit is layered in several sets of inter-connected plates of armoured protection. There is armour on his shoulders, elbows, lower arms and knees, each with visible textures indicating high durability and safety; a high-and-low-tech approach integrates traditional, lower-tech crafting practices with modern advanced materials and tools, allowing for movability and maximum protection. The result of this bat suit is a blend of old and new technology, which

creates an innovative design that is both accessible and functional, and which reflects a resourcefulness and hands-on approach towards crime fighting. Writer and director Matt Reeves (2022) comments on the design of the bat suit in his adaptation, emphasising his desire for Batman to be an efficient street fighter (see Figure 3.2 for the character design breakdown).

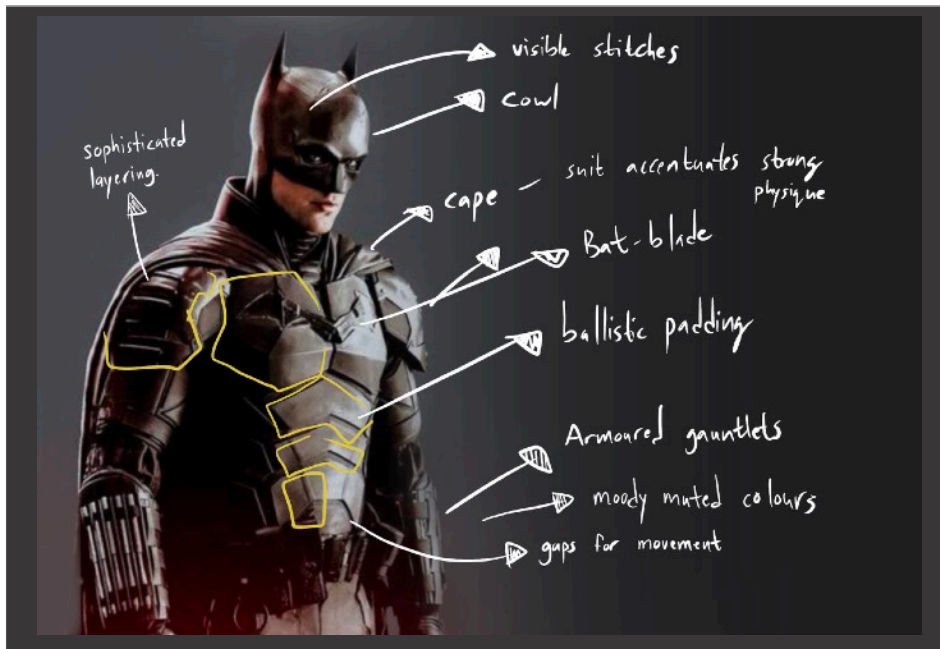


Figure 3.2: Batman breakdown

3.2.3. Bud White

In *L.A. Confidential*, Bud White is portrayed as a rugged, assertive police officer who violently enforces the law. The film's production design authentically captures the essence of 1950s Los Angeles. Bud's appearance perfectly aligns with this setting, since he has a ferocious, rugged face and carries himself with a sense of readiness and confidence, always prepared for the next confrontation (Tomasi, 2023). Bud's attire is practical and straightforward: he typically wears plain, dark-brown suits and white shirts. This choice of clothing underscores his role as a working-class officer rather than a refined detective, though he is a capable detective in his own right. Much like his approach to his job, his wardrobe is no-nonsense, direct, and strictly functional. Despite his rough exterior, his appearance is neat; and while simple, his clothing is always well-fitted and clean. This suggests that beneath his violent tendencies lies a man who possesses a strong sense of discipline and order, which is contrasted by his inner conflict.

Additionally, Bud's appearance is marked by scars, cuts and bruises that resulted from numerous physical altercations. These wounds serve as a testament to his role as an enforcer in the Los Angeles Police Department, and indicate his frequent involvement in violent

confrontations across the city. These physical marks also reflect his personal history, hinting at a violent childhood marred by domestic and physical abuse, which has left him with both physical and emotional scars (see Figure 3.3 for the character design breakdown).



Figure 3.3: Bud White breakdown

3.2.4. Joel Miller

Joel has a stoic demeanour and appearance, with a slightly hunched posture. This hunched posture is a testament to his age and the physical and emotional toll of the trauma and hardships he has endured since the outbreak. In his 50s, Joel is a hardened and grizzled survivalist, with a muscular build. Joel is marked by clearly visible scars and bruises on his hands, body and face. His severe and reserved expression reveals a man who closely guards his emotions, a characteristic of someone who has faced countless battles and emerged as a seasoned combatant and survivor. A resourceful and pragmatic individual, Joel uses whatever is available to him. His attire consists mainly of weathered and worn-out clothing, and scavenged materials and equipment, which all point to his survivalist and pragmatic nature. He is always prepared for the dangers that lurk in America's ruined cities, and ever wary of the strangers he meets and their true intentions. His choice of clothing allows him to blend into urban environments, and help him maintain a low profile and conceal his identity from those who might see him as an outsider. Joel's wardrobe reflects his harsh and hazardous world, constantly reminding him of his past. He favours practical and utilitarian clothing, which embodies his cautious and pragmatic approach towards survival. His attire reflects the world around him and indicates his mindset, which was shaped by years of living in a post-apocalyptic setting, where practicality and caution are paramount (see Figure 3.4 for the character design breakdown).

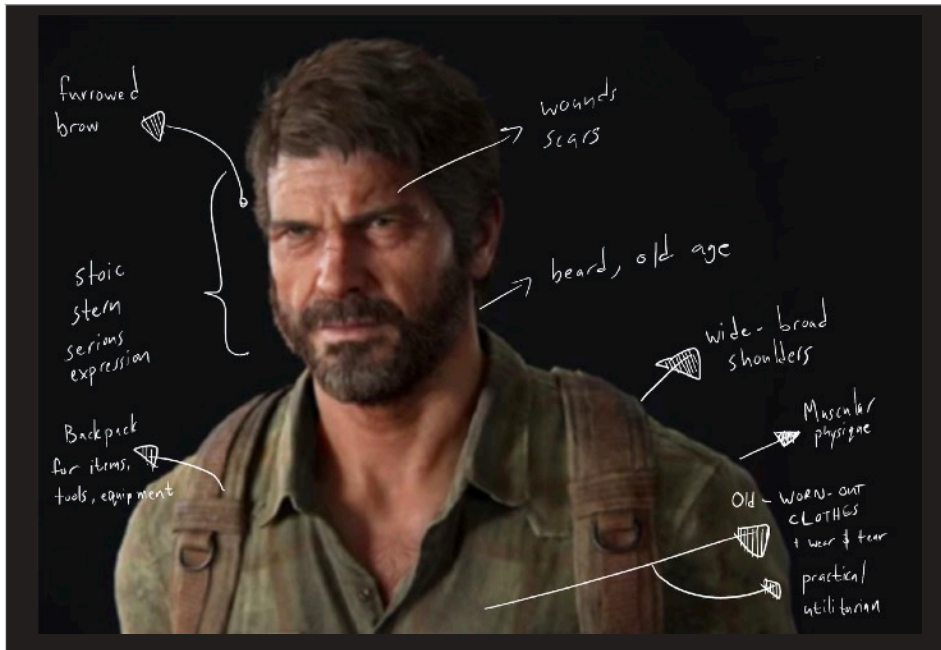


Figure 3.4: Joel Miller breakdown

3.3. Insights gained from visual audit

The visual audit provides noteworthy insights that can guide Captain James Miller's visual development. For example, the visual audit of these grey characters suggests that these characters often reflect aspects of their personal life in their appearance. The appearance of these characters provides visual cues that offer insights into their backstories and lives. For instance, Batman's suit is covered in scars from battle, reflecting his fight against crime in Gotham City's underworld. Another example is Captain Price, whose worn-out military vest and gear suggest his military career and service towards his country. Bud White's suit, on the other hand, is well-fitted. The suit reflects his working-class nature, background and no-nonsense attitude towards abusers. The visual audit suggests a variety of attire, which varies from a rugged look to a more practical look for the characters. Some appearances are marked by wear and tear on the clothing, and by scars, wounds and bruises on the bodies, which indicate each character's life of hardship, conflict and constant physical struggles and altercations. Their physiology, body language and facial expressions reflect their seriousness, focus and readiness for confrontation. Their outfits, clothes and general attire suggest a preference for function and practicality.

Because the outfits of these characters – Captain Price, Bud White, Batman and Joel Miller – do not indicate a specific affiliation (for example military), it gives them a lower profile, which allows them to hide in plain sight. At the same time, it provides necessary protection and

mobility, and it accommodates the neutral and muted colour pallet of their attire. Their clothing, gear and equipment are typically muted shades of grey, brown, black and green. The colours are a practical and grounded (believable) part of their character, allowing them to function in their intended storyworld, such as the night city of Gotham, urban combat zones and the gritty streets of Los Angeles. It also reflects the more severe and sombre thematic nature and qualities that The Batman story carries.

3.4. Observational findings

The following section makes specific observations regarding the investigations into these case studies of grey characters, to highlight and address their physiological and psychological commonalities. It aims to arrive at a series of design parameters and conventions that can be utilised to design and develop this study's artefact.

3.4.1. Physiological commonalities of grey characters

The case studies concerning these characters reveal that they are shaped by their roles as hardened individuals who are experienced and accustomed to violence and danger. All of the characters' physique suggest much about their history and characters. However, in all these cases their tough exterior hides vulnerability that springs from trauma. Their lives as hardened individuals reflect a series of relentless physical and psychological demands. All the characters that are observed in the case studies display physical strength, and the build of their body is often muscular, which makes them capable of handling demanding physical altercations. This is a common theme amongst the case studies. Their strength is an essential trait in their respective roles as soldiers, crime fighters and survivors, and their muscularity grants them the means to overpower enemies and endure the physically taxing environments in which they find themselves. Whether it is in the alleys of Gotham, the slums of Los Angeles, or an urban combat zone, their physical strength is an invaluable component that is required if they are to succeed in their goals.

Furthermore, these characters also exhibit a great deal of stamina and endurance. These characters demonstrate that they can have high levels of endurance and stamina for prolonged periods, whether in pursuit of criminals fighting in a warzone or surviving harsh post-apocalyptic conditions. Their ability to keep going despite physical and mental fatigue is proof of their resilience and determination. Another trait shared among these characters is their high pain tolerance, indicating that they can take significant physical punishment. These characters are depicted as often sustaining several types of injuries, regardless of which they continue to push forward, even though their bodies are marked by wounds, scars, cuts and bruises. Their high pain tolerance suggests a certain degree of durability that has been attained over their lifetime.

Consequently, these characters are also characterised by their tendency to prefer practicality in equipment and appearance. They are characterised by their no-nonsense approach to their attire and equipment. For instance, Batman's suit is designed for function and protection. At the same time, Captain Price's military outfit and Joel's scavenged clothing and makeshift tools reflect their need for practical utility and readiness, which is not about aesthetics. A certain purpose determines their attire's appearance – whether it is to protect, conceal or to serve some functionality within their given roles. They also exhibit heightened reflexes and sharp, tactical awareness, for instance in their ability to anticipate an opponent's moves, split-second decision-making during combat, quick reactions in critical situations, or their ability to act during confrontations. Their physicality includes a mental sharpness that complements their physical strength.

Lastly, these characters' physiology communicates readiness and confidence, while projecting an assertive demeanour. Their overall body language suggests constant alertness and preparedness to engage in confrontation (Kosuta, 2018). This is also indicative of their background and the role that they play in their respective narratives.

3.4.2. Psychological commonalities and motivations of grey characters

The psychological makeup of all these characters leads to isolation, whether this isolation is self-imposed or circumstantial. They are, by nature, all metaphorical lone wolves. They find it difficult to connect with others on a deeper level. This isolation is partly due to their distrust and emotional guardedness. We can infer that they also believe that their roles require them to be solitary figures who carry the burden of their responsibilities alone. Thus, they experience significant internal conflict and guilt over their actions, such as Batman, struggling for justice and vengeance. Price deals with the moral implications of his wartime decisions; Joel confronts the ethical consequences of saving Ellie; and Bud wrestles with his brutality and desire for redemption. These internal struggles highlight the emotional and psychological toll of their decisions, actions and choices. They are traumatised and their actions contradict their values. Because of their trauma, they resort to violence and constantly struggle with guilt or remorse, which in turn aggravates the trauma and internal conflict. Their internal conflict erupts into more violence and they have a tendency towards aggressive actions. They are prepared for and comfortable with resorting to violence when it is necessary.

They view force as essential for achieving their goals or staying alive. Their willingness to engage in physical confrontations and altercations is a defining aspect of these characters' personalities. These characters are emotionally reserved. They exhibit a stoic demeanour that keeps their emotions tightly controlled and rarely allow themselves to be vulnerable to anyone.

It is a defence mechanism developed out of necessity to appear unshakable and robust, even when it does not serve to protect them from further emotional pain. Their stoicism and emotional isolation also prevent them from forming meaningful relationships. These characters, despite their flaws, possess a strong sense of duty. Batman, for example, considers himself responsible for protecting Gotham City. Similarly, Captain Price protects his men; Joel ensures Ellie's safety while travelling across America; and Bud has a deep desire to protect vulnerable victims from abusers. This protective drive also informs their personality and motivations, and it encourages them to act even if it demands personal sacrifice or crossing moral boundaries.

Consequently, these characters exist in a moral grey area, where their actions frequently conflict with their established moral code. This moral ambiguity allows them to make decisions that, while perceived as justified, often mirror the tactics used by the criminals or adversaries they seek to defeat (Krakowiak *et al.*, 2015). In doing so, these characters blur the distinction between right and wrong. They challenge the conventional boundaries of heroism and justice. Their willingness to break the rules of their profession or to violate their internal principles highlights the complex nature of their morality. These characters are driven by a deep, sometimes desperate commitment to serve a greater good, uphold their sense of justice, or protect the ones they love at any cost, whether this involves bending the law or engaging in morally questionable actions. They justify their extremes as necessary sacrifices, and this reflects the deep internal struggle between their desire to remain righteous and the harsh reality of their circumstances. This duality makes their choices relatable and human, and it forces the viewer to confront the uncomfortable question of whether the ends can truly justify the means.

For instance, Batman uses intimidation against criminals; Captain Price resorts to morally questionable military tactics to win the war; Joel sacrifices the potential cure to save Ellie; and Bud White uses brutal force to impose his version of justice. Their actions, which arise from ambiguous morals, prompt questions concerning right and wrong and which actions are justified under challenging conditions. These characters also exhibit considerably cynical views of the world, born out of betrayal, loss, and the harsh realities they face daily. They are wary of others' intentions, and they often possess a strong sense of distrust. However, the most significant aspect of these four characters is their past trauma, which shapes their behaviour and worldview. Batman is driven by the childhood trauma of losing his parents, Captain Price by the horrors of war, Joel by the loss of his daughter, and Bud White by his violent upbringing. The characters' trauma often manifests as emotional scars, leading to a hardened demeanour and difficulty with forming emotional connections.

Based on the observations made from the case studies regarding this set of characters (Batman, Captain Price, Joel Miller and Bud White), grey characters are characters of ambiguous morality. This ambiguity is demonstrated by how these characters act and make moment-by-moment decisions in their respective stories. What is observed, is that these

characters set out with good intentions. Still, by chance, the narrative thrusts them into situations where they are forced to make difficult decisions influenced by internal and external factors, such as balancing their sense of justice, moral code, values, the rules and laws of military or professional engagement. This, however, depends on how the character's internal needs and conflicts clash with external factors. The characters above exhibit psychological and physiological traits associated with heroes and warriors. Qualities such as bravery, strength, resolve and courage are prominent, which makes them admirable and worthy of the viewer's support. However, while the grey character may also seek to do good, unlike the hero their methods are not always heroic. Also, they sometimes act impulsively and get triggered by situations or events. This is evident in the actions taken by characters such as Captain Price, Bud White, and Joel in their respective contexts.

Joel, for instance, decides to save one life instead of the potential thousands. While saving Ellie is good from one perspective, Joel's decision to sacrifice many others is morally reprehensible. Bud White fakes an attempt on his life to legally allow him as an officer of the law to return fire and kill an unarmed man holding a hostage. White does indeed save the woman who is held captive, but his methods are outside of the law and police jurisdiction. Whether consciously or subconsciously, each character investigated in these case studies attempts to reestablish control over their inner lives and regain agency. The trauma strips the grey character of their autonomy by affecting their ability to make decisions and act freely, without concern for reencountering the same trauma.

The loss of independence can affect the character psychologically and cause a feeling of powerlessness and a desire to reclaim it through alternative means. It could also lead to more self-destructive behaviours and is the driving force behind initiating their actions in the narrative. Heroes are often considered doers; they usually possess admirable and unique qualities, such as heightened senses, great physical strength, acting selflessly, and overcoming adversity (Kaveney, 2008: 2-22). It was observed in the case studies above that while grey characters may not always have honest and sincere intentions, they can also overcome adversity and possess admirable qualities. Qualities such as their ability to care and their desire to do good, are notable. They also have a measure of charm that makes them endearing, compelling and relatable (Blanchard, 2018). Due to their flawed nature and behaviours stemming from past trauma, they are more relatable and understandable than other characters, as they bear their human flaws more openly (Majewski, 2023). This allows viewers to connect with the character and visualise the story in their minds, making it easier to follow and understand the characters. The overall observation made from the case studies regarding interpersonal relationships is that the parameters of these relationships require the grey character to be narratively connected to others. These different characters are directly involved with the grey hero and are often linked to the trauma experienced by the grey character.

Peter Verstraten (2009: 171) points out that the genre of the film informs the general image of morality that should form in the viewer's mind. The boundaries between right and wrong are often explored in superheroes, survival-horror, war and action genres. These genres confront, question and investigate the circumstances that provoke violent responses (Bramlet, 2013; White, 2013: 47). The bendable values show what the soldier is willing to do to complete his mission. In the case of Batman, the bending of values shows to which lengths he is willing to go in order to avoid dealing with his trauma instead of addressing it directly. Similarly, in the case of Joel Miller the question is posed as to what extent the father will go to protect his surrogate daughter. To what extremes will Bud White, the police officer, resort in the name of order and authority of the law?

