

THE WITCHER[®] MONSTERBOOK



CDPROJEKT

Adapting Andrzej Sapkowski's prose proved a great challenge, and this was especially true of the bestiary or collection of monsters that were to be used in the game. Reading Sapkowski's books turned out to be much easier than interpreting his work in visual terms.

One of the problems we faced is that in his stories and novels about the witcher the author rarely describes beasts in detail, preferring instead to provide impressions that do not disrupt the flow and drama of his narratives. He produces moods and emotion rather than describing the world he creates and the characters and creatures that populate it. An effective means of shaping images in readers' minds, this approach was only mildly helpful to producing the creatures for the game world. While working on the game visuals, we were often left wishing we had more supporting material.

Simultaneously, whenever Sapkowski describes a monster in detail, he does so in an altogether uncommon manner. Iconic creatures of the fantasy genre break out of the canon and acquire new traits in the author's work. The beasts to which the author devotes more attention have their specific place in his world's ecosystem. Primarily predators, their existence is logically justified, making the threat they represent more credible as it taps into the primal fears that lay dormant in all of us.

This approach inspired us as we produced the several dozen creatures for the game. We needed to consider the background of each beast described in the books, define its behavior and relation to the surrounding world. While working on The Witcher, we produced vast material describing each of the species that appear in the game, exploring their behavior, feeding habits, combat techniques, and methods of procreation. All this is not immediately apparent, though it does surface in time. And not all our ideas could be incorporated into the game, so we will gladly revisit many of them in the future.

Many monsters of the witcher's world have a clear derivation. When Geralt encounters a frightener, it immediately evokes associations with a giant mantis. When Sapkowski describes the koshchey, readers at once recognize the beast to be an overgrown crab. This is an excellent approach to literature, because it guides the reader's imagination, but it is not the best solution for computer games, where congruence of this kind can result in hackneyed, none-too-terrifying monsters. We sought to resolve this by taking a fresh approach to seemingly banal things, by allowing ourselves to interpret familiar themes loosely, all the while conscious that this might breed controversy.

We also had to keep gameplay in mind while creating game characters and beasts. The witcher's combat styles, designed for different threats, are a key tactical element. Individual adversaries are thus linked to specific combat styles: burly foes are best defeated using the Strong Style, while the Fast Style should be used against agile beings. This system could only work if players were able to recognize the threats they faced, identify opponent types automatically, at first glance. Thus, any agile creatures needed to seem lighter and more slender than strong opponents.

By taking an inventive approach to the world of The Witcher, we have assumed a great responsibility. The monster slayer has many devoted fans, and they might not necessarily agree with our vision of the literary original. Nevertheless, we believe they will look kindly on the work we did.

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DROWNER

*"These are terrible times," sighed the burgomeister.
"Rotten times! Twenty years ago, who would have
thought, even after barrels of drink, that there would
ever be such a profession? Witchers! Traveling basilisk
slayers! Door to door killers of dragons and drowners!"*

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Witcher



Drowner

One of the most popular creatures in the game, the drowner is initially a worthy opponent, but becomes cannon fodder as the game progresses, an excuse for increasingly spectacular displays of Geralt's mastery of the sword. Frequently appearing creatures need to be created with particular attention to detail, so unsurprisingly we spent a lot of time refining the drowner's final appearance. This was probably the most often modified model in the game.

Skinny and humped, with its huge head, slightly protruding belly and concave chest, the drowner became a creature that is half-scary, half-grotesque. Its eyes are round and fish-like, granting it a rather dumb expression. It also has wide palms and membranes between its fingers, as well as a fin. Like its color, these elements reveal much about its natural environment. This creature clearly lives underwater and is awkward when on dry land... unless it happens to be hungry and there's an unsuspecting traveler nearby.

A concept drawing of the drowner in the version ultimately incorporated into the game.



The model of the drowner.