Arguably, however, the characters investigated above also have unique identities, missions and qualities, such as Joel's protective instincts towards Ellie and Bud's strong moral compass and values. In addition to those qualities, these characters share traits with the warrior archetype, as Batman and Captain Price illustrate. Their determination and resilience drive them forward, and characteristics such as strength, courage and bravery are illustrated in the process (McKay, 2011). The warrior archetype is characterised by a mindset that makes a concerted effort to win and triumph over adversity. The warrior fights relentlessly by using necessary force. Warriors are often depicted as soldiers or fighters, and are seen as protectors (Chin, 2009; Donovan, 2017). There are many parallels between the warrior and the selected case studies. Fitch (2005: 2-12) deconstructs the mainstream, contemporary depiction of American heroes (characters such as Batman, Joel Miller and Captain Price) as they are portrayed in Western films and draws strong comparisons between those contemporary Western heroes and the tale of Odysseus. Like Odysseus, Batman, Joel, Bud and Captain Price are flawed. Arguably, because of the narratives and circumstances in which they are caught, they cannot resolve their struggles without violent force.

Across these case studies, the characters possess recurring traits and encounter similar circumstances that inform the narrative in unique but comparable ways. Each of these characters exhibits a traumatic past and an interpersonal relationship, and as a result of these two factors, they are susceptible to bending their values. Therefore, the study deduces that three recurring primary conditions are needed to design and establish a grey character. The three specific tropes through which grey characters are identified, are a traumatic past event, interpersonal relationships, and bendable values. These tropes can be thought of as conditions that must be met when developing a grey character. The first condition, trauma, involves that the grey character carries with them a traumatic past or background. Based on observations made of the characters Bruce Wayne (Batman), Captain Price, Bud White and Joel Miller, one can infer that the trauma persists, and functionally strips the character of their autonomy or control over their situation.

3.4.3. Consequences of grey characters

The accumulation of actions committed by morally ambiguous characters suggests that there are consequences for their actions. Ambiguous characters act or react to events and circumstances, which leads to exciting or devastating outcomes that impact the story. This logically stems from the nature of stories and ties to the narrative elements of events, which I discuss further in chapters 4 and 5. However, the implication is that when ambiguous characters act, their actions have consequences. When morally ambiguous characters act, there should therefore be consequences for their actions that are revealed during the narrative or later on as the story progresses. These consequences should demonstrate that grey characters are not bound to typical conventions and that they are therefore exempted from serious situations. Even though the consequences of the grey characters' actions are not the main focus of this study's investigation, these consequences play an essential role in the story's plot. The actions and decisions of grey characters are typical of and inherent to their behaviour. The reader needs to understand how the grey characters' actions lead to inevitable consequences, in order to follow the unfolding events within the story and to recognise that the characters are morally ambiguous.

3.5. Tropes and conditions for grey characters

This section elaborates on the three conditions deduced from the case studies that stood out as elements conducive to creating grey characters. It further explores and defines the parameters within these three conditions to design this study's grey character. The analyses of these case studies revealed past trauma, interpersonal relationships and bendable values as cornerstones of a grey character. The following sections discuss these themes in more detail.

3.5.1. Trauma

The case studies demonstrate trauma's essential role in developing a grey character's backstory. In the stories of Batman, Joel Miller, Bud White and Captain Price, trauma catalyses their transformation into morally ambiguous figures. Because not all stories are the same, it becomes essential to consider how these characters become morally complex and what information about them is needed to convey their moral complexity. Their values and backstory are notable points that contribute to this development, as their traumatic experiences initiate their descent into greyness. This trauma becomes the driving force behind their actions, influencing their decisions and shaping their motivations.

The inability to save someone or take control of an impossible situation challenges the character's autonomy over their life and actions. The trauma inflicts a psychological wound that traumatises them, reminding them of their inadequacies and failures. The characters' trauma

may manifest in various ways, such as through the death of loved ones, abuse, failure and loss. The characters remain haunted by this trauma. The soldier who could not complete his mission and avoid the deaths of comrades, the hero who could not save his parents, the officer who was abused, and the father who could not protect his daughter, are all people who have lost autonomy and agency over their lives.

The motivations and actions of Captain James Miller, the protagonist for this study, must be rooted in a traumatic experience from his past. Introducing this trauma into his backstory and inner life sets the stage for the moral ambiguity that will define him. This profoundly ingrained trauma compels Miller to make morally questionable decisions, which leads to his eventual downfall. Additionally, the trauma he endures is closely tied to his interpersonal relationships, particularly with his brother, Liam, and a rogue colonel, Shepherd. These relationships further intensify his internal struggle and contribute to the complexity of his character.

3.5.2. Interpersonal relationships

The second condition that must be met in the creation of a grey character, is the condition of interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationships are best described as a broad condition since the relationship is not directly specified as positive or negative. The significance of interpersonal relationships to narrative and character development can be understood by examining the example of characters' relationships in the film *The Terminator* (1984). In the movie, a cyborg assassin is sent back in time to kill Sarah Connor, the woman who will give birth to the rebel leader who will save mankind from the tyranny of Skynet, a computer overlord. Similarly, the resistance sends back a soldier, Kyle Reece, to protect Sarah Connor and ensure her and her son's survival. Their mission objective interconnects the secondary characters, Kyle Reece and the Terminator, as they both attempt to reach Sarah Connor. Both characters pursue her for John Connor, her unborn son. Sarah Connor is, in turn, connected to them since she bears the child responsible for saving the future of humanity.

This example aims to illustrate the dependencies characters may have on one another in their respective narratives and how those connections drive the narrative and are shaped by the narrative. The case studies reveal that grey characters often have deep interpersonal relationships that significantly influence their actions and behaviours. These relationships, especially when intertwined with trauma, directly impact how these characters navigate morality and decision-making. In the cases of Bud White and Captain Price, personal betrayals and losses push them towards morally questionable actions.

Bud White's betrayal by his love interest and Captain Price's loss of a friend to a war criminal demonstrate that the closer the connection to the trauma, the more likely they are to engage in morally ambiguous behaviour. Therefore, in the relationship between Captain Price and

Makarov, Makarov is responsible for the death of Soap, a long-time friend of Captain Price. The emotional connection to Soap motivates Captain Price to pursue and kill Makarov. Soap's death is the catalyst for Captain Price to disregard standard rules of military engagement to exact revenge on Makarov. Similarly, Bud White betrays his values by assaulting Lynn Bracken when he discovers that she has been manipulating him. The purpose of the interpersonal relationship is to thematically and narratively unite various characters introduced in the story, giving them a purpose and reason for involvement and motivating their actions.

3.5.3. Bendable values

The third condition relates to how a set of bendable values can reveal how flexible a character's morale is and what their limitations are. *Bendable values* refer to a set of beliefs, principles, or values a character has and is willing to compromise on. The bendable values reveal the character's flaws by showing what they are willing or capable of doing to achieve what they deem necessary, or to avoid that which traumatises them. A conventional flaw could be a character's refusal to kill; then, due to the circumstances of the narrative or some personal change endured by the character, the character can forgo this principle of not killing or committing murder, in order to overcome a problem or achieve a goal. Bendable values are context-dependent, meaning that what drives one character to act in a certain way will not necessarily be true for another character in the same position. Some causes of bendable values are pragmatic flexibility, moral ambiguity, negotiable principles, and influence by external factors where characters rationalise their behaviour based on circumstances (Sevi, 2024). Values such as honesty, justice, honour and loyalty, non-violence and integrity are all subject to bending.

Bendable values are the cornerstone of grey characters. When written with a convincing narrative and backstory, these bendable values make them compelling, relatable and unpredictable (Sevi, 2024). The bendable values enable a grey character to act in a way and do things that conventional heroes would not, such as killing, cheating and taking actions that would only benefit themselves. Fitch (2005: 14-17) suggests that many contemporary heroes in films and television are to some degree anti-heroes, like Odysseus, who cannot resolve problems peacefully without violent force.

The bendable values highlight the character's flawed nature, revealing the character's complex, nuanced and lifelike intricacies and providing the viewer with a more nuanced understanding of the portrayed moral struggles (Sevi, 2024). These values also shape the viewer's perception of the character. For instance, they allow us to understand the dilemma faced by Joel Miller, a man who has lost his daughter. Through Ellie, Joel finds a new daughter he can look after and care for; but then he is asked to let go this surrogate daughter so that she can save the world. Joel's decision to massacre the rebels and doctors who wish to sacrifice Ellie in the pursuit of a possible cure, is understandable and relatable, even if it is morally unacceptable. Because of

his relationship with Ellie, the viewer understands and may sympathise with his dilemma. This portrayal of his character arc makes him convincing, since his internal conflict and reasons are well understood. By comparison, the example of Daenerys Targaryen at the start of this chapter feels jarring.

Consequently, bendable values are the culmination of events and circumstances that drive the character to take morally ambiguous decisions and actions (Sevi, 2024). The case studies suggest that Captain Miller must be pushed to commit acts in direct conflict with his values. These actions directly result from events and circumstances beyond Miller's control, but they are directly connected to his interpersonal relationships with his brother and friends. Subsequently, the events and circumstances challenge Miller's values, cognition and volition, and ultimately make Miller compromise his values and turn against his beliefs: this makes him a grey character who is morally ambiguous.

3.6. Deductions: recurring conditions for grey characters

The investigation of the above characters revealed that specific traits and conditions serve as foundational elements for developing a grey character. These include resilience, strength, endurance, awareness, and specific narrative tropes like traumatic experiences, interpersonal relationships, and bendable values. Together, these elements and conditions can act as structures that create a framework for developing the grey character. This helps distinguish the grey character from other characters, such as heroes and villains, who are more defined in their roles, functions and moral alignment.

The tropes inform the general direction of the narrative arc, which implies that certain events must be introduced to help shape the characters. For example, Captain Miller must exhibit qualities such as resilience, endurance and awareness, as the remarkable resilience, physical strength, and understanding of grey characters like Batman, Price, Joel and Bud are fundamental to their identities while also providing the viewer with insight, experience and empathy for the protagonists' actions and decisions. These qualities define, shape and inform how these characters function in their stories. Subsequently, the conditions of trauma, interpersonal relationships and flexible values must also be met, as trauma is a pivotal condition that shapes their psyche and motivations, catalysing their transformation, as illustrated by the case studies. As exemplified in the case studies, trauma can be established through personal loss, betrayal, and exposure to severe violence.

Furthermore, the case studies also illustrate the significance of strategically written interpersonal relationships with Captain Miller's character. These relationships can thus be a source of strength or a type of trigger that drives the character towards morally ambiguous actions, as the case studies suggest that these relationships are often complex and fraught with

tension. Lastly, the values of grey characters are bendable, allowing them to adapt to their circumstances and facilitating actions deemed questionable, as described in the case studies. Captain Miller must demonstrate a willingness to bend his values in response to the situations he encounters. Based on these findings, the development of Captain James T. Miller's character and story will incorporate themes of trauma, complex interpersonal relationships and flexible moral values.

Therefore, to design and demonstrate Captain James Miller's grey character, the character will need a narrative that includes a traumatic past event, strong interpersonal relationships, and a set of values that may bend under specific pressures and enforce change upon Captain Miller. These interactions must inflict trauma and internal conflict on Captain Miller. The events and characters involved must also challenge Miller's interrelationships with characters in the narrative. This leads to Captain Miller's contradictory and ambiguous actions, which illustrate that he is morally questionable.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the method and relevant case studies selected through the pre-project reflection phase. Case studies of existing grey characters inform the design of an original grey character. The selected grey characters are analysed, to arrive at a series of recurring patterns that can be combined into a framework for creating new grey characters. This chapter features a detailed exploration of case studies which involve morally ambiguous characters. The case studies in this chapter examine the background story of selected grey characters (Captain Price, Batman, Bud White and Joel Miller), to provide an overview of each character and to uncover the traits and roles of these grey characters in their respective stories. This chapter identifies common elements, such as a trauma complex, fraught interpersonal relationships and bendable values, which distinguish these grey characters from other character types.

Furthermore, the chapter emphasises that these characters exist in a morally ambiguous grey area between good and evil. Grey characters are driven by internal conflict, which leads to unpredictable behaviour that may contradict their values and moral code. These examples reveal the trauma and difficult decisions that make them grey characters. Through a visual audit and analysis of their psychological disposition, the chapter identifies recurring traits such as bravery, strength and resilience in these compelling characters. However, this chapter also highlights these characters' flawed and questionable decision-making, based on the findings for each character. The study outlines the conditions required to develop a grey character: James Miller, who experiences trauma, has tense interpersonal relationships tied to his moral conflict, which ultimately compromises his values, making him morally ambiguous.

With the knowledge gained in this chapter regarding grey characters, the chapter concludes with a series of components that need to be positioned within a theoretical framework, which is elaborated on in Chapter 4. This framework is informed by theoretical inputs from postclassical authors such as Bal, Ryan, Jannidis and Margolin. These theorists approach characters as mental constructs that are informed by real-world knowledge.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: CHARACTER IN THEORY

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework for this study. The research aims to establish the foundation for designing and implementing a grey character in a 3D animated short film. Therefore, the study is primarily concerned with the theory of character as a narrative element (Bal, 1985: 113) as it is understood within the context of stories.

For a character to display specific character traits, a story is needed with certain events that lay the basis for the character to manifest. This study's objectives thus include the creation of a story presented as a 3D animated short film. A basic understanding of narrative theory will guide the exploration and development of character. The context in which narrative theory functions is essential because it can shape how elements such as space, time, event and character are understood within the story.

Conventional narratives are characterised by approaches that function under the pre-tense, of depicting narratives with clearly defined characters and structures that recur and are easily understood. This includes binary opposition that separates good and evil, hero and villain; and underlying structures that reduce the narrative to a series of formulaic patterns. However, introducing an ambiguous character that undermines the clear-cut distinctions made within narratives requires a relevant theory to explain this. By extending various aspects within postclassical narrative the study can pursue a more dynamic interpretation of the narrative elements, such as the element of character within the context of an animated movie, going beyond merely offering flexibility in the portrayal of morally ambiguous characters (also known as grey characters), but also in the design of narratives that are complex and non-linear, through the use of flashbacks. Writing and developing a narrative and characters fits the objectives of this study, because the approach of this study, which extends Bal's arguments of the narrative elements, grants flexibility in the development and portrayal of ambiguous characters. This is achieved by introducing complex chronology and non-seriality, fragmentation of the narrative, and the use of multiple subjective viewpoints – through these methods, the objectivity of the narrative is undermined and a layered experience is created. Information is conveyed through numerous channels; and the progression of real-time is problematised by means of technical devices and multi-faceted systems, with the result that a mediated cinematic

time is revealed. Below, it will be explained how time, space and events – as narrative elements – alter how information flows in a story.

Narratologist Mieke Bal (1985: 166; 2017: 146) suggests that the most fundamental characteristic of a story is its depiction of change over time. Bal defines this temporal progression as a shift from one state of affairs to another. She identifies four elements that constitute the building blocks of a story: time, space, character and event. Among these components, the character element is the primary focus of this study. While it is possible to design and develop a character based on theoretical guidelines and even illustrate or visually present such a character without a story (by only implementing the other narrative elements), it is difficult to meaningfully understand a character, especially a grey character, without the character unfolding through a sequence of events. Therefore, the following section discusses the narrative aspects of time, space and events, as theorised by Bal, to theoretically underpin the creation of the story, which is manifested in a 3D animation.

The exploration into the other elements is essential for understanding and correctly implementing these narrative elements. In this manner, a deeper understanding of character as a narrative element may be attained. This investigation into the elements of time, event and space forms the foundation for understanding how a character acts as a dynamic narrative element, rather than a mere static entity. The elements of time, space and event establish parameters in which the character can operate. At the same time, the events mark the transitions that reveal the nature of the character. By examining how time and space shift and how events unfold, the elements provide a deeper understanding of the context and conditions that inform and shape the development of the character. Thus, the elements define the state of affairs from which the characters may evolve to different degrees, making meaning of their actions and reactions. While the narrative elements of time, space and event are not the primary focus of this study, they are critical guidelines necessary to arrive at a story through which the grey character can be conveyed in this study. The following sections will thus investigate and summarise the salient theoretical narrative elements of time, space and event as supplementary to character development.

4.1. Space, time and event

4.1.1. Space

In film narratives, space is essential because it sets the scene for events that move the plot forward (Bordwell, 2004). Thomas Elsaesser (1990: 12) argues that filmic representation requires both space and time simultaneously because space and time are interconnected (also see Bakhtin, 1981). Deleuze (1983) argues that space is the continuum in which movement occurs, thereby suggesting that the space in a narrative captures the flow of events and actions over time, concurring that space and time are connected. Bordwell (2004: 84) elaborates on the

use of space by implementing screen space and off-screen space, which respectfully refer to the space that is seen in the frame and space which is outside the frame. An example to help illustrate this notion would be a scenario of a man meeting a shadowy figure in an alleyway. The screen space informs the viewer that the character is in an alley with another character that the viewer cannot see. Offscreen space is a powerful narrative device that shapes the audience's understanding and emotional response, by implying that significant elements exist outside the boundaries of the frame beyond what is immediately visible. This fundamentally enriches the story by suggesting the presence of hidden threats that can influence the scene's outcome. In this study's narrative, screen space and off-screen space create ambiguity, chaos and uncertainty by only partially showing the space where actions occur. A notable scene (scene three) in the study's animated short film, *Fog of war*, is when the events are presented through audio only. It questions the actions and events presented to the viewer, and creates an unsettling openness rather than closure.