GHOUL

"Hmm... The ghoul, uncle Vesemir, is a corpse eater. It appears in burial grounds, near barrows, anywhere the dead are buried. In nec... necropolises. On battlefields..."
"So it's only dangerous to the dead, right?"
"Not only. Ghouls attack the living, too. When they're hungry or fly into a rage. If there's a battle, for instance... Many fresh dead..."

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Blood of the Elves

Ghouls, like drowners, appear often in the game. Geralt frequently has the opportunity to practice his silver sword techniques on this monster. Since the drowner became grotesque, we made the ghoul both scary and a bit pathetic, without rendering him humorous. As a foul scavenger, he has all the necessary attributes: deadly pale, spotted skin, a nose-less head resembling a skull, and a strong jaw capable of cracking open any bone. A bit of artistic trickery and clear connotations went into creating the model for this rather dumb, hideous creature.



An early concept drawing.



The drawing that was the basis for the model: the ghoul has evolved considerably.



The model of the ghoul.

The ghoul is no joke – it is stocky, thick-boned, and ready to attack. It loves feasting on human cadavers, but has nothing against fresh, warm meat. When it grabs its prey with its apelike arms, there is no escape.



GRAVEIR

"Graveirs are rare, luckily, but they're hellishly dangerous bastards. The smallest wound received from one results in cadaverine poisoning. Which potion do we use to treat cadaverine poisoning, Ciri?"

"Golden Oriole."

"Correct. But this poisoning is best avoided altogether. So you should never get too close to a graveir. Always fight him at a distance, and lunge to hit him."

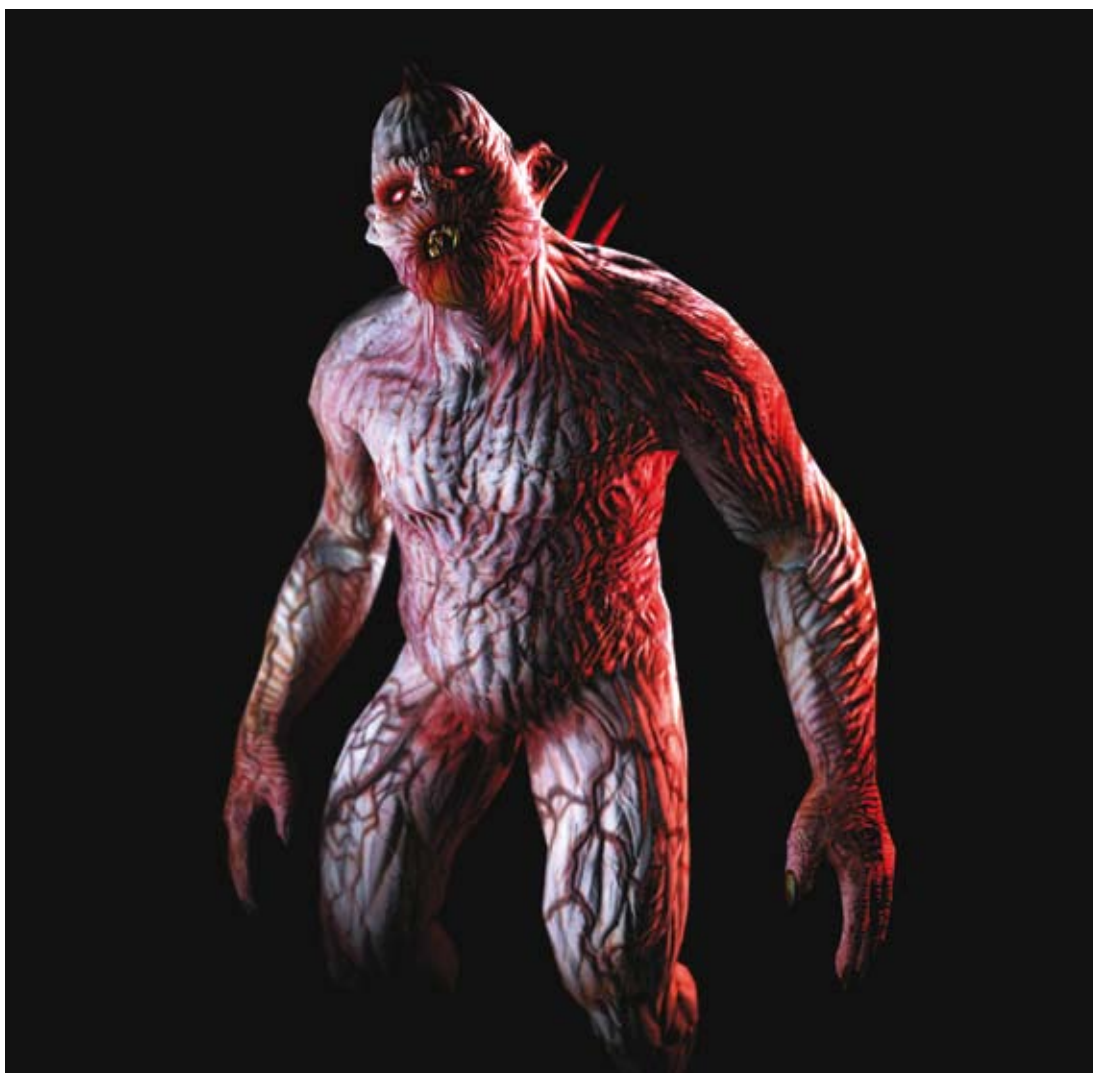
Andrzej Sapkowski, The Blood of the Elves



A concept drawing of the graveir.

Half-dead, half living creatures, ghouls are scary, miserable and repulsive at the same time. They feed on human corpses and hide from sunlight in dark crypts. Graveirs are their larger cousins and can by no means be described as miserable. They are just plain scary.

The graveir's hefty, strapping silhouette suggests it is no normal necrophage. Closer examination reveals some chilling details. Its hard, stone-like skin is covered with dry blood. Its most striking features include its small eyes and a low-set head that makes the graveir look dumb (which it is indeed). With its small mouth full of curved, uneven teeth, it easily crushes even the thickest bones, and it possesses a long tongue useful for sucking out marrow, its greatest delicacy.



The rendered model of the graveir.

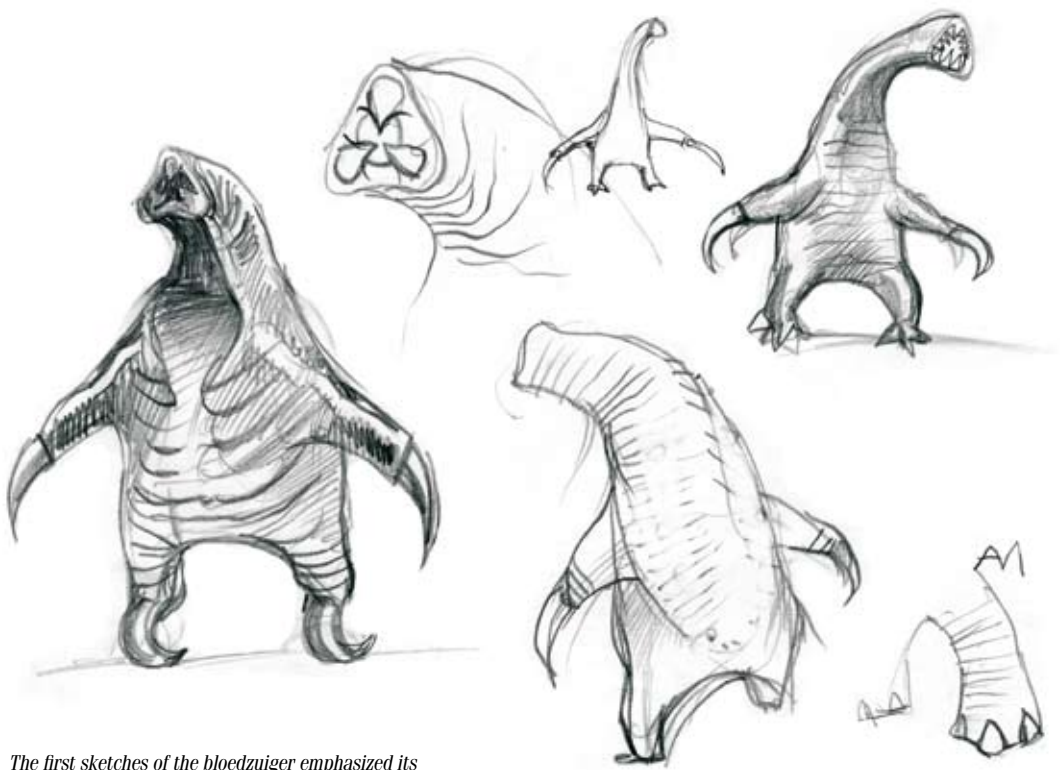
Vetala is an unusual graveir, one endowed with human features, a keen intelligence, and the ability to speak. When Geralt encounters him on one of his adventures, he ponders whether to kill the creature or to leave it be as an intelligent being capable of rationally justifying its way of life.