The scene with the two men in the alley in the example mentioned above illustrates how space influences the perception of the two characters in the alley. Through the space, the viewer may assume several things, such as who the men are, why they are meeting in an alley, and where the alley is. The narrative elements of space offer contextual information that informs the viewer's response to the scene. For this study, narrative space provides a platform for the interaction between the characters in the courtroom during the court-martial, which is the space in which most of the narrative of this study unfolds, giving the viewer the necessary contextual information to form an understanding and emotional response towards what is being depicted in the animated short film. The courtroom enables the story's characters to interact and confront one another and for their differing perspectives about Miller and past events to be revealed. The courtroom context infers a "battle" between two sides – the prosecution versus the defence – as they exchange questions and testimonies relating to past events concerning the actions and character of Captain Miller. The story should allow both sides to argue their case while relying on the testimony of characters who must recall past events and actions involving Miller in other spaces, which are revealed through flashbacks and witness testimony. This is needed to determine whether Miller's actions are justifiable. It also shows the need to explore the role of other narrative elements (such as time and event) to understand characters fully and to develop a suitable story through which the grey character can manifest.

Bordwell (2004) notes that the narrative space is connected to the action in the narrative. This implies that narrative space is integral to understanding the events that transpire there. Elsaesser (1990: 19) proposes that space emphasises the scene's individual shot or perceived logic. This suggests that the space not only pre-determines the type of actions and events that can occur within the space but also the emotional resonance of the actions. The arrangement of characters and objects in the space communicates narrative cues and emotional undercurrents, guiding the viewer through the scene. The use of space as a narrative element allows for the

development of cause and effect, which establishes certain patterns in the narrative (Bal, 1997; Bordwell, 2004: 85). In the context of this study, such a pattern will for instance involve the prosecution asking the witness a question, followed by a scene that transpires in the past. Connecting the questions in the courtroom to the actions that occurred in the past directly leads to the character ending up in the courtroom to testify and argue over Miller's actions and loyalties. This course of events infers that change is essential in conveying a narrative: if something happens in one space, it will affect the response in another space. While the question-and-answer sequence of the courtroom creates a pattern and provides a measure of narrative structure, the flashbacks and audio logs take the viewer to different spaces, interrupting the pattern and structure and creating uncertainty and fragmentation within the narrative.

In several instances in the film, there is more to a scene than what is immediately visible in the frame, creating a sense of mystery, suspicion, tension, and excitement. This is the case with the intentional use of the audio log in the film, which at times omits all visuals and relies only on the characters' audio cues to contextualise the off-screen space and events that transpire.

The following subsection delves into the close connection between space and time and highlights the aspect of time.

4.1.2. Time

Bal (1985) argues that events in a narrative unfold over time (cf. also Bakhtin, 1981; Deleuze, 1983; Gianetti, 2013). Bal (1997) contends that time within a narrative can be manipulated to advance the story and enhance the emotional impact of the story. Manipulating time by utilising devices such as time-skips, omissions of events and actions, or eliminating or condensing parts of the story can heighten the intrigue while limiting viewers' access to specific information. Temporal manipulations create suspense and shape the viewer's experience by withholding or distorting the progression of time. The case studies in Chapter 3 exemplify such issues by presenting several incidents where events affect the characters earlier in the story and shape who they are later in the narrative. For instance, Batman and Joel Miller encounter traumatic events in their past (the death of their parents and daughter respectfully), which leads to these characters' moral ambiguity. Thus, to create characteristics of moral ambiguity, it makes sense to use a similar traumatic event in the life story of the main character in the current study, Captain Miller. This will be an essential narrative device for the study to portray how and why Captain Miller becomes morally ambiguous.

To demonstrate past trauma, time must be manipulated to uncover this moment of trauma that shapes the character. The narrative device of flashbacks is relevant to this study for investigating grey characteristics, as the story is set up in a courtroom, where several accounts

of past (often traumatic) events concerning the main character are reflected upon and from different perspectives. According to Eleftheria Thanouli (2006), postclassical time is characterised by complex chronologies (non-linearity, jumping between periods), mediated time (told through flashbacks, for example) and subjective time (a character's experience of time is prioritised). When employing a postclassical approach, filmmakers access a significant amount of freedom to explore the narrative qualities of their films.

In the animated film, past events are explored through the subjective viewpoints of several characters, whether through their courtroom testimony or flashbacks. The use of flashbacks allows the story to 1) condense time and string multiple events together that occurred over a long period and 2) explore the main (grey) character's actions and decisions. Although Miller's actions are revealed non-linearly, the flashbacks connect the past events with the current events in the courtroom. This facilitates the communication of the past trauma that influences the protagonist's present decisions and, ultimately, his character, which may be framed as ambiguous.

The following section considers the importance of events as a narrative element, in conjunction with space and time.

4.1.3. Event

The narrative element of *event* is closely linked to time and space. Bal (1985: 189) explains that events represent the transition in a story from one state to the next. Alternatively, an event is something that happens, or an action or change that occurs in the situation (Mcquilan, 2000). One action leads to the next, thus emphasising how the transition caused by the event is a process of change. Events are the building blocks of a story, and therefore they form the core of the progression of the narrative. Events are critical for the characters to evolve beyond their current state. The significance of events is that they communicate the underlying cause-and-effect process embedded in the storytelling structure. Each transpiring event triggers the next, which pushes the narrative forward (Amerian & Jofi, 2015: 189). Bal (1997: 189) stresses the importance of the transition as a process. This process of transitioning from one event to the next exposes the character to circumstances that challenge the character, subsequently influencing the character's growth and development. Events within the narrative cover the why, how, cause and effect. For example, when Batman approaches a gang in the opening scenes of the film and a brawl ensues, the event can be described in two ways:

- a) The thugs are attacked.
- b) Batman attacks the thugs.

The first instance describes a condition. The second suggests a change of affairs; the persons were safe until the attack by Batman started. The scenario described above is an isolated event, in contrast to the scenario in (c) below:

Before the attack, the thugs pursue a civilian as they approach a train station, where they are subsequently attacked by Batman, who has been chasing them the entire time.

A previous event now informs the isolated event. An explicit relationship exists between the events (c) and (b): one action leads to the next. Therefore, a series of causally connected events forms meaning. Bal (1985: 191) argues that the relationship between events can be explicit or implicit. An explicit event is concrete and entails that within the narrative, it is directly shown and actively presented to the viewer as is, leaving little to no room for interpretation. Explicit events give rise to narrative progression that is clear in its intent. Meanwhile, an implicit event hints at developments through subtle cues, gestures and context to communicate information passively.

An event can further be understood as a confrontation between opposing parties, such as two participants and an action. From the above-mentioned conclusions, it becomes clear that this study requires the application of a clear set of events to guide the story. The events will set up moments in which the main character, Captain Miller, manifests as a grey character by taking either explicit or implicit actions. The film will switch between the present-day event, the court-martial, and the historical events that led to the trial. Fragments of relevant historical events are revealed through flashbacks, audio logs, intertitles or montages. The combination and juxtaposition of media contrast events and information remembered or told from other character's perspectives.

4.2. Character

The previous sections concerned the study of the narrative elements of space, time and event and the relevance of these elements in creating a story. The manipulation of these elements was explored, as the goal is to construct a narrative that lends itself to and complements the expression of the grey character. It also became clear that these elements cannot function in isolation. The character as a narrative element must activate time, space and events. This section focuses on character, which is the primary concern of this study. The goal is to establish a theoretical underpinning for the development of a character in the postclassical narrative context while framing the theory towards creating an ambiguous character with "grey" characteristics. This section will address the need to understand character classification, which guides the character development of this study to arrive at a grey character suitable for the animated film.

Characters are fundamental elements in narrative worlds (Jannidis, 2012; Ryan, 2012) that can be characterised as fictitious and abstract entities (Ryan, 2012). Ryan (2012) elaborates that characters exist as mental constructs in the viewer's imagination, meaning that they are mental projects informed by real-world knowledge and by what is presented through the text (the text being a film, television show, video game or book). These entities are shaped and influenced by the unfolding of the narrative, where the story's events impact the characters' decisions, prompting them to act and react in ways that propel the narrative forward. This suggests that the characters themselves are essential to storytelling, as their struggles and responses to their challenges form the basis for the story's progression. The character faces problems and seeks a resolution, and their journey toward that resolution drives the plot forward and engages the audience.

Fokkema (1991) points out that when consuming the story, the inner life of characters (which includes past events, actions and decisions made by the character) enables the viewer to understand this abstract entity as if the character were a real, living, breathing person. Initially, characters were understood by structuralist narratologists as being constructed through the application of psychological attributes that make the given character identifiable and relatable to the viewer (Margolin, 1990; Jannidis, 2012). These represented psychological traits enable the viewer to perceive the character (an entity formed in the viewer's mind) as tangible and lifelike, forming part of a temporary suspension of disbelief where consumers of the story momentarily accept the narrative as true (Friend, 2017).

Furthermore, Friend (2017) attributes this phenomenon to "fiction prompting imaginings", which means that the images viewed by the viewer can be regarded as fictionally accurate – that what they are seeing could happen or be plausible to some extent even though a character and their story may be fictitious. What matters is that the character and story are conveyed to be experienced as convincing. This suggests that a viewer may look at something and accept that the character and events surrounding the character are believable according to the laws of the narrative world. H.J. Human (1988) elaborates on the character's inner life, proposing that a character is only created after an inner life is established. Human (1988) explains how the inner life describes the character before the narrative unfolds. While not all information about the inner life needs to be revealed to the viewer, the inner life must become an amalgamation of revealed information. This revealed information suggests or hints at the personality and foreseeable actions of the character, while contextualising the character's actions as credible (Seider *et al.*, 2017). The protagonist's inner life in this animation is revealed in fragments and in non-linear order, and it is up to the viewer to piece together the character's psychological makeup. The inner life adds perceived depth to the background story of the character.

Friend's (2017) theorisation of viewer perceptions as fictionally accurate resonates with Ryan's (2012) view of the character being a mental image triggered by specific signifiers, such as how characters look, act and make decisions, and allows for better representation, ultimately making the character more fictionally true. Similarly, Jannidis (2012) argues that characters are representations of real-world knowledge. In other words, in this project, the character (Captain James Miller) must be designed from real-world knowledge that can trigger imagery in the viewer's mind. Moreover, Captain Miller's experiences must appear fictitiously plausible, suggesting that Miller's actions and the events he experience must seem like things that someone would do or could experience. The addition of more detail in the description of the character – and more precisely the character's physique and psyche – makes the character seem more human. Even characters who do not appear human-like will still exhibit some recognisable human traits or emotions (Jannidis, 2012). The creation of human-like characters allows the viewer to relate to, emotionally connect with, and invest in that character.

Margolin (1983: 1-14) argues that a character is a general signifier element of a constructed storyworld. As a result, characters can be perceived as cultural and social constructs that aid the viewer in sense-making (Bertetti, 2014). A well-developed character enables a viewer to escape to a fictional world and be immersed in the character's story. Friend (2017) adds that the viewer can intersubjectively identify with the character. The viewer embarks on a narrative journey with the character, which allows the viewer to explore and ponder relevant themes facilitated by the character.

Presentation is one of the primary concerns when creating a character. Their appearance often informs the viewer of their identity and suggests to the viewer who this character is. Their appearance can also contribute to establishing an emotional connection and notify the viewer of the role that this character inhabits in the narrative. Another identifying factor is the naming of the character. Humans are identified through names; therefore, naming a character relates the character to a more "real" and authentic status. Olson (2013: 4) argues that naming enables interpersonal communication through language. Giving a character a name informs the fictional reality based on real-world knowledge. Fokkema (1991: 26) proposes that the character's name is a fundamental and cohesive factor that identifies and preserves a character's identity. Therefore, the first step in developing a character for this study is to name the character.

After having established the basics needed for creating a character, the next section addresses the notion of ambiguous characters.

4.3. Ambiguous characters

Characters are interesting and complex entities. The accepted discourse concerning this is the affective disposition theory (ADT) proposed by Zilmann and Cantor (1977), which argues that our view of characters in stories, whether good or bad, is framed through our judgement of their

morality. The viewer rejoices when the character they deem to be good acts in accordance with their view of morally acceptable behaviour; and likewise when the villain who acts maliciously, gets punished for the moral wrongdoings that stand in opposition to the ethical standpoint of the viewer (Zillmann, 2000; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977). This theory effectively explains why certain characters are as celebrated as they are (characters such as the superheroes Superman and Spiderman) because of their alignment to be good. However, this theory does not accommodate the emergence and celebration of ambiguous characters.

Raney (2004) argues that morality's role in character perception must be linked to affective disposition theory to understand and enjoy narrative. However, it does not account for the popularity of characters such as Gregory House (from the television series *House*), Batman, Captain Price (from the video game series *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*) and Joel Miller (from the video game and series *The Last of Us*). Gregory House, for instance, can be perceived as a character who is undoubtedly flawed and morally ambiguous. House's unconventional methods and abrasive personality push ethical and moral boundaries while he is still being deeply valued for his dedication to his practice of saving lives and solving medical mysteries. On the other hand, Batman is the manifestation of a vigilante who operates with a rigorous personal code while functioning within a moral grey zone to protect his city, even when it costs him personally. Then there is Captain Price, a seasoned soldier hardened by years of war and a man willing to make ruthless decisions to capture the darker side of patriotism. Lastly, Joel Miller, a father haunted by his past and driven by his fierce love, makes a morally complex character that blurs the line between heroism and selfishness. Yet, viewers find these characters compelling because of their authentic and multifaceted nature.

Consequently, characters are far more complex than mental constructions constituting only binary behaviours such as right and wrong. As illustrated through the project's case studies in Chapter 3, the characters generally exhibit both good and bad behaviour, which motivates how morality functions as a spectrum. Thus, there is a need to define the attributes of ambiguous characters. Ambiguous characters, like other characters, are entities that appear in media such as film, television, video games and literature. However, unlike characters who are called *heroes* (who exhibit only virtuous qualities, such as helping others through performing good deeds and self-sacrifice) and *villains* (who exclusively exhibit reprehensible traits and commit acts considered heinous), the ambiguous character wholly commits to neither acts of good nor evil. A key patent in their behaviour is that they only sometimes act good or bad (Kleemans *et al.*, 2016). Ambiguous characters are recognised by their moral ambiguity. Characters such as Gregory House, Walter White and Tony Soprano from *The Sopranos* are widely considered ambiguous characters. They are morally ambiguous because they behave and commit heinous or destructive acts. Still, the intentions behind those actions may be recognised as virtuous, sound or even ethically commendable. Gregory House, for instance, will break medical protocol

to ensure a patient's survival; and Walter White engages in drug dealing to provide for his family while dealing with his terminal illness because he wants his family to be taken care of after his death.

Duality is an appropriate way to describe the nature and behaviour of ambiguous characters. Ambiguous characters are perceived as fascinating because, as Raney and Janicke (2013: 160) argue, the viewer constantly reevaluates the character's motives. The viewer does this to maintain interest and continue enjoying the narrative. Ambiguous characters are complex and do not follow set patterns of behaviour. Tamborini *et al.* (2010) and Eden *et al.* (2011) determine that the morality of an ambiguous character shifts over time. This shift is particularly notable since the character's motives may change and develop as the story progresses.

However, essential discrepancies need to be acknowledged, such as the overlap in terminology pointed out by Kleemans (2016) as they cite Eden (2011 *et al.*). Ambiguous character and anti-heroes are terms often used interchangeably. Other terms, such as *neutral* (see Krakowiak, 2016), *ambiguous* or *interesting* (see Eden *et al.*, 2011), can give rise to further confusion when referring to characters who are morally ambiguous. Thus, there exists a need to clarify and establish consistent terminology. Shafer and Raney (2012) attempt to address this inconsistency of anti-heroes in a narrative by highlighting them as character types and argue the importance of the anti-hero's function. However, this interchangeable application of the terminology remains confusing and redundant at best. An antihero is commonly defined as a protagonist who lacks traditional heroic qualities, such as serving the greater good. The term antihero is suited to describe characters in animated narratives that are fantastical in nature and exist within specific genres like the superhero genre, and they offer an antithesis to the hero archetype. While characters in the animated film created for this study are not imbued with super powers, the protagonist is morally grey or ambiguous because he is neither hero, nor anti-hero. The persistence of interchangeable terminology is likely rooted in the inconsistencies and similarities in questionable behaviour and actions made by different characters like Dr. House and Deadpool. The need to specify whether the character is an anti-hero or a morally ambiguous character, likely stems from the context in which the story is grounded. This context refers to the notion of genre. The genre in which the story and character appear, such as a drama or superhero movie, can suggest certain conventions. Referring to a character such as Gregory House as an anti-hero is questionable. House is a disabled doctor with a cynical and manipulative personality who is highly intelligent, problem-solving oriented and gifted with deductive reasoning. While being an exceptional doctor, he is not perfect, nor does he have superpowers, but he ultimately performs deeds that serve others. However, referring to a character such as Deadpool¹⁴ as an anti-hero – in many ways the opposite of a traditional hero - who can regenerate and use superpowers, is appropriate.

¹⁴ Deadpool is a Marvel comics anti-hero who has superpowers and regenerative abilities which make him immortal. This character is known for his crude humour and tendency to break the fourth wall.

According to comic book conventions, superheroes are associated with superpowers, and extraordinary events, circumstances and abilities shape their actions and behaviours. This allows them not only to break traditional moral boundaries but also to exist outside of usual constraints and to engage in fantastical and excessive violence and chaos, without facing real-world consequences in this sense. This comic book convention creates a space where the answer is to rebel against foreign forces without regard for traditional moral codes, while achieving heroic outcomes without real consequences. In contrast, Dr House is grounded in a realistic medical setting and does not have superpowers. While he is skilful as a doctor and his manners can be considered inappropriate, his complexity resides in internal conflict. He is characterised by moral ambiguity, rather than exaggerated physical abilities, and House's actions are also limited to his human condition, which makes him a great character subject to the consequences of his actions in the real world. He cannot bend or ignore the rules of reality; if he makes a reckless mistake, a patient will die. Though the actions and behaviour exhibited by both House and Deadpool are objectively questionable, their intentions to save others are indeed noble and heroic.

Consequently, I argue that terms such as *antihero*, *neutral*, *fascinating* and *grey* are not interchangeable terminology. They characters that the terms describe have similarities, however, they are used to describe and contextually differentiate the flawed but well-meaning ambiguous character. Having established limitations with existing terminology concerning ambiguous characters, concrete terminology that accommodates them needs to be developed through character classification.