BLOEDZUIGER

"Our path leads through the Marshy Range! And there, master, dread awaits! There, master, prowl brucolacs, leaf-noses, endriagas, inogas and other filth! No more than a fortnight ago a leshii nabbed my son-in-law – so quick that the man could do no more than grunt before he was gone."

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Swallow's Tower



The first sketches of the bloedzuiger emphasized its characteristic features.



A concept drawing of the bloedzuiger – the detail depicts its tooth-filled gullet.

A colored drawing of the bloedzuiger.

Bloedzuigers lurk in muddy waters and surface only when attracted by the presence of warm-blooded creatures. They are slow and may seem grotesque, until a swarm of them surrounds its prey.

The bloedzuiger was inspired by the leech, thus its segmented body and characteristic head, or rather, its bloodthirsty maw spiked with teeth. The bloedzuiger consumes both the blood and intestines of its victims. A strong and malicious beast, it can easily kill a human.



A bloedzuiger at its best – ready to attack.

Bloedzuigers do not usually need to chase their victims, hence their thick, elephant-like legs. The spikes on their forelimbs prevent their victims from escaping. The insides of their barrel-shaped bodies are a dangerous weapon in themselves, as their digestive fluids are a mixture of strong acids. Woe to those attackers who decide to gut the monster.



ZEUGL

The debris exploded in an eruption of thick, stinking grease, clay pot shells, rotting rags and pale strings of pickled cabbage. From beneath it burst a huge, bulbous corpus, shapeless like a grotesque potato. It slapped the air with three tentacles and the stub of a fourth. (...) The corpus glided toward him, plowing through the debris like a barrel being dragged to market. He saw the tuber crack as it unclenched its wide maw full of large, block-like teeth. He let the tentacles wind themselves around his waist, lift him from the stinking grease with a thwack, and drag him toward the corpus that in circular movements dug deeper into the debris (...). The tooth-lined jaws snapped wildly, angrily.

Andrzej Sapkowski, A Shard of Ice

This sketch focuses on the zeugl's cephalothorax – the monster's head resembles that of a fish, while the folds on its back bear a likeness to mushroom caps.



The zeugl in color – even more repulsive than in black-and-white.

This huge monster inhabiting the sewers beneath Vizima looks like a medieval environmentalist's nightmare. It feeds on the garbage and carrion that slowly drifts with the flow. The zeugl can grow to be enormous in size, and as a hermaphrodite, it reproduces easily. A fully grown specimen is a threat to humans and very difficult to kill.

Only the top part of its body and tentacles ever surface above the sewage – and these are the most important elements of its design. The black and white sketches present the creature in all its glory. Sapkowski described it as a „hideous bulge“ – and such is our zeugl. The concept artist provided it with a fish-like head and a few rows of sharp teeth suitable for grinding whatever reaches the monster's jaws. If the victim is not quite dead, the zeugl's tentacles feature spikes that allow the creature to pull its prey into its mouth.



The zeugl with its tentacles, their extremities visible.



DEVOURER

...And there would be something that lived solely to kill. Out of hunger, for pleasure, incited by someone's sick will, for other reasons. A manticore, wyvern, fogler, aeshna, naucoris, frightener, leshii, vampire, ghoul, graveir, werewolf, giant scorpion, striga, devourer, kikimore, or vypper.

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Last Wish



The artist strove to create the ugliest possible hag, and thus was born the devourer.

Like the noonwraith, this monster is strongly rooted in Slavic lore. It began with a name mentioned by Sapkowski; the idea that the devourer should resemble an old, menacing woman followed soon after. In its final form, the devourer is a hag with a wonderfully hooked nose, drooping breasts, and a swollen, wrinkled belly. Its open mouth curves into a spiteful grin, and the protruding tongue and pulled back hair make it resemble a dog panting after a chase.

The devourer embodies children's nightmares of a mischievous, sadistic witch waiting to carry off naughty children.

In this illustration of one of Geralt's flashbacks, the witcher defends a boy from a devourer. The way she glares at the urchin explains the fear in his eyes.



The colored version proved even more repulsive.



Geralt defends Alvin against a devourer in one of the protagonist's flashbacks.



GOLEM

The sorceress gazed at him and smiled. Only her lips moved. "On that issue," she said, "leave judgment to us humans. You, witcher, are not meant to judge. You are meant to work."

"Like a programmed, will-less golem?"

"Your comparison, not mine," Yennefer replied coldly.

"But yes, accurate."

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Limit of Possibility

The golem is often portrayed as a clumsy, faceless figure made of clay or as a perfect effigy of a man. Neither of these ideas was suitable to the world of The Witcher. Ultimately, our golem became a piece of roughly hewn rock animated by a magical obsidian heart placed inside the beast's chest by its maker. The mage who created it was no sculptor; he cared little for aesthetics and focused on functionality. This creature was meant to work and defend its master's property. And the Golem performs these tasks (especially the latter) perfectly, with ruthless efficiency.

The hero encounters the Golem in the swamp forest, near the Golem Burial Ground. The creature stands still, frozen in mid-step, having expended all the power which animated it. Geralt's task is to bring the creature to life, which he does by summoning a storm with the help of friendly druids. We obviously drew the concept of a thunderbolt giving life to inanimate matter from the story of Doctor Frankenstein's monster. Having Geralt yell „It's alive!“ was too tempting to pass up. The Golem is thus inspired both by the legend of a rabbi from Prague who created an artificial human being and by Mary Shelley's novel. This combination perfectly fits our world of grim and gritty fantasy.



This sketch presents the golem as a chunk of rock with barely discernable limbs.



The earth-toned golem, placed in the swamp, resembles an unfinished sculpture.



WEREWOLF

He pulled the pouch from beneath his pillow and quickly counted the ten crown pieces. One hundred and fifty for yesterday's manticore. Fifty for the fogler slain at the behest of the mayor of the hamlet near Carreras. And another fifty for the werewolf to which the settlers of Burdorff had led him.

Fifty for the werewolf. A lot given it how easy it had been. The beast offered no resistance. Chased into a cave with no egress, it had knelt and waited for the blow. The witcher had felt sorry for him.