The following section elaborates on character classification, including how these theoretical insights are applied to Captain James Miller (the protagonist of this study's narrative).

4.4. Character classification

Character classification becomes a means of discerning the significance of a character in a story (Human, 1988: 55). Character classification involves categorising and organising characters based on their roles, traits and functions in the story into character types. Various character types may have similar roles, goals or situations across different narratives. Jannidis (2012) further explains that characters can be flat, static, dynamic or round. For example, a static character has more than one trait, which can be complex and compelling. Their personality and motivations, however, do not change throughout the narrative (Fishelov, 1990: 47). Conversely, a dynamic character changes throughout the narrative.

A character's classification depends on the number of traits attributed to them and their development during a narrative (Augstyn, 2018). A flat character has a single characteristic¹⁵ and can be summarised as embodying a single idea that represents the character, such as the waitress, the chef or the doctor. Such a character undergoes little development throughout the narrative. On the other hand, a round character is ascribed numerous traits and will undergo narrative development across the story in the form of a character arc. In this character arc, for example, Batman develops from a vengeful and isolated vigilante to a hopeful protector and guardian of Gotham City. A round character cannot be defined, explained or understood by a single idea or trait but needs to comprise several ideas and must evolve from one idea to the next.

According to Forster (1927), the round character is the most developed type of character that can be created. The goal is to develop Captain Miller into a round character because such characters have depth, are more life-like, and exhibit intricate attributes such as moral ambiguity, conflicting motivations, flaws, questionable actions and a tragic backstory, which are attributes that are derived from the case studies of an exemplary grey character. H.J. Human (1988: 56) notes that no clear guideline exists for developing a round character. Generally, a round character encounters internal or external challenges and changes for better or worse (Fishelov: 1990). Human (1988) concludes that the significance of the character in the story should determine how round the character ought to be. From this, we can infer that the round character is a fully-fledged entity perceived as multi-dimensional and occupies a significant role in the narrative. Therefore, Captain Miller must be portrayed as a character with complexity and depth that manifest through his inner life and struggles. As a round character, Captain Miller should exhibit several personality traits and motivations. The motivations can be either internal or external. As a round character, Captain Miller should also inform critical moments in the story that result from his actions and decisions. His identification as a soldier and his values directly oppose his military mandate, which tells the story in which he functions as the main protagonist. As revealed through his actions and decisions, Miller's identity is unstable and is expressed in contradictory ways, which speaks to the current understanding of postclassical character theory.

The development of Captain Miller as the protagonist and the role of the protagonist in the story is pivotal. A clear definition of a protagonist the differentiation of Captain Miller as the protagonist are critical in portraying him as a grey character in the animated short film. Since Miller's actions shape the story, he is the reason why the narrative exists and unfolds as it does. In this regard, Human (1988: 74) and Heckmann (2023) infer that the protagonist must be the character who drives the story forward. Consequently, the protagonist is responsible for making decisions and taking actions that affect the narrative world. In other words, Captain Miller's

¹⁵ Flat and static characters are different: *flat* refers to a character that is one-dimensional, whereas a *static* character can be multidimensional. Both flat and static characters do not change as the narrative progresses. However, the static characters can be compelling, whereas flat characters are not.

actions need to impact the story and result in a sequence of events that led him to be court-martialed and to end up in the courtroom. Jane Friedman (2009) emphasises the role of the protagonist in driving the narrative forward, and the importance of the protagonist having a goal, which is essential when character is designed. In terms of the protagonist of this study, Captain Miller, the goal relates to protecting his men, friends and brother, which creates conflict with his objectives and mission as a soldier.

Heckmann (2023) and Delf and Williams (2004) argue that protagonists should always be central to the story's conflict; otherwise, the story risks losing focus and questions whether the lead character should be the protagonist. As the protagonist is central to the narrative, they carry the story's themes (Human, 1989), whether it be moral ambiguity, loyalty and honour, or strength and resilience. As the protagonist, Captain Miller is morally ambiguous and must choose between his unit and his mission. The narrative challenges his values, testing him to see where his allegiances genuinely reside. Joseph Bates (2016) theorises that the protagonist has personal motivation, which Bates suggests is the best source for driving the protagonist to achieve their goal. This insight is helpful for this study since it informs the design of the grey character, Captain Miller. In the case of Miller, the goal is to redeem himself. Giving the protagonist a personal goal adds motivation for their actions and gives the viewer a clear understanding of what the character wants to achieve. A clear goal for the protagonist offers the viewer a foreseeable endpoint and makes the viewing of the story worthwhile, because the anticipation of possible resolves and the desire to know which one actualises, fosters viewer curiosity. A clear example of such a goal is found in the Japanese animated series *Attack on Titan* (2013-2023), where the lead character, Eren Yeager, vows to rid the world of the monstrous Titans and at the end of the series, completes his goal. Human (1988) describes the protagonist as the one true architect of the story. Therefore, the protagonist must be active in their story, be part of the action, and make decisions that drive the narrative forward.

4.5. Characterisation

Characterisation is the process of character creation, which involves assigning traits to the character. Fokkema (1991: 61) suggests that these traits are interpreted through markers and registers that convey these character traits, which the reader can decode. Human (1988: 02) proposes that characterisation involves the author getting to know and understand the character, their behaviours and actions. Traits allow for a better understanding and relatability of a character (Human, 1989). Therefore, it is important to familiarise oneself with the characters involved in the narrative, such as Captain Miller, and thoroughly explore the intricacies of the character to convey the character in the narrative. Thus, characterisation is portraying a fictitious person. This begins with the conceptualisation of the character, where the writer develops a fictitious personality and makes them faithful representations of people (Human, 1988: 16). The goal of characterisation is to create a believable character that bears

some emotional connection to the viewer while also manifesting in the text, and it can be subsequently explored through the text¹⁶, whether it is a film or book.

Characters may exhibit a dominant trait (Seider *et al.*, 2017), which is like the backbone of the character and should influence all subsequent characteristics. In the film *The Batman* (2022), for instance, Batman is obsessed with crime-fighting because of his past trauma concerning the violent death of his parents through a criminal act. This obsession, linked to past events, positions one of his most destructive traits: preparedness. Batman is always prepared for any situation because he wishes he could have stopped his parents' murder. He is plagued by this past trauma, which manifests as brooding, because he is constantly thinking back to the day he lost his parents and yearning to change the past and to save his parents. He is thus shaped by his trauma, which manifests in his brooding demeanour and obsession with stopping crime at any cost.

Human (1988: 47) suggests that a character's dominant trait can be a strength or a weakness. Furthermore, Human stresses the importance of identifying and focusing on the most meaningful characteristics of the character. These dominant traits are the ones that the viewer must perceive if they are to understand the character. Dominant traits are the most recognisable character characteristics that the viewer can identify. These dominant traits help in positioning the character in the viewer's mind and allow the character to remain recognisable to the viewer when other characters are introduced into the story. For example, Miller's dominant trait is his loyalty to his men, which is designed to be his undoing as it informs each of his actions in the narrative of the animated short film.

With the relevance of the dominant trait established, it is essential to recall that this study's artefact culminates in an animated short film produced by a single researcher with limited production resources. Therefore, aspects such as the genre, runtime and funding of an animated movie limit this study's interpretation of the character. The runtime of the short film and the genre related to the story must be tailored to demonstrate how to portray a grey character within the scope and resources available. Consequently, it is critical to reiterate the key aspects of a character that need to be developed.

Margolin (2006: 68) suggests that characters are complex descriptions resulting from characterisation. Thus, as established through a series of case studies in Chapter 3, a set of recurring conditions such as trauma, interpersonal relationships and bendable values are identified as parameters, along with other physiological and psychological characteristics, such as pragmatism, resilience, strength, stamina, endurance and agility. Through its investigation into grey characters, the study concludes that specific physiological and psychological traits can

¹⁶The text refers to and includes all media such as film, games, animations and all types of narratives.

be used as a baseline for the characterisation and development of grey characters. However, the need persists to focus on how characterisation can take place regardless of limitations.

Margolin (2006) elaborates on the paradox of being able to characterise a character endlessly but being limited by runtime, genre, funding and a finite text. In theory, a character can be endlessly developed, and layers of backstory can be introduced to further increase emotion and psychological depth, adding experiences until the character has become multi-faceted, which will lead to an infinite exploration of the character. However, practical constraints prevent this endless exploration, such as the length of the story. A film or television series has a limited amount of runtime available. A film, for instance, might be two hours long, and a television episode can be between half an hour and a full hour. This directly impacts how much screen time can be devoted to developing any character. Therefore, the storyteller must decide what aspects of the character are the most important to highlight and what aspects can be left out.

Furthermore, convention relates to different genres, fostering various expectations regarding characterisation. Action movies, for example, focus more on the plot and pacing than on a deeper exploration of character motives. Drama, on the other hand, may opt for a more in-depth look at and investigation of character development because dramas focus on emotional engagement, internal conflicts and the human condition, which gives a more nuanced exploration of people. The genre of a story influences and determines how much attention can be given to specific details concerning the character's development. Another limitation that influences characterisation and development, is the budget. Funding and scope must be considered, since smaller budgets restrict the number of scenes produced and affect the complexity of what can be told or done. Bigger budgets mean a more extensive scope and resources, which might result in more profound character development. The text itself can also be a limitation. The text is limited, which, by extension, limits the story. Whether it is a screenplay, a book, a television series or a feature film, the medium determines a fixed set of boundaries regarding the length and scope of the text. The text, being either a book, movie, television series, or animation, is the format in which the story is contained and presented. Though a character can be theoretically developed towards infinity, the text containing the character cannot be.

Subsequently, a character is constrained to a certain amount of viewable time. As a result, one must find the appropriate way to say what needs to be noted within the film's timeframe. For instance, if one were to watch a short film about a grey character like Captain Miller and a feature film about Captain Miller, the viewer's experience, exposure and interpretation of that character would be very different due to the amount of runtime and the scope of the respective film formats. Since the text is finite, it might result in what Margolin (2006) refers to as partially indeterminate (or incomplete) characters. Therefore, the author, writer or director must decide what is most significant to the story and ensure the limited details the viewer is privy to are of

the utmost importance to telling the story. This will be especially relevant in a shorter animation, which is the vehicle used to convey Captain Miller in this study. A significant constraint for this study hinges on the researcher serving as the sole producer of the animated production, which prompts creative challenges and solutions.

According to Fokkema (1991: 30), character traits were traditionally considered to relate to psychological aspects. Margolin (2007: 72) suggests that characters possess qualities that can be categorised into several dimensions, such as physical, behavioural and mental dimensions. This ties into Lajos Egri's approach to characterising characters by outlining their psychology and physiology. Firstly, the physical dimension refers to the character's appearance, body type, shape, size, height and build. It also concerns the face of the character, the colour of their eyes, the shape of their nose and jaw, and any unique and distinguishing qualities, such as scars and freckles.

The second dimension, behavioural, relates to all the characters' actions and reactions. This ties back to character classification. As argued earlier in the chapter, character actions and reactions are strongly tied to the character's motivations. It considers how the characters respond to events, circumstances and situations. The behavioural dimension is also interested in the characters' mannerisms, from minor quirks and habits to gestures and speech, ranging from tone to formality to cadence to facial and postural expressions.

Lastly, the mental dimension focuses on all the internal aspects of a character, such as their thoughts, emotions, motivations, and even psychological traits (Margolin, 2006). This dimension contributes to their overall depth and complexity. The mental dimension concerns the thoughts and beliefs of the character, and it also includes their opinions. The characters' thoughts and opinions guide decision-making and allow them to interpret events. This also factors into their emotional state. The mental dimension can be divided into perception, emotion, volition and cognition. The first of these concepts, perception, refers to the character's ability to make sense of their surroundings and the world around them through their sense and subjective experiences within that storyworld. Their perception shapes their reality.

For instance, a character who is cynical might perceive events or situations as threatening, in the way that Joel Miller might encounter strangers as possible threats. Joel would distrust strangers and distance himself early to protect himself. In a similar sense, Batman would also be distrusting and sceptical of the motivations of other individuals whom he encounters and whom he believes to be corrupt, whereas a more optimistic character could see such encounters as opportunities.

The emotions of the character concern the internal feelings and the emotional response that a character might have. Emotions play a significant role in shaping character's reactions and they

influence their decision-making, which affects their relationship with other characters. Emotions also contribute to internal conflict and alter the character's development and growth throughout the narrative. A character's emotional state informs us about their mental health, adding psychological depth to that character and making them more relatable or sympathetic.

Volition refers to the character's ability to make conscious choices and decisions. It also concerns their sense of self-agency and control over their actions, reflecting the character's ability to pursue or motivate themselves towards specific actions or certain goals. In terms of the main protagonist, Captain Miller, volition involves that he wants to redeem himself and complete his mission.

4.6. Conclusion

In summary, this chapter starts off with an investigation into and the establishment of the theoretical framework for the study, which aims to create and demonstrate the application of the grey character in a 3D animated short film. The chapter introduces postclassical theory and its relevance in designing and developing characters. It further investigates the relevance of narrative elements, especially regarding the relationship between space, events and characters in creating narratives.

It became clear that a deeper understanding of narrative elements and their functions resulted in more compelling character development and related artefacts. It was demonstrated how space is used to help drive the plot by enabling character interaction and movements with specific locations, like a courtroom or battlefield, thus influencing the actions and events. In the investigation of the element of time, the manipulation of narrative time through devices such as flashbacks, which explore past actions and decisions made by characters, was highlighted. The section on the element of events emphasised how events are intertwined with space and time to represent the progression of the narrative.

The chapter concluded with character as a narrative element by exploring relevant narrative theory. Drawing on the theoretical work of Bal, Fokkema and Bordwell, the narrative elements were shown to shape how the story unfolds and how characters, particularly morally grey characters, are understood within the narrative world. This chapter also considered character in theory as its primary interest in designing and developing a grey character, and it was argued that characters are abstract constructs shaped by their psychological traits, actions and decisions. This was found to make them relatable and believable. This study adopts the approach of treating characters as non-actual specified individuals, which allows for the in-depth exploration of grey characters, such as Captain Miller, the artefact of the study.

The chapter concludes with a focus on character classification, and determines that dynamic characters are more complex and life-like. Therefore, character classification is essential for Captain Miller, who must be morally ambiguous and exhibit multiple motivations and a personal struggle that drives the story forward. This chapter also emphasised the protagonist's role in the narrative and highlights the limited required selection of character traits to be portrayed within the film's constraints. Consequently, this chapter concludes that to theoretically design and develop a grey character, a series of traits must be ascribed to that character. This includes physiological and psychological traits, visual traits such as facial and bodily features, and clothing, which result in a more nuanced and complex character.

This chapter also determined that to successfully portray a character, the other narrative elements must be considered and integrated in a meaningful way that contributes to portraying

the grey character in the animated short film. The following chapter addresses the practical application of the relevant theories and investigations conducted in chapters 3 and 4 to develop the artefact (the grey character) and produce the animated short film.

5.1. Conceptualising the grey character

This chapter discusses the development and application of the morally grey character, Captain James T. Miller, in an animated short film by implementing theories such as narrative theory, specifically focusing on the narrative elements of character, time, space and events. Ambiguous characters, character classification and characterisation are investigated in the previous chapter, and the context of morally grey characters in narratives is analysed. The case studies reveal three essential conditions that define morally grey characters, namely traumatic events, interpersonal relationships and bendable values, which refer to values such as loyalty, trust and honour, which can change as the character faces pressure. It is notable that not all grey characters experience the same kinds of trauma; nor are the strong interpersonal relationships identical between grey characters. This section of the study thus predominantly deals with the practicalities of this project, such as how the character, Captain Miller, and the story are designed, developed and executed. However, to apply these conditions meaningfully, Captain Miller must be positioned in a story that can highlight these conditions to demonstrate Miller as a grey character.

Therefore, postclassical narrative theory, and specifically theoretical character exploration, highlight the intricate interplay between narrative and character development in a postclassical context. Postclassical narrative theory addresses how narratives shift away from predictable storytelling, paving the way for a non-linear approach, where the characters are more psychologically intricate and ambiguous. It reveals that characters are no longer bound to conventional and clear-cut archetypes such as heroes and villains, but rather that characters may be subject to a spectrum of morality and that the character's morality may move towards more or less heroic or villainous behaviour as they develop. The growth and development of the character are intertwined with the unpredictable nature of events, which reflect the complexity of human nature and relationships between characters and narrative events, emphasising the dynamic nature of narrative in postclassical theory and challenging the viewer to engage with the story and character on a cognitive level. As a result, the design and development of Captain Miller, the grey character and primary focus of this study, are fundamentally unique and novel. While the design of Captain Miller may harbour traits resembling those found in the hero, warrior and anti-hero, Captain Miller as a grey character is fundamentally different and not merely a composite of these archetypes. The grey characters are predominantly identifiable by their psychological makeup and physical appearance, similar to the psychological makeup. This refers to the dimension of physicality described by Margolin (2006). The appearance of the morally grey character will resemble that of a soldier as it is contextualised in the story. The grey character of this study will have heroic characteristics such as loyalty, courage and honour that other characters will admire and respect, as some of his fellow-soldiers testify.

However, the grey character, Captain Miller, develops selfish needs that are driven by traumatic events Miller experiences. These needs influence decision-making and actions that correlate with the bendable values associated with an anti-hero, and he shifts his behaviour from heroic to selfish when he must choose between continuing his mission and prioritising his values. The grey character will manifest through the narrative to reveal Miller's inner life. His thoughts, feelings and motivations, as demonstrated in the story, will provide a richer understanding of his character to reveal the backstory and illustrate Miller's grey characteristics. This notion of the inner life, as described by Fokkema (1991), highlights the importance of developing the character's backstory: Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2 show the conceptualisation process of developing Miller as reflected in Book two of the process documentation. The grey character's story starts with a series of events that challenge the lead character and arrive at a morally ambiguous ending. The development of the grey character integrates the theoretical underpinnings of postclassical narrative studies regarding character through the study of characterisation to create the grey character. This chapter is concerned with portraying characters in narratives and ensuring that a character arc is present that will illustrate how a character progresses from one state to the next. The final output of this study is the narrative, which is the short animated film in which this grey character will be presented and show integration with the research conducted in this study.

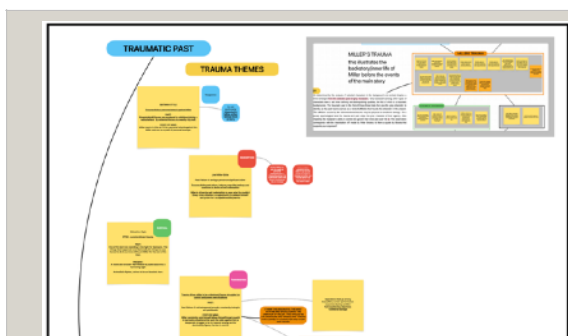


Figure 5.1: Creating Miller's background

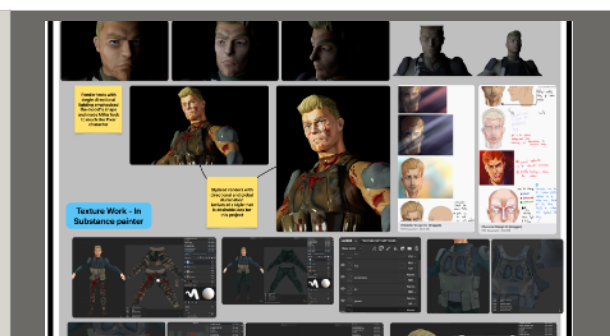


Figure 5.2: Designing the character, Miller

5.2. Developing Captain Miller: the grey character

This section concerns the development of Captain Miller as a morally grey character through the application of character theory (researched in Chapter 4) and the relative insights gained during the investigation of the grey characters in the case studies (Chapter 3). This section elaborates on how character theory is implemented to develop Captain Miller through the adoption of postclassical views concerning the design and development of characters through real-world knowledge and as non-actual but specified individuals.

5.2.1. Character theory applied

In this section, I discuss how character theory is applied to develop Captain Miller and I create the animated short film featuring the above-mentioned character. This section also discusses the character's development and classification, as contextualised in the animated short film. As established in Chapter 4, the theoretical framework for character construction is foundational to understanding characters and their role in a narrative. According to Jannidis (2012), characters are inherently tied to narrative structures, as they must exist within a narrative where events transpire over time and space. This idea is pivotal for analysing Captain Miller's character in this study. However, while Jannidis (2012) highlights the necessity of situating characters within narratives, this view risks reducing characters to mere reflections of narrative functions, which could neglect their depth and psychological complexity. For instance, Ryan (2012) explains that characters are influenced by the elements of space, time and events. This view aligns with the notion that Captain Miller, as a character, is shaped not only by his internal traits but also by his external circumstances. Critical perspectives from theorists such as Margolin (2006) and Fokkema (1991) introduce a more nuanced understanding. Margolin challenges the reductionist view by arguing that characters are amalgamations of psychological traits, which allows for a more prosperous, multifaceted construction of the individual, such as Captain Miller. Nevertheless, such a focus on psychological traits could overlook the specific function that the character needs to fulfil, particularly in genre-specific contexts like war dramas.

Fokkema (1991) emphasises how the inclusion of the character's inner life can contribute to constructing their psychological profile. This insight is fundamental and crucial for understanding how Captain Miller's backstory and experiences informed his character development. However, a critical examination of this theory raises some questions: for instance, how does focusing on the character's inner life detract from (or contribute towards) the broader narrative functions that they serve, particularly in action-oriented genres which do not concern the narrative depth of the character as much as dramas do? While Captain Miller's inner life does enrich his character by showing what the character endures and experiences before the court-martial, he must also balance the demands of the war genre and prioritise external conflicts and action-driven narrative arcs. Considering Captain Miller's characterisation in relation to other characters like Captain Price and Joel Miller, as discussed in Chapter 3, there is a recurring tension between real-world knowledge and fictional depictions. In Captain Price's instance, the tension is seen through his actions, which are rationalised through decision-making. Similarly, Captain Miller's actions are also determined by his decision-making process.

Jannidis (2012) suggests that the traits ascribed to a character must be convincing. The character must align with real-world expectations, especially in genres like war, where authenticity is critical. This argument supports the decision that the character Captain Miller's appearance, demeanour and personality must reflect that of a soldier. Yet, the reliance on real-

world knowledge could limit the creative potential of fictional characters, ultimately boxing them into familiar yet predictable tropes rather than allowing for subversion and innovation.

Captain Miller's psychological traits, physiology and appearance are carefully designed to embody the qualities of a soldier, which include loyalty, resilience and courage; drawing from qualities expected from real-world soldiers and established character templates observed from characters like Captain Price. The character needs to be recognisable as a soldier; however, through a critical engagement with character theory, one could argue that this adherence to convention may inhibit more dynamic or unorthodox character portrayals. A rigid construction could undermine his individuality or reduce his character to a stereotype. Figure 5.3 shows the conceptualisation process of developing Miller's inner life as reflected in Book two of the process documentation.

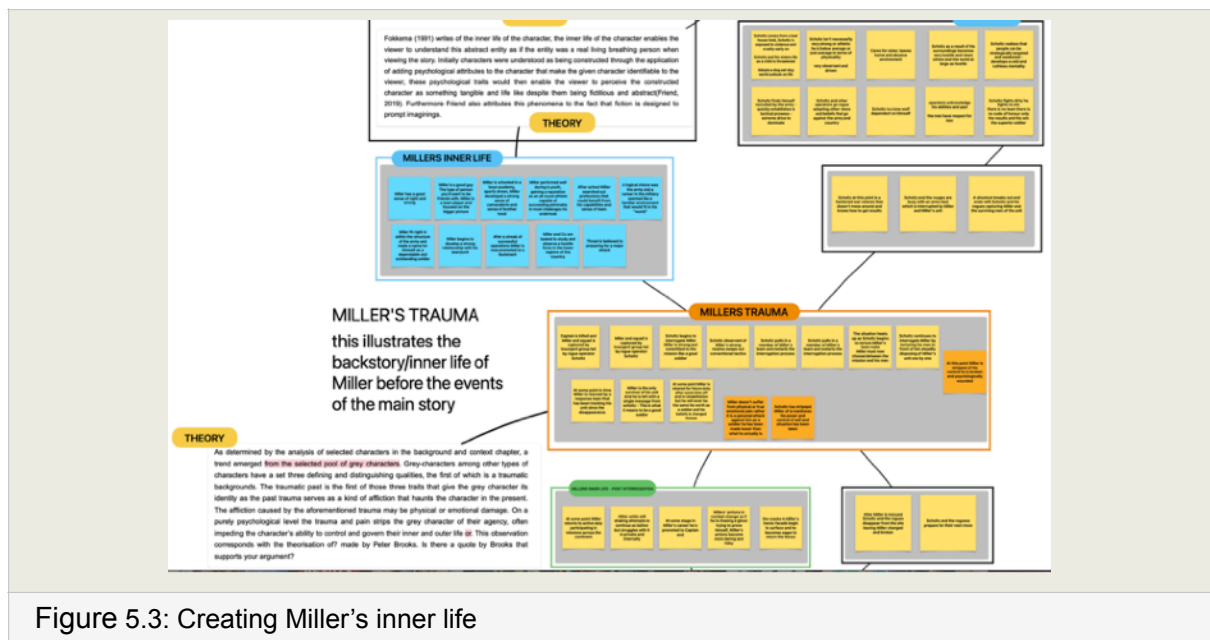


Figure 5.3: Creating Miller's inner life

5.3. Developing the narrative to convey Captain Miller

This section investigates how the narrative should be developed to convey Captain Miller as a morally ambiguous character successfully. The section investigates how narrative theory can be employed in the context of an animated short film.

5.3.1. How does narrative theory help convey a character?

Characterisation, as discussed in Chapter 4, is the process of ascribing traits to a character. It was also established that character development is the process of change that a character undergoes during the narrative. To become a fully rounded character, the character must endure hardships and trials and, as a result, change; particularly psychologically and physiologically (Human, 1988: 16-17). Margolin (2006: 68-69) argues that a character's traits ought to be sequentially revealed as the story develops. These traits emerge from what is stated, shown and inferred, telling the viewer who the character is and ultimately making them more believable and relatable (Jannids, 2012). Thus, two concepts are critical in character development: sequentially revealed traits and traits that emerge from what is shown, stated or inferred (Margolin, 2006).

The audience pieces together different elements as stated, shown or inferred by the narrative, to create a formal, cohesive image of who the character is, making the character seem more realistic and complex. These two concepts work together to show how traits are revealed and facilitated when revealed, resulting in a character experienced as authentic and progressively more relatable. Character theory guides the narrative development through an in-depth investigation of Captain Miller's characterisation. Human (1988: 02-03) argues that each appearance created by the character must contribute to revealing the character's true nature. To authentically convey Captain Miller, the narrative must faithfully and incrementally present him as a morally ambiguous soldier by portraying events that cultivate morally ambiguous actions, such as Miller's values clashing with mission objectives. Human (1988: 03) asserts that the development of the character should integrate with the plot, thereby confirming the need for a story. Characters form an integral part of the narrative, and as a narrative progresses, aspects of the narrative, such as the locations, the time, and the character, also change (Bal, 1990: 76-79). This involves crafting a story that complements and challenges his characterisation, treating him as a non-actual but well-specified individual informed by real-world knowledge.

Given Miller's role as a soldier, the narrative must orient elements of space, time and events to align with his function in the story. Space is employed to orient and position Miller in various situations that lead to events that encourage morally ambiguous behaviour, such as the chaotic battlefield where the situation at hand forces Miller to choose between his values and his mission. Captain Miller's story does not occur over a single day: it spans years, and the element of time is used to present the viewer with glimpses into different parts of Miller's life to

demonstrate how his behaviour and actions changed over time, most notably his beliefs before and after the betrayal of his brother and how this informs his actions. Events create situations that call upon Miller to act as a soldier, to protect his men and defeat the enemy while enduring the consequences of those actions, which drive the story forward. The narrative, therefore, had to include instances of combat, action and decision-making, in order to place Miller in situations that highlight his moral ambiguity.

Human (1989) argues that the main character ought to be positioned in relation to every significant event that is crucial to unfolding the narrative, which suggests that Miller makes pivotal decisions that drive the story forward. The narrative employs critical findings from the case studies concerning other grey characters. Therefore, this study intends to develop a narrative that introduces the protagonist, Captain Miller, to conditions such as trauma and other characters with whom Captain Miller will have complex and tense interpersonal relationships, facilitating his willingness to bend his values. This approach emphasises his significance as the protagonist and reveals the depth of his character. To achieve this, the narrative utilises space, time and events to construct sequences that challenge Miller's characterisation. His strength, endurance, resilience and awareness are challenged, and through this his flawed decision-making process is demonstrated. This allows for a more nuanced and critical examination of Captain Miller, and effectively portrays him as a grey character whose behaviour and actions invite questioning and consideration.

By controlling the amount of information the viewer can access, Miller's character remains intentionally partially indeterminate, which creates more significant curiosity, surprise and intrigue for the viewer (Bordwell, 2004: 89). This allows for narrative tension, which makes Captain Miller ambiguous. Bordwell (2004: 91) argues that the knowledge available to the viewer and the depth of the knowledge are limited, as the narrative switches between subjective and objective viewing. Thus, to have the narrative unfold in a courtroom with different characters offering different views and counterpoints about Miller and his actions, the narrative establishes contradictions and uncertainty regarding the protagonist, Captain Miller, and questions the objectivity and subjectivity of the content shown in the film. This means that when the grey character and other participants in the animated story are demonstrated, the framing and telling of events will be subjective and multiple, and the knowledge gained from the subjective points of view will be limited. This approach of determining what is accessible to viewers informs the approach that should be taken during the production of the animated short film, with specific reference to what is shown in the frame.

Having established the role of characterisation in narrative theory, the need exists to clarify what role the narrative elements of space, time and event play in establishing a grey character.

5.3.2. Application of postclassical narrative theory: space, time and event

In Chapter 4, which concerns theory, this study discusses narrative elements and elaborates on the theoretical underpinnings of these elements' construction. The study determined that to demonstrate a narrative that depicts a grey character, the study must also utilise the narrative aspects of space, time and event to communicate the grey character effectively. It is essential to elaborate on how these elements will be applied to achieve this study's goals. For example, this study uses space to house and contextualise events, much like how Gotham and Auburn, Texas, contextualise, position and set Batman and Joel Miller up in their respective stories and the events which are to follow, such as the war on crime and a virus outbreak. The particular spaces – a city with vicious criminals and a small town verging on apocalyptic collapse – present the stage for events to unfold and progress. In *Fog of war*, this study's film, the narrative element of space is applied differently and varies between the battlefield, prison camp and courtroom to contextualise and enable the progression of various events needed for the development of Captain Miller.

In this study's narrative, the element of time is applied differently than in most of the case studies. In the narratives of *The Batman* and *The Last of Us*, where the bulk of the narrative occurs in the present, time progresses linearly. Flashbacks are not implemented to address past events (like the death of Joel's daughter or Bruce Wayne's parents); the traumatic events occur, and then the story moves towards more pressing events in their respective narratives. While *Fog of war* is also a linear narrative, it relies on flashbacks to address past events that have transpired and it shows how Miller develops over several years. In contrast, Batman's story occurs during the course of a single night.

While *The Last of Us* takes place several years after the virus outbreak, the story is not concerned with past events but only the present situation and its circumstances. Conversely, this study's narrative jumps between past and present via flashbacks, as the events of Miller's inner life are paramount to understanding and developing his character and progressing this narrative. Similar to the case studies, events create circumstances that challenge the character and, as such, progress the narrative. Advancing the narrative unexpectedly allows critical engagement with the character's themes and actions. The events are linked to the use of time, as the narrative juxtaposes events that span an extended period, showing how the character has grown from past events and experiences. The elements are used to develop and push the character of Captain Miller in *Fog of war* in ways that reveal his moral ambiguity. In Chapter 4 of this study it was explained through postclassical narrative theory that the narrative elements of space, time and events are pivotal to developing and demonstrating a grey character. Space contextualises the narrative events. The space of the narrative serves as a vessel for recounting past and present events. The study uses the narrative aspect of time to reflect on past events and character actions in the context of the storyworld.

5.3.2.1. Space in *Fog of war*

In the same manner that the element of time is an all-present factor in the telling of a story, the element of space is also necessary to set the stage for events to unfold. Four distinct spaces in the narrative are of interest in the story in this study: the courtroom, Colonel Shepherd's interrogation room, the battlefield and the military base. Each space is designed and presented differently to allow for the communication of critical thematic and narrative points, such as moral ambiguity and loyalty, that inform the development of Captain Miller. These spaces also inform and complement the type of events that transpire there. The narrative is primarily set in a courtroom where the protagonist, Captain Miller, is interrogated. The courtroom, usually a formal, solemn environment, acts as the space for these investigative events, allowing the viewer to move from the present events that transpire in the courtroom to revisit events that had occurred in the past and other spaces. One example is the battlefield where Captain Miller and his unit are ambushed and where he decides to save a fellow-soldier instead of completing his mission. This results in his subsequent capture, along with other survivors. Colonel Shepherd, a state enemy and former army commander who defected, interrogates Captain Miller and the survivors for critical information at an unknown location. Shepherd tortures and kills Captain Miller's men, who are also his friends, to undermine and intimidate him. The spaces where this and other events occur are art-directed to serve the story. A bright and expansive courtroom, a chaotic combat zone and an isolated dark prison camp inform the viewer of various events occurring at other times that critically impact Miller, which further informs his development into a grey character.

5.3.2.2. Events in *Fog of war*

For narrative progression to occur, it was highlighted in previous sections that space and time need to be informed by different events. Four events in this story are of interest. The events set up situations and circumstances to challenge Captain Miller's character and drive him towards morally ambiguous actions. Of these events, three are set in the past: the failed mission, Miller's interrogation and torture at the hands of Shepherd, and Miller's interrogation, torture and murder of his brother, Liam Miller. These past events are set in different spaces to indicate a sense of progression and causality, where one event directly leads to the next event.

The courtroom space offers a strong motivation for the narrative to use the element of time to transition between past and present events. Motivation for the content is critical; there needs to be a convincing reason to have the narrative take place in a courtroom, and there needs to be a reason to have flashbacks. The flashbacks are not only a convenient narrative device that allows the story to show the viewer the relevant context to make its case for Miller being a grey character; the flashbacks are the recollections of other characters in the courtroom, such as Gordon and Miller, as they provide their testimony. There further needs to be a reason for the

viewer to see the past events, and the flashbacks make it possible to peer into Captain Miller's inner life immediately. This allows the viewer to experience the series of events, decisions and actions that caused Captain Miller to end up in the courtroom for questionable actions.

5.3.2.3. Time in *Fog of war*

The initial narrative first written for this study focused on Captain Miller's actions during a single event, a missile crisis. The problem with this initial narrative was that the event transpires over time. Because the final narrative sketches the context before and after the event, it is easier to discern whether Miller's actions were morally ambiguous and whether the ends justified the means. What became apparent was that the story's overall structure would need to address this problem. Therefore, by framing the story in the context of a courtroom drama, the narrative can introduce current and past events with the benefit of additional context that informs what happened before and after the events, allowing for more context. This depiction of past and present events enables the narrative to manipulate the element of time to convey contextual information vital to the story. Time is used (in a narrative sense and through editing) to depict ellipses and omissions to indicate and suggest that a significant amount of time has passed. This also allows the viewer to see the outcome of certain events, actions, and decisions, as well as during and between events, most notably since the film occurs over a long period of time. Time is further manipulated to create suspense and tension by omitting certain narrative parts, and thus works in practical confines. The story leaves the viewer to wonder about an event that transpired but is only hinted at, which creates suspense.

Further tension is also created by lingering on specific moments in the narrative, such as the torture sequence in the prison camp. The use of text cards in the film indicates at various points when and where the narrative takes place. Captain Miller's trial occurs over several days, implying that there is more to this lengthy trial procedure, of which the viewer only sees snippets. This is also true of the events that transpired in the past. There is a significant amount of time between the various flashbacks, which suggests how much time passes for Miller to change between these life-altering events, ultimately resulting in him being perceived as a grey character. The jump between events also juxtaposes and consequently allows for review, questioning and reflection on the consequences of Captain Miller's actions and how he developed into a grey character over time.

5.4. Production of the animated film: *Fog of war*

The following section details the process of producing the animated short film, *Fog of war*. This section concerns the characters, their design, the wardrobe, the voice acting, the design of the set props, the selection of use, the choice of colour, and lighting. The process of developing 3D models, rigging those 3D models, animating the 3D models, and the process of rendering the animated stylised approach are discussed, and it is indicated and how it benefits the overall

production and completion of the study. Various cinematographic techniques are considered when an animation is directed and produced. Cinematography, a visual storytelling tool, concerns the camera's placement, the camera, the movement of the camera, what the camera is focusing on, and the use of light and composition (Dean, 2021). Straub (2023) argues that it is about bringing the story to life through cameras, light and lenses – the knowledge and work of the director and cinematographer overlap, requiring them to work symbiotically. The cinematographer is responsible for creating the look of the image, while the director's work usually entails the entirety of the project and uniting the different creative work involved into a single vision. While these disciplines have differences, both are concerned with telling the story (Brown, 2002: 1). In the creation of *Fog of war*, the animated movie for this study, the researcher fulfils the roles of both the director and cinematographer. Furthermore, the researcher is also responsible for writing the story and for designing and developing the character, as well as primary animation and the creation of 3D assets in the movie.

5.4.1. Creating the character

The artefact of this study is a grey character called Captain Miller, whose story is revealed through an animated short film, *Fog of war*. The animated short film will have a distinct, stylised look. The animated film's characters are computer-modelled, digitally rendered and designed to accommodate a 3D animated short film. The characters wear military uniforms to show their past and present affiliation. The overall design of these characters is stylised. They are marked by a semi-realistic look, highlighting that they are fictional, while maintaining and suggesting the story's more serious tone and theme. The characters' designs rely on real-world knowledge concerning the subject matter of soldiers attending a court-martial. This story's characters are designed and stylised to look like well-groomed, well-disciplined soldiers. Contemporary Western military attire and practices (military regulation and conduct) inspire their appearances, speech and body language. The characters' serious and stoic qualities are furthermore borrowed from the case studies to adhere to the expectations of the genre and maintain a visual and tonal consistency. Digital animation allows for precise manipulation of facial expressions and bodily movements. In the production of this short film, the animation expresses the actions, decisions and emotions of these characters and conveys and enhances the performance of the voice actors. The voice actors' performances are directed inside a recording studio to capture the correct performance.

A stylised approach offers the project a unique visual look and identity. Practical considerations also motivated the decision to use a stylised approach, as it requires fewer resources, such as processing power and memory, and intense graphic processing tasks, such as rendering. 3D animation entails a particularly demanding workflow, which requires significant computational power regarding software and hardware. A stylised approach aids in cutting down on resources such as processing, memory, graphics and rendering.

Figures 5.4 and 5.5 show the stylised look of the film, depicting the prosecutor, Willard, and Captain Miller in the courtroom. The characters in the scene are lit by means of global illumination to illuminate the character model and background scene, and there are visible brush strokes on their 3D texture maps. Specific details – such as highlights, facial scars and shadows – are digitally painted onto the characters, working within the technical constraints of making animated films.



Figure 5.4: Willard in courtroom



Figure 5.5: Captain Miller in courtroom

5.4.2. Applying the element of space

This section concerns the practical use of space as a narrative element to aid in telling this study's story. The narrative aspect of space is implemented throughout the animated film. The animated movie uses several different spaces to house and contextualise the events unfolding within them.

Each space contains another event, which is to say that each space serves as a vehicle to include an event that is part of the critical chain that serves the story. Space informs the events and circumstances within those distinct settings while depicting the different settings at different times, for instance, the battlefield, the prison camp, a military base, an undisclosed room and the courtroom. The space in which the events of the story occur also informs the possible actions and decisions that the characters can make. For example, in the first space, the battlefield, the characters are ambushed and attacked by enemy forces who capture them. The battlefield is art-directed through the production design to communicate the events within the space. In the context of the ambush on the battlefield, Captain Miller decides to prioritise the lives of his men instead of the mission, which he subsequently fails at, and he and his surviving men are captured.

Secondly, there is the prison camp location where Captain Miller and his men are held prisoner. Miller and his surviving men are tortured for information, and most of his men are killed during

this interrogation process. The space is dark and nearly empty, suggesting isolation, and it is directly linked to the previous space, the battlefield. A rogue colonel, Colonel Shepherd, uses this desolate space to obtain sensitive information from Miller; because of the narrative context associated with the space, it becomes possible to infer what kind of actions occur within that given space. This nondescript space is contrasted to the particular context of the courtroom in which the characters recount and testify their experiences and views concerning Captain Miller and the actions throughout the story.

The third space, the interrogation room, serves a very similar purpose as the second but the roles are reversed in this space, with Captain Miller as interrogator and torturer. Captain Miller, in an undisclosed location, apprehends, interrogates and tortures the intelligence officers, among them his brother Liam, to learn who has leaked the information about their mission. The space, therefore, houses another torture and interrogation event that leads to Miller learning his brother is a traitor. The fourth space (the space the viewer will see first in the film) is the courtroom, which houses the court-martial, in which Miller and several other characters appear, to recount past events leading up to this military tribunal and to ultimately determine where Captain Miller's loyalties lie. The space brings the characters into question, allowing them to present their viewpoint on the matters at hand. The courtroom implies a certain formality and series of protocols. The space forms a counterpart to how the military characters look, dress, speak and act. The courtroom space sets the stage for the unfolding of the story and its events, and after flashbacks to past events, the narrative returns to this space, where events unfold in the present.

5.4.3. Applying the element of time

In Chapter 4, the relationship between space and time is established. Space houses events that occur over time, and time is also used to portray the narrative. This section demonstrates how time is applied in this study's narrative. While the narrative of this study seems linear, it depicts several events occurring at different times that contribute to the overarching plot. In the story, some events unfold over long periods. To convey this, the narrative employs a series of flashbacks to recall these past events. In this narrative, several events occur at different locations at various times. Time is predominantly used to show different periods within the story, such as the ambush on the battlefield, the prison camp, the army base and the courtroom. The narrative jumps between these various points in time to focus on specific characters at those particular events. Depicting different points in time allows for juxtaposing the character's past and present actions and for showing how the character has changed from one state to the next. It also allows the viewer to discern and reflect upon the choices, decisions and actions made by the character in past events, while also seeing the consequences of those events in the present. Time is manipulated to demonstrate various character interactions that suggest how the characters acted or reacted to various circumstances and events at different times.

5.4.4. Applying the element of events

In this section, the narrative element of the event is discussed in terms of how it is applied to the story of this study. Events in this story are pivotal to its narration, progression and the development of the protagonist, Captain Miller's backstory and character. Events in this story are regarded as a series of causally linked sequences that inform and determine the overall story. In this story, titled *Fog of war*, several events are intertwined with the decisions and actions of the characters, most notably Captain Miller and his brother Liam Miller. Each event that transpires in the story results from actions taken by characters that directly influence the next event in the story. For instance, the ambush event on the battlefield directly results from actions taken by secondary characters such as Liam Miller and Colonel Shepherd. These events allow for specific actions to occur, such as Miller deciding to prioritise his men over the mission, which influences the direction of the narrative. By doing so, a sense of causality is established across the story, in which four significant events occur that each has an effect on the other. The first event is the ambush during the battle, the torture and interrogation of Captain Miller, followed by the subsequent execution of Captain Miller's men. This is followed by Captain Miller's escape and his interrogation and torture of his brother after learning that his brother could be responsible for the attack. This event is then followed by Captain Miller's apprehension and court-martial, where several characters give their perspective on Miller's loyalties and actions, with some believing his actions are justifiable and others that they are not.

5.4.5. Post-production of the animated film *Fog of war*

This section discusses the post-production process during the final stages of creating the animated short film. The method includes refining the performance of the voice actors and characters, the use of editing, the manipulation of colour, the utilisation of audio and sound design, and the integration of sound design and music into the post-production cycle to finalise the film. The section further describes character, space, time and events post-production.

5.4.5.1. Refining character

The process of capturing voice-over relies on the six actors performing several takes and reads of the lines of their character; during the production and post-production, the best-read performances are used to create the animated performance. Dialogue is used to guide the animation, and during post-production editing, lines are then synced across the film's final edit to tighten the performances captured in the sequence. Through post-production, the performance can be fine-tuned to create the best possible portrayal of each character. To further enhance the narrative, additional shots that function as insert shots demonstrate that these

characters are alive and active in the scene, thinking and reacting to other characters' decisions, words and actions. The addition of alternative takes via multiple camera angles set up in the digital scene also offers some variability and options in approaching the final version of the edit. Different takes of these additional shots can impact and enhance the story in new ways as the finalising of the animated short continues. The objective is to refine and implement the performance using the best-suited voice performance with the most compatible animation sequence to create the most compelling shot for the animated movie, thus matching the best performances with the best animations.

5.4.5.2. Editing

In this study, editing creates tension and suspense while providing a degree of rhythm and momentum in telling the story, through editing techniques such as match cuts and cross-cutting. Information is presented to the viewer rapidly to create a sense of excitement and intrigue, which subsequently creates fragmentation and ambiguity, which in turn complements the protagonist's character. By carefully utilising rapid cuts and long takes to balance the narrative's pacing, a more compelling viewing experience is created. The editing enhances the story's narration by introducing audio cues and visual effects, such as recurring sound effects and the manipulation of visual elements that heighten the themes of ambiguity, loyalty and betrayal, which elevate the overall tone of the animated short film. Editing also enhances the production quality of the animated short film by utilising various animation cuts to improve a given scene (see scene one of the animated film, which is a montage), making the sequence more dramatic and engaging. By using both editing and sound design, tension is amplified with video editing software; and by enhancing the emotional stakes of the animated movie, a more immersive and engaging experience is created.

5.4.5.3. Refining colour

Colour in film is an aesthetic decision, and colour can contribute to how films are perceived (Sher, 2020). Colour is also a stylistic choice which affects technical decisions. Colour can enhance the mood and feel of the film and can provide the film with a signature style; and colour is associated with film genres and certain directors. Colour is also vital in the animated short film *Fog of war*. The film is separated into eight scenes, each styled with a different colour palette to help differentiate between the various spaces and time periods applied in the eight scenes. Each space in the animated short film, such as the battlefield, prison camp, military base and courtroom, has its distinct colour palette that helps orient the presented context. For example, the battlefield has a warm and saturated tone, whereas the prison camp is murky brown, muted and desaturated, to heighten its ominous tone. The flashbacks in the military base are a cold blue. Colour in the film is manipulated to enhance the scenery and establish a serious tone and mood to create a sense of ambiguity; during the film's final act, the colour is animated to fade

out as the scene progresses gradually, and the colour desaturates, becoming grey. This choice in manipulating colour makes the connection by thematically and symbolically acknowledging that Captain Miller has regressed from being morally sound to morally ambiguous, establishing Miller as a grey character.

5.4.5.4. Refining audio, music and sound design

The animated short film relies on creating a sense of ambiguity throughout its runtime. The scenes and narrative are structured and restructured to force this objective of expressing the ambiguity of the protagonist. This is most evident in how the film uses a sequence where only audio is played. The narrative introduces an audio log that serves as a historical recording of events during the battle at the story's start. The audio is the viewer's only source of information in this sequence, creating uncertainty. In sequence, the protagonist is not present in the courtroom at first. Instead, the narrative relies on other characters' testimony to introduce Captain Miller, with the secondary characters arguing and debating about Captain Miller and his past actions. Miller's values and loyalties come into question, making the viewer uncertain of Captain Miller's intentions right from the start. Powerful moments of storytelling can be achieved by limiting knowledge and controlling the amount of information the viewer can access; in this manner, the filmmaker creates more significant curiosity, surprise and intrigue for the viewer (Bordwell, 2004: 89). This allows for the creation of narrative tension, an element needed for this study to demonstrate a grey character effectively. Bordwell (2004: 91) argues that limiting the knowledge available to the viewer limits the information's depth, objectivity, and subjectivity. In practice, this means that scenes only offer partial information to the viewer. Each testimonial in the courtroom and flashback to past events, such as the ambush on the battlefield and the interrogations in the prison camp, is fragmented and only reveals a subjective view of the event, leaving the viewer with uncertainty and creating ambiguity.

Sound is also used to further the narrative and enhance the portrayal of the characters, and ambient sounds that the character is aware of are introduced to enrich and fill space. These sounds are critical, since there is no sound in a digital environment; sound needs to be artificially created and added to liven up the space in which the actions occur, to frame the scene's context. This involves sound such as explosions, gunfire and radio chatter used on the battlefield; and audio logs or ambient noise that fills the room, such as the hangar in the military base or the courtroom. Moreover, adding a score exclusively composed for the film by a composer sets the tone for what will transpire, introducing a thematic layer that enacts the general storytelling experience and completes the film as an overall package. The score creates mood, setting the emotional tone of the story, and it guides the viewer's emotional response to the film. The most significant contribution of the score for this project is in how the score heightens the character themes and motifs. The score's brooding and contemplative nature

reinforces the challenging and complex themes such as loyalty, betrayal, honour and contradictions.

5.4.5.5. Refining space

Compositing involves combining multiple elements to create a single image or video. This is essential in this study as the production uses 2D and 3D elements, which must be combined seamlessly. The backgrounds had to be added during compositing. While this eases the rendering phase of the project and eliminates the need to render large and complex scenes, this process, although longer, allows for more control over the final image at the cost of visual fidelity since the backgrounds can be altered and manipulated without affecting the animation. However, this mixed approach limits the creative output since the project relies on 2D and 3D elements. This means minimal action occurs between the environment and the 3D characters. While some interactions between the 3D characters, the environment and some 3D props exist, they are limited and occur only occasionally. This phase also provides the opportunity to conduct an initial pass of colour grading. As the shots were composited, the colour of the shots was also manipulated and adjusted to fit the mood the film desires. Figure 5.6 captures the compositing process in the Adobe After Effects software. The file contains a series of image layers stacked on each other and manipulated accordingly.

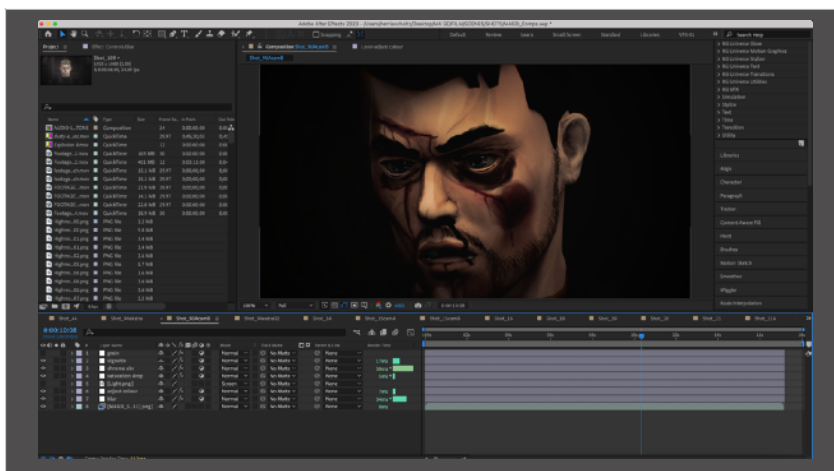


Figure 5.6: Layers composited into a single video

5.4.5.6. Refining time

The project's narrative depicts various events that occur in different spaces at different times. To produce an animated short that captures all of these moments, including the periods in-between, is unrealistic, as the theory suggests the narrative should focus on pivotal moments. These would include events such as the ambush and the betrayal that led to Miller taking

matters into his own hands. These episodes shape the character and, by extension, the story's plot. To do so, the narrative is written to feature events that transpired in the past and present, and the courtroom setting is applied as a means to reflect and dissect these events through the eyewitness testimony of secondary characters. To achieve this, the narrative element of time is intended to illustrate the relevant events needed to form the narrative and convey that the protagonist is morally questionable within a reasonable amount of time. This condensing of temporality also extends to the narrative element of the event; considering the scope of this project, its available workforce and time limitations, the narrative cannot depict each event in its entirety. The compelling nature of the narrative will subsequently get lost in all the minor details should the narrative depict the entirety of the events that transpired. Critical moments in the narrative must be illustrated and strung together to communicate the intended message.

The conflict regarding Miller's failures, interrogation and flashbacks, along with the most pivotal moments – such as the revelation made by characters like Miller and Gordon in the courtroom – is then condensed into a compact narrative by manipulating time through omissions, ellipses and editing. Manipulating time through editing allows for the restructuring and framing of events in the narrative, changing the context or adding emphasis to pivotal moments and improving the flow of the narrative. The study manipulates time to condense and edit the narrative into cohesive and streamlined experiences, connecting the relevant events to create the story. By editing and moving shots around, such as presenting snippets of flashbacks earlier in the narrative, the story foreshadows events yet to come, guiding the viewer and setting realistic expectations.

The narrative depicts several moments at various points, such as the ambush on the battlefield, the argument at the military base where the characters doubt Liam's loyalties, Shepherd's torture at the prison camp, and the court-martial in the courtroom. Editing is used as a filmmaking tool to connect the relevance of these events. Past events are addressed during the court-martial, and the consequences of those past events are relevant to telling the narrative.

5.4.5.7. Refining events

Events are used to progress and develop the narrative and the characters, notably Captain Miller. They are implemented to show the narrative's most prominent and relevant actions and illustrate critical moments that shape the actions and development of certain characters, which in turn influences the development of the narrative. The events are intercut with one another to connect and juxtapose scenes to communicate thematic and narrative plot points. Since the narrative occurs over several years, editing condenses time and connects the outcomes of relevant events. The events that occur on the battlefield, prison camp and courtroom serve to be sequentially revealed through the narrative events (Margolin, 2006). The more significant the event, such as the betrayal, the more growth Captain Miller as a character can undergo. The

events also bring the relationships between the characters into question, testing how strong these bonds between the characters are, and serve to introduce conflict and inject tension into the narrative, putting pressure on Miller's values. Events are constructed and manipulated to show how these events influence and connect and create a sense of causality between the characters' actions as the narrative progresses.

5.5. Creative and technical constraints

An exciting challenge for this study was bridging theory with practice and finding creative solutions to connect the theoretical understanding of character and narrative to the practical execution of narrative and character, so as to develop an authentic story without the character or the narrative feeling contrived or convoluted. In addition, the researcher was responsible for managing and producing the animated short film, managing the project budget, writing the script, designing the characters, making the 3D models, doing the animation, texturing 3D assets and editing the animated footage into a complete film. The theoretical approach to the study emphasised outlining the narrative and its various components, which led to a more structured approach to developing the artefact, specifically the grey character, and at the same time integrating theory with practice. The latter process needed to be managed to prevent the character and story from becoming too rigid and predictable. If a finite set of theoretical steps were to be followed, the creative scope and viability of this approach would be limited.

This study encountered a unique challenge in its reflection, which concerned naming conventions. The study pursued the development of a *grey character* – a character characterised by moral ambiguity. However, the study also considered naming conventions such as *antihero* and *ambiguous* character, with questionable morality change, and further investigated the terminology of ambiguous characters. Designing characters proved more challenging than anticipated, particularly when they had to be transitioned from 2D designs to 3D character models (see *Book two: Artefact and film production*). Sculpting characters is relatively simple for those familiar with drawing, but optimising 3D models for practical workflows presented significant challenges. Creating and optimising 3D models for animation workflows was a steep learning curve.

Designing and developing a grey character while constantly cross-referencing the creative work with the theoretical research proved challenging, as the theory often became increasingly complex and over-emphasised specific attributes over others (see process books one to three, which capture the creative production of the character and film). This included the psychological aspects of designing and developing the character, as seen in *Book two: Artefact and film production*, and the more philosophical understandings of narrative and character, rather than the practical output of creating a compelling character and story. Attempting to find the critical elements within the theory proved challenging, as it meant connecting various theoretical outlooks to weave a theoretical approach that would still yield a satisfying creative output that is

novel. This is most apparent in the development and writing of the story and the main character, Captain Miller, which saw several iterations and adjustments to honour theoretical insights while still being creatively satisfying. The case studies come into play by implementing the findings from the audit of grey characters in film, series and gaming, along with insights from narrative theory.

One of this project's most challenging aspects was my technical knowledge and skills, which required rapid learning and development. I had to learn additional software such as Autodesk Maya, Houdini, ZBrush, and Unreal Engine. This exposed me to various roles in a 3D animated production, such as 3D modelling, sculpting and creating high-fidelity 3D assets for texturing in Substance Painter (see *Book two: Artefact and film production*, where Captain Miller's modelling and textures designs are presented). A significant hurdle was preparing the models for animation. This project provided insights into the time and technical expertise required to develop 3D characters for animation. Each step, from modelling to texturing and rigging, requires specialised knowledge and decision-making to create appealing and practical designs. Another obstacle was the amount of specialised software involved in 3D workflows. Each software package serves a particular purpose: modelling in Autodesk Maya, sculpting in Maxon ZBrush, and texturing in Adobe Substance Painter (see Figure 5.7 and Figure 5.8).

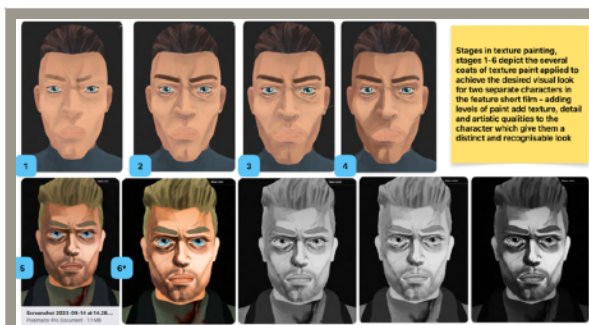


Figure 5.7: Digital texture paint test (see Book two)

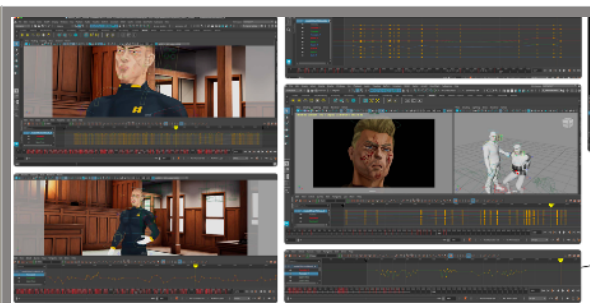


Figure 5.8: Animation in Maya (see Book two)

By optimising the 3D models to ensure that they were production-ready, the polygon count was reduced, as current 3D workflows cannot process moving objects consisting of hundreds of millions of polygons (see *Book three: Reflections*, where I note the deployed designs). This process, known as *retopology*, significantly hindered the project's progress. After scaling down the poly count and combining the lower poly models with normal maps to preserve detail, the next hurdle was creating multiple 3D character rigs. These rigs control the model and must be adjusted to properly animate without breaking the model or rig.

Each bone inside the rig governs a particular area of the model. While the software makes a good estimation, it was necessary to manually adjust each bone's control over its region. Production could proceed more smoothly once the models were successfully rigged and optimised. More in-depth initial knowledge and experience with the software would likely have yielded better results and a smoother production process.

To produce an animated short, the sequences must be compiled and rendered into a series of image sequences. While compiling and rendering these sequences, the computer does intensive processing and calculations to compile the scene. 3D rendering also pertains to time availability, since rendering is exceptionally time-consuming. As a result, several steps were reduced in order to reduce render time, such as using global illumination instead of multiple directional light sources and, in some cases, limiting and removing the number of physical light rays that had to be calculated within the scene. The workflow demanded the removal of all realistic lighting processes in Maya. However, the stylised approach allows the animator to more efficiently communicate how the characters' emotions and actions convey the story effectively. The rendering of a realistic character in Figure 5.9 takes considerably longer than the rendering of a stylised character in Figure 5.10.

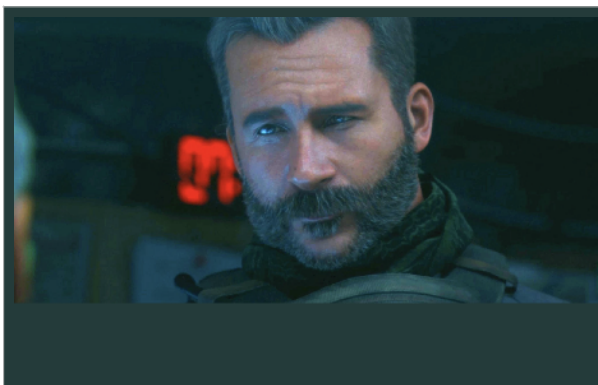


Figure 5.9: Shot of Captain price in *Modern warfare* (2019)

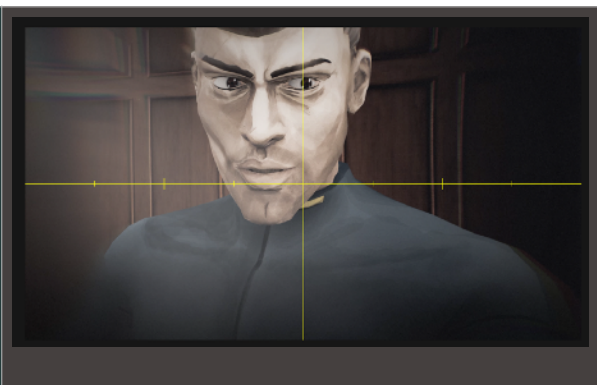


Figure 5.10: Shot of Sgt. Maguire in *Fog of war*

Rendering, which is the final production stage (see both Books two and three for render and lighting tests with character models), involves the computer calculating all scene information to create the final image. Each shot, consisting of several frames, had to be rendered and compiled into an image sequence. Several film cuts were made using low-resolution proxies of the final shots. The second-to-final cut ran at 13 minutes and 32 seconds, meaning the animated short was about 18 720 frames, which would take an estimated 50 hours to render, assuming that each frame took 10 seconds. Several efficiency tactics are employed to accelerate the production of the animated short film. Using stylised animation, as opposed to a more realistic approach, simplifies output by reducing the time spent animating and rendering.

For example, instead of using 3-D locations such as a 3D courtroom model, the courtroom comprises a collection of 2D cards projected onto a plane in 3D space. Instead of physically based directional lighting, a single global light source is used to illuminate the entire 3D scene.

By lowering the samples used to render and calculate the scene, the workload for the computer is also decreased. The render samples can be significantly lower, since the characters are stylised and not photorealistic. 3D rendering is the most significant technical challenge of this study. Since 3D render time, in general, is one of the biggest challenges in 3D production, it places a heavy load on the computer's processing power. Using assets that are not resource-intensive, such as 3D models for furniture, props and background plates, ensures that the only resource-intensive task the computer should handle, is the animation of the 3D characters.

This significantly accelerates the production of the animated short film and reduces the computer workload. Thus, a stylised approach was of the utmost importance to the successful completion of the animated short film *Fog of war*, as attempting to complete this project with photorealistic characters and environments would prove too strenuous for the scope of the study. As such, the stylised design and approach for the survey employ several techniques to streamline and ease the process of producing the animated short film.

While staying within the boundaries of this project's scope, stylised characters proved to be a valuable creative problem-solving tool in achieving the project's objectives. While this approach is limited to some extent, it also has benefits. If planned accordingly, this approach for the animated feature will allow for significant control over the final look. The characters' placement, framing camera position and background planes are planned via the script (viewable in process documentation – see *Book two: Artefact and film production*), storyboards and animation. This can also be considered a drawback, since only a character and a background plane can be filmed in the 3D space, which is hugely limiting.

5.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter of the study explores the application of the theoretical parameters established and examined in the previous chapters, specifically Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. This chapter details how these theoretical foundations are deployed in designing and developing the study's artefact, a morally ambiguous character intended for the animated short film *Fog of war*. The chapter elaborates on the conceptualisation of the grey character and primarily focuses on how Captain Miller's character development progresses throughout the narrative, through the investigation and application of targeted key narrative elements, such as character, time, space and events.

The chapter highlights the need for communication. The character's ambiguity ensures the artefact aligns with the study's aims. The development of the grey character is further refined through the integration of narrative and character theory, as established in previous chapters. This process involves carefully assigning traits that portray the character as a non-archetypal but well-specified individual who can function meaningfully within the narrative. This illustrates how design is understood in the context of the animated short film. Furthermore, postclassical theory is applied to conceptualise and develop the character into a full-rounded, multidimensional entity. The chapter examines whether these traits suffice for the purpose of directing the character beyond the tragic hero, by incorporating findings from previous studies and applying them to specific contexts. Traits such as trauma, interpersonal relationships and bendable values (see Chapter 3) further shape Captain Miller into a character that embodies moral ambiguity. Postclassical narrative elements such as space, time and events also portray the character as grey.

The chapter then addresses the application of postclassical narrative theory in the development of the narratives, offering insights into how these theoretical elements are used in the construction and design, as well as the evolution of the story, to fulfil the objective of portraying Captain Miller as a grey character. Additionally, the chapter details the theoretical underpinnings and their practical application in the animated form. It highlights the creative challenges when approaching this project as a theory-led, practice-based research study. It outlines the obstacles faced in integrating the theoretical and practical components and the strategies employed to bridge these aspects effectively. Finally, the chapter also addresses the technical challenges associated with character and narrative development. It highlights the need to use stylised animation to complete the project while it acknowledges the difficulties of bridging the theoretical and practical outcomes. Chapter 6 offers reflections and conclusions regarding this research project.

CHAPTER SIX: REFLECTION AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1. Introduction

Chapter 6 concludes this study by reflecting on the project and the process of developing the grey character, Captain James T. Miller, and the animated 3D short film *Fog of war*. The study investigated how postclassical narrative theory, with specific focus on the narrative element of character, can be utilised in the design of a grey character for a 3D animated short film. To solve this problem, postclassical narrative theory firstly guided the development of a morally ambiguous grey character. The chapter further discusses how narrative theory and the study of grey characters in television, film and gaming are used to develop a grey character. The insights and contributions that this project offers researchers and creative practitioners will also be examined by reflecting on the process documentation captured during the development of the project. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the key findings concerning narrative and character. The chapter also presents the emergence of various relevant themes from this study's story and character, and concludes with suggestions for future research and artistic endeavours, and final remarks.

6.2. Reflection on process

Throughout this study, the process documentation for the practical component was recorded in three separate books, each capturing a different facet of the study. The process books were structured into three themes: Exploration, Production and Reflection. The first process book, titled *Book one: Pre-project reflection*, concerns the initial (pre-project) reflection, which looked at characters, films and games that were of interest to this study's goal of designing and developing a grey character. The book also set out to create a visual style board to explore different visual styles, themes and motifs relevant to the project objectives. The second book, *Book two: Artefact and film production*, concerns the production of the grey character, Captain Miller, and the animated short film. *Book two* is divided into three subsections: pre-production (where prototyping of the narrative and characters occurs); production (where the 3D character, voice recordings and animation are produced); and post- production (which concerns the editing of the animated videos and mixing of sound to produce the final short film). *Book three: Reflection*, documents the reflection on the artefact and film and discusses the challenges encountered during production. Instead of a structured document, this project's exploration book, *Book one*, details the theoretical investigation and underpinnings that proved interesting or insightful for this study. The production book, *Book two*, utilises large mind maps that collect imagery, theory and references from movies, series and games, notes and insights about the design and development of the animated short film. These mind maps were saved in a cloud format in PDF forms for easy access and insight into the creative process. *Book three* presents

mind maps and notes to reflect on the project. A separate introductory document explains the purpose of each process board.

6.3. Addressing the problem statement

The study sought to determine if narrative and character theory can be used to effectively design, develop and portray a morally ambiguous character within the confines of an animated short film. The research aims to explore the principles of narrative theory and character theory to contribute to the portrayal of this complex character and determine whether these theoretical frameworks are suited for the concise application of such a character within an animated format to convey the character's moral ambiguity to the viewer successfully. In addressing the problem statement, the integration between narrative and character theory becomes critical. The next section addresses the research questions.

6.4. From a postclassical narrative perspective, how can narrative theory be utilised to develop a grey character?

In answering the above question, narrative theory is utilised to create and design a narrative for the animated short film that portrays the morally ambiguous main character. Postclassical narrative theory is found to be suited to this process, but because the theoretical scope it provides is so broad, relevant theoretical insights had to be identified and streamlined for the objectives of this study. The study gleaned insights from the work of Bal, Margolin, Ryan and Fokkema, which oriented the theory towards the study's objective of exploring and creating a grey character, honing in on character development and the narrative elements of time, space, event and character. The narrative elements are implemented as guidelines for creating the narrative over multiple facets, such as the design of spaces, events and progression of time, as well as the development of decisions and actions made to advance the psychological development of the character. Each element is used to specifically create instances that challenge Miller's beliefs and values, and to portray his ambiguous morality by means of it. Therefore, the theory can be utilised to develop a story which the characters can inhabit and where they interact with space, time and events to demonstrate their grey characteristics. The character is subject to narrative elements (time, event and space) and narrative elements are in turn subject to the character's actions. Narrative theory suggests that a causal relationship exists between these various narrative elements and that they work together to convey a story to the viewer.

6.5. From a post-classical narrative perspective, how can character theory be utilised to develop a grey character?

Through an audit of grey characters from television series, movies and gaming, a design parameter was formulated that considers character theory, that derives from identifying commonalities that inform the characters, namely trauma, interpersonal relationships, and bendable values. Character theory highlights specific psychological and physiological traits that are beneficial in the design and development of grey characters, identifying targeted traits that are recognised as qualities that render a character ambiguous. Character theory further enables the development of the character by approaching the design of the character from a theoretical standpoint that argues for a set of informed steps needed to portray a round character. Such portrayal entails aspects from their psychological make-up to their inner life, which creates a history for the character that captures the life of the character, and informs the mental image that forms in the viewer's mind.

6.6. Through a series of selective case studies, what common recurrences in the narrative, character physiology, and psychology of grey characters can be discovered?

The case studies proved beneficial in identifying a set of recurring commonalities or traits that are psychological and physiologic in nature among existing grey characters. A series of recurring qualities – such as trauma, interpersonal relationships and bendable values – became the foundation for designing and developing a grey character and highlighted the various traits needed for a character to be recognised as morally ambiguous. While other parameters may exist, trauma, interpersonal relationships and bendable values appear to be essential in the design and development of grey characters.

6.7. Contribution and key findings

This study's notable insight and contribution are the creation and use of a theoretical design parameter intended to help researchers and creative practitioners design and develop a grey character and a narrative in which that grey character can be deployed. The study contributes to knowledge and insights for practice-based and theory-led work, by suggesting and proposing a model for designing and developing grey characters based on recurring patterns discovered in a series of case studies. The key findings of this study can be categorised into two groups: 1) findings that concern the conceptualisation, design and development of grey characters, and 2) the construction of narratives that convey the story of grey characters. Initial research revealed no clear delineation of what constitutes a grey character or how the narrator can design such a character for visual media. The study identified a series of recurring elements and theoretical guidelines that prove beneficial for the design and development of grey characters. Lastly, this study argues that the development of a character is directly tied to the design and implementation of the narrative elements, namely space, time, event and character. These

narrative elements work together and cannot function separately when the objective is to design, develop and portray an ambiguous character within an animated short film.

6.7.1. The value of postclassical narrative theory

By investigating postclassical narrative theory, the study arguably uncovers crucial insights that significantly enhance the design and development of both the character and the story. A key finding lies in the theoretical understanding of the narrative elements of space, time, event and character as interconnected components that drive storytelling, as understood by narrative theorists. This study highlights how these elements can be purposefully manipulated to create an atypical narrative that portrays a grey character. Subsequently the research revealed that these elements are not isolated but intertwined, each influencing and reinforcing the other to create a cohesive and dynamic narrative body. For example, the manipulation of time, such as compressing sequences, allows for the efficient portrayal of significant events while maintaining the narrative's emotional weight within the constraints of a short film. Similarly, events are carefully designed as catalysts to place the character in morally challenging situations, pushing their development towards ambiguity. Space, both physical and symbolic, serves as a vessel to contextualise these events and provides settings that amplify tension and test the character's internal motivations, values, and beliefs.

The findings also highlighted the limitations of narrative manipulation in the short animated format, particularly in balancing narrative density and clarity. These constraints necessitated a precise and intentional deployment of elements, ensuring that each aspect served the central goal: portraying the protagonist's moral ambiguity. For instance, fragmented storytelling techniques were utilised to create a sense of disorientation and complexity, which reflects the protagonist's inner turmoil and moral conflict. By putting the character under intense psychological and moral pressure through the interplay of space, time and events, the study demonstrates how these elements can transcend their conventional roles as mere backdrops. Instead, they function as essential narrative devices, informing the protagonist's evolution and aligning with the story's thematic objectives. This investigation underscores the malleability of narrative elements and their potential to support an author's intentions. When carefully oriented and integrated, these elements become powerful tools that propel the narrative forward and ensure the successful delivery of its message.

6.7.2. Character theory

The aim of using character theory was to identify signifying patterns, like similarities, and commonalities shared by the grey characters in successful television series, films and comics, and establish a set of parameters for developing a grey character. Chapter 3 identified recurring physiological and psychological traits commonly exhibited by the grey characters in the case studies. These traits, including background, trauma, interpersonal relationships and bendable values, were analysed and cross-referenced with character theory to establish design

parameters for developing a grey character suitable for this study's animated short film. Character theory not only confirms these findings but also validated the importance of these elements in crafting morally ambiguous characters (use of clear, recognisable traits that inform the psychological makeup and inner life of the grey character). Through validating the methodology, the theoretical insights from Chapter 4 further support and expand upon these findings, and emphasise the role of psychological traits and motivations that are derived from real-life observations used in the creation of ambiguous characters. These traits are explained and implemented through postclassical narrative theory, providing depth to the character's inner life, which ensures that the grey character resonates as realistic and human. Thus the methodology demonstrates how traits that are assigned to a fictional, yet well-defined individual can construct a mental image in the viewer's mind that is recognisable as human, making the character appear life-like. Collectively, these findings concerning psychological traits align with the theoretical framework proposed to design, develop and portray a morally ambiguous character effectively.

6.7.3. Grey characters

The study determined that grey characters exhibit common traits and narrative patterns. These patterns are primarily universal across these characters and their stories, as set out in Chapter 3. Traits like resilience, stamina, endurance, perseverance, strength and physical qualities also determine that grey characters share specific psychological markers regarding how they think and feel, make decisions and act on those decisions. Most notably, the study arrived at a design parameter that was extracted based on case studies of grey characters. While limited in scope, investigating existing characters and synthesising a design model based on their backstory, personalities, and physiology proved successful in developing and designing a grey character. The model revealed that grey characters exhibit some personal trauma in their story. Secondly, these characters have relationships with other characters that are often filled with tension and complex relationships, marked by stress and mistrust. Lastly, the combination of trauma and tension-filled interpersonal relationships facilitates the possibility for these characters to engage in morally questionable behaviour that ultimately bends their values, making them grey characters.

6.8. Emergence of notable themes

The following section addresses the emergence of themes that are visually and aurally presented in the film and are significant in framing grey characters and positioning them in the narrative of the film. It discusses themes such as ambiguity, conscience, morality and duty, internal conflict, selflessness and selfishness and impossible odds. In addition, there is a recurring theme of imperfect men being expected to act perfectly under internal and external pressure, to live up to certain ideals or expectations, even when they know it is impossible. Finally, there is the theme of *victor's justice*, a term that refers to the general and excessive

punishment of the losing party while offering amnesty to the party that has been deemed the victor.

6.8.1. Ambiguity

The theme of ambiguity in the story, *Fog of war*, is a powerful tool for exploring the complexities of human nature. Ambiguity is one of the main themes addressed within the narrative. The story uses events that are depicted in ambiguous ways, by offering the viewer various interpretations of the events through the eyewitness testimony of characters present in the court-martial of Captain Miller. Narrative devices, such as flashbacks, are employed to represent the perceived recollection of these events by characters such as Miller and Gordon, mystifying the events that are addressed in the story. It further discloses motivations, decisions and actions made by other characters, such as the domestic terrorist, Colonel Shepherd, and his ally Liam Miller, who is a spy. Liam Miller shares sensitive information with Shepherd, which causes Captain Miller to fail in his mission. This catalyses Captain Miller's efforts to redeem himself and it leads to the questionable action taken by Captain Miller to torture and interrogate not only other innocent soldiers, but also to kill his brother, Liam Miller, who betrays Captain Miller's values and beliefs of moral code, honour and loyalty. Simultaneously, Miller also takes the law into his own hands by avenging his fallen comrades and executing his brother. This raises questions about the loyalties of the involved characters, such as Miller and his brother Liam, and it prompts the viewer to ask questions about the state enemy, Colonel Shepherd. The intentions of these characters are kept vague, which leads to more critical speculation concerning the actions of these characters, specifically Captain Miller. As a result, it is questioned whether his actions are indeed justifiable, or if they are merely the actions of a man who seeks to undo his past failure.

Only glimpses are shown of the events and actions that happen, and the full extent of Miller's trauma and conflicting actions remains unknown. The narrative intentionally withholds visual information that could confirm certain actions and behaviours, such as the possibility of Miller killing the other soldiers, or Shepherd actually killing the rest of Miller's men. For the most part, Captain Miller's actions are reactive towards the outcomes of certain events in the story, such as the failure to protect the significant person at the beginning of the story. It also acts as a form of rationalisation when he later justifies the murder of his brother.

Captain Miller's actions are also informed by his traumatic experiences as a soldier. Knowing of these events, the viewer may question how stable his mental state is, as he endures several high-pressure situations that could cause many others to break. Ambiguity is further utilised within the structure of the narrative to limit information and to keep the viewer in the dark. The viewer is constantly kept guessing and doubting the information that they receive from the characters in the court testimony. This not only keeps the viewer engaged but allows for the viewer to continually and critically scrutinise the content of the story. It questions Captain Miller, and what constitutes a war crime, or whether it is merely dependent on perspective.

The process of editing the movie further enhances ambiguity by shifting around parts of the story or limiting the amount of viewable information in a given scene. This is also further enhanced by the careful usage of cinematography, by showing only what is needed to provide enough information to contextualise the scene, but never enough to explain the scene. The manipulation of narrative elements proved to be beneficial towards the telling of the story, as the limiting of information provided by each narrative element, such as space and time, greatly enhance the ambiguous nature of the events that unfold, as well as the actions taken by the characters that are present in those moments. Furthermore, Captain Miller's actions throughout the narrative question the values that he presumably embodies and it raises doubts about whether he genuinely values his men and friends over the mission. The narrative suggests that Miller's values can be bent under certain circumstances, but his resolve is pivotal. He believes in his actions, even if it means turning on those close to him and turning on himself – this constitutes one element of him being perceived as a grey character.

6.8.2. Conscience

The theme of conscience in *Fog of war* explores moral ambiguity through multiple perspectives, challenging viewers to question right and wrong in extreme circumstances. The narrative examines moral dilemmas through the characters present in the court hearing, such as Willard, Carmichael and Gordon. They are seen arguing over actions such as the killing of presumed innocent people to combat domestic terrorism, and the viewer encounters contrasts in personal beliefs, like Miller's and Liam's differing views on the domestic threat, which influence their actions. Legal morality is scrutinised through Miller's court-martial for destroying military property and causing loss of life. The story avoids declaring Miller's actions as right or wrong, and instead presents his choices of saving his comrades, killing his brother and protecting his country as complex and morally ambiguous, thus revealing his challenged values and beliefs.

6.8.3. Morality vs. duty

The conflict between morality and duty in *Fog of war* examines human relationships, such as loyalty, and the sacrifices that are made for personal beliefs through the relationship between Miller, Liam and Clark. Themes like honour and betrayal are rooted in the narrative's focus on interpersonal relationships, portraying characters as close friends or relatives who rely on each other for survival during war. Their shared code of honour, interpreted differently by each character, is ultimately betrayed by those considered brothers. This is exemplified by Liam Miller's betrayal of his brother, Captain Miller, driven by personal beliefs, which becomes the catalyst for Miller's character development. The betrayal not only leads to violent consequences (Miller's decision to torture and execute Liam) but also challenges the characters' shared vision and values, questioning what they truly fight for and believe in.

6.8.4. Judge, jury and executioner

Captain Miller's multiple roles as judge, jury and executioner highlight the complexities of morality and decision-making in wartime, challenging viewers to consider the consequences of individual actions. Throughout the story, Captain Miller's choices and actions raise questions about his loyalties, values and alignment with his country, portraying him as an ambiguous character. His experiences during the war shape him into someone who embodies the roles of judge, jury and executioner. The narrative initially presents Captain Miller with a deep sense of loyalty and honour. However, he ultimately fails in his mission and loses several men due to his brother Liam's betrayal. This betrayal challenges Miller's values and drives him to break his principles by murdering his brother to redeem himself and defeat the enemy. Miller's actions confront viewers with difficult questions about justice and the justification of violent actions, especially toward those in close relation to us. At the same time, he is also depicted as someone willing to forgo the rules to save those he cares about. Unfortunately, this trait works against him when his brother betrays him and he deems it necessary to kill him. This raises further questions about his decision-making abilities, emphasising how a single individual can influence notions of right and wrong, and decisions about who should live and who should die.

6.8.5. Internal conflict

The pervasive theme of internal conflict in *Fog of war* explores the complexities and conflict between personal values versus civic, professional duty and the challenges of reconciling personal beliefs with societal expectations. This theme of inner conflict runs consistently throughout the narrative and affects the characters deeply. Unlike depictions where the protagonist typically faces external threats from opposing forces, *Fog of war* focuses on internal struggles. The characters literally and metaphorically grapple with a rogue faction within the armed forces, which holds differing views, loyalties and opinions. The characters Miller and his brother, Liam Miller, embody this internal conflict as they confront opposing perspectives on the war and a defecting former colleague. They are torn between their duties as soldiers serving their country and their personal beliefs about right and wrong, justice, honour and duty. The narrative highlights the contradictory nature of Captain Miller, illustrating his struggle to balance his personal beliefs with the obligations of his role.

6.8.6. Selflessness vs. selfishness

The narrative explores selflessness and selfishness through Captain Miller's leadership decisions, revealing his flawed nature and inner conflict. Miller's trust in those close to him makes him vulnerable to darker impulses; yet, his loyalty to his men highlights his compassion and selflessness, such as prioritising saving a soldier over completing a mission. However, his decision to murder his brother Liam, who betrayed his code of honour and caused the death of a close friend, shows his struggle to balance duty, justice and personal relationships. This act

raises a key question: can duty and values justify sacrificing personal bonds, even a sibling's life?

6.8.7. Impossible odds

The theme of insurmountable odds challenges the notion of individual responsibility and explores the complexities of moral decision-making in the face of overwhelming adversity. As is the precedent in the case studies and this study's film *Fog of war*, the protagonist, Captain Miller, encounters events and circumstances that are out of their control. Like other grey characters highlighted in the case studies (see Chapter 3), Miller is also not responsible for those events but he is guilty of failing to overcome those impossible situations, which reveals his character, personality and values. These values and beliefs inform the grey character's growth and development, while shaping the character's actions in dire circumstances. The narrative also explores the flawed nature of these men as soldiers. The impossible tasks they must complete ultimately control characters such as Captain Miller, by forcing them to test their values and beliefs while also making them come to terms with the consequences of their actions. These impossible odds confront the characters with their limits, and they must choose between upholding or sacrificing their values. This theme poses a more profound question: are these characters simply victims of circumstances beyond their control, or do they have agency in shaping their lives?

6.8.8. Consequences of war

A critical theme in the animated short film *Fog of war* is the concept of victor's justice, which challenges notions of fairness and impartiality by examining how victors impose justice to serve their interests while avoiding scrutiny themselves. This selective prosecution targets the defeated party for war crimes while excusing similar actions by the victors, which creates an imbalance in accountability. Captain Miller's actions to achieve justice and prevent further conflict reflect this dynamic, as his decisions compromise his position, risk escalating tensions, and ultimately lead to his court-martial. The narrative questions whether Miller's morally ambiguous choices, framed as serving a greater national purpose, can be justified; while highlighting the ethical and legal flaws of a justice system shaped by the biases of the victorious.

6.8.9. Role and significance of grey characters

The role and significance of morally grey characters in media are compelling. Morally ambiguous characters exist in the liminal space between what is perceived to be good and evil, heroic and villainous. Ambiguous characters explore the themes of duality in human nature, how power corrupts and the influence of ambition on values and relationships. These characters serve as vehicles that explore the psychological and sociological themes that more typical and

conventional characters cannot fully present. Grey characters explore these psychological and sociological themes of human nature and the complexities of moral decision-making by putting these characters into situations that are atypical and do not provide a clear distinction between right and wrong, offering a nuanced and multifaceted view of the human condition and showing that characters are capable of doing bad things that a viewer may find to be understandable, given the context.

The stories of grey characters are not narratives told to comfort the viewer. These stories depict the harsh realities of life, which provoke and challenge the viewer on an intellectual level, reminding them of the contradictory, volatile nature of the world and the human condition. Furthermore, these characters tend to subvert traditional characters, such as the hero or villain, and grey characters allow the storyteller to reinvent or critique established narrative structures. By creating stories that do not adhere to binary norms, the stories of flawed humans, such as grey characters, force the viewer to re-examine their own values. The narrative prompts the viewer to question what they would have done in the same situation, provoking thoughtful engagement with the content of the story and its characters. These characters challenge conventions and norms; grey characters reflect reality by depicting people who are susceptible to making mistakes, who act selfishly or against their own moral compass. These characters often face ethical dilemmas, such as saving one life over another or prioritising themselves over others, sacrificing the few for the many, and loyalty to one's beliefs rather than the lives of others. The tension of these dilemmas leads to compelling character development as the characters are forced to wrestle with their choices. Inner conflict creates an emotional depth and adds complexity to the character and their journey, resembling how real people must come to terms with their own actions throughout their day-to-day lives.

Furthermore, ambiguous characters also experience external conflict, where ambiguous morality creates tension with other characters. These characters allow the viewer to empathise with individuals whom they might not typically support within the context of a story that is more straightforward, allowing for the broadening of emotional and intellectual experiences. Grey characters may enable the audience to empathise with them because the viewer may see their own flaws reflected in these types of characters. As this character's struggle mirrors the more rigid views, this dynamic drives the plot and leads to intriguing character interactions.

6.9. Suggestions for future research

This study identifies gaps in the delineation of characters such as the grey character, who is often associated with the term *antihero*. The study furthermore identified gaps concerning the design and development of grey characters, and found that defining and creating a grey character involves creating a design framework that implements theoretical principles to create such a character. Further research on the subject may take the form of developing a qualitative measure for moral ambiguity to propose a means of gauging the morality of grey characters in

narrative contexts. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that while the study employed animation as a medium to explore and achieve its research objectives and goals, it did not delve into the intricate visual design and iconographic aspects of the characters. Additionally, the study also did not provide any insights into how specifically animation serves as a medium to enhance the attainment of these objectives nor communicate the moral ambiguity of the character. Future endeavours can further investigate the utility of animation as a medium and visual design of morally ambiguous characters. Additional research can explore the benefits of interdisciplinary approaches to the design and development of morally ambiguous characters, focusing on aspects such as the psychological makeup and even the social context of grey characters, to contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact that grey characters may have on storytelling. Additionally, further research may increase the scope of the study by adjusting its deliverables and overall objectives, to determine if more parameters can be considered for the design and development of grey characters. Future researchers can integrate the design parameters of the study into other mediums, such as live-action film, graphic novels or video games.

6.10. Final remarks

The research conducted in this study offers valuable insights into the design and development of grey characters. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of grey characters and their significance in storytelling and it leads to insights regarding the theoretical design and development of grey characters. Recurring traits are used to create a design parameter that uses trauma, interpersonal relationships and bendable values as a means of designing a non-actual but well-specified individual who is perceived as morally ambiguous. While the implementation design and development of the character is successful, I do believe that not all of the goals were achieved. I find that while the method is validated by what is portrayed in the film, the character of Miller requires more depth and further narrative investigation and exploration. I believe there is another variation of the story that could've explored another morally ambiguous character in the form of Liam Miller. On hindsight, his motivations and actions prove to be far more interesting and ambiguous as opposed to Captain Miller, who can be perceived as making impulsive and reckless decisions, and then subsequently suffering because of those decisions. While I believe the study achieved its goal in proposing a method for the development and design of narrative and character that can be portrayed within a specified medium, I do you believe the degree of success that this animated film reaches can be enhanced, especially if more time was available to implement changes following responses from viewers . Lastly narrative theory is also applied and narrative elements are utilised to orient and design the story of the animated short film to meet these goals of portraying a morally ambiguous character.

Regarding the success of this study, the study's utilization of narratology in its classical and post classical form, succeeded in developing valid methods for the achievement of the desired goals

within the study which is the design development and application of a morally ambiguous character. The design and development of the narrative and character relied heavily on textual descriptions, and approaches towards design and development, rather than engagement with the visual design that is often associated with the post structural narrative theory. The potential impact of this design framework can lead to more nuanced and refined designs and writing of grey characters, avoiding common pitfalls where the character can be deemed inauthentic. The study also acknowledges the limits of its scope and application, as other parameters for developing and designing grey characters may also be determined and applied in other storytelling media.

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ANNEXURES A:

Fog of war, Animated short film: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1wXgltp0DVToS2wq5Re0Vf6gYkGVV9RNJ?usp=share_link

Process Documentation(Process books one, two and three): https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/18zZQehjbhagaB8Gal-Fwz2X3S6v34qUa?usp=share_link