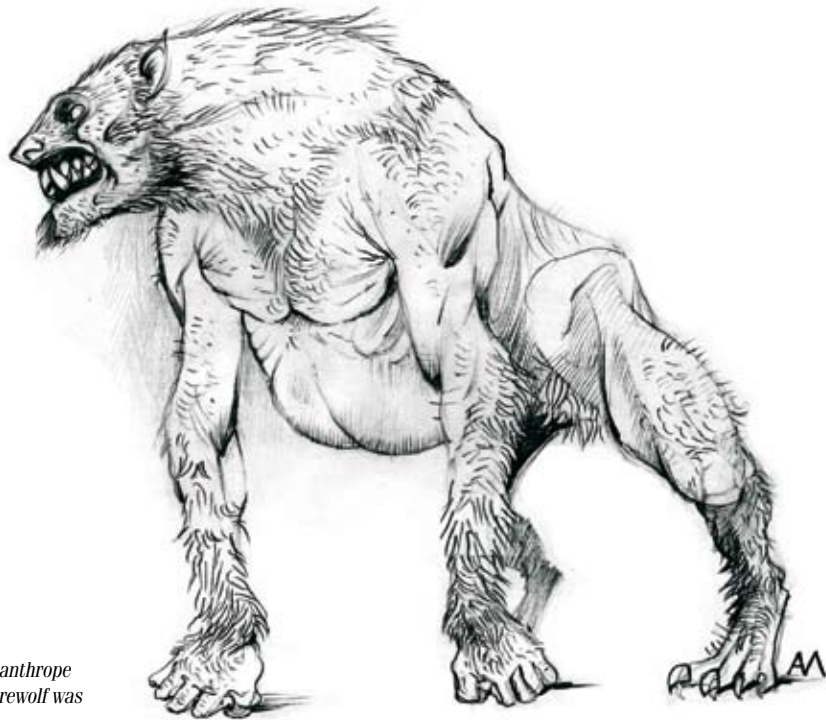
Andrzej Sapkowski, The Time of Disdain



The final concept drawing for the werewolf.

At first, lycanthropes, including werewolves, were supposed to be ordinary, frequently encountered opponents in the game. When we realized that the curse of lycanthropy could be the basis for a fascinating story in the spirit of Sapkowski's tales, we decided to make the werewolf an unusual creature.

We were inspired by early drawings that depicted a lycanthrope with a large „gut.“ We immediately linked the creature to Vincent Meis, the tough commander of the City Guard, a middle-aged man with a well-developed „beer muscle.“ New motifs were added to the story until it became a tale of a righteous law enforcer who uses the lycanthropy to fight crime more effectively. The werewolf must ultimately choose between being a masked (and furry) avenger or devoting himself to true love. Geralt can help him resolve this dilemma while proving that in addition to killing monsters, witchers are also good at lifting curses.



*A sketch of the lycanthrope
from which the werewolf was
ultimately derived.*



*The colors emphasize
the monster's thick fur.*



FRIGHTENER

Visenna leafed through page by page, paying him no heed.

"Interesting," she said after a moment. "Eleven years ago, when you were banished from the Circle, certain pages disappeared from the Forbidden Books. It is fortunate they have been recovered – and annotated in the meantime. Well, I'm amazed you dared to use Alzur's Double Cross. I doubt you've forgotten how Alzur ended. They say some of his creations still roam the world, including his last: the viy that maimed Alzur himself, destroyed half of Maribor, and fled into the forests of Riverdell."

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Road of No Return

Sapkowski never describes the frightener in detail, but does mention its name. And what a name it is! A monster called a „frightener“ certainly shouldn't disappoint players.

The prototype for the creature was the praying mantis, a voracious insect famous for its cannibalism. The creature depicted in the black-and-white sketch was modeled after this arthropod. The colored sketch presents an array of colors – a common feature of dangerous and venomous creatures. Like the original insect, the frightener has a pair of highly developed forelegs – formidable weapons when it attacks the witchers of Kaer Morhen.

An early sketch of the frightener, modeled after a praying mantis.



The first frightener was multi-colored.

Based on that first sketch, we created a model that we used briefly in the game. Yet as the game evolved, the concept of the frightener changed as well. We needed a more massive, armored creature covered with earth-toned textures matching the grey walls of Kaer Morhen, where the frightener spreads destruction. In the second sketch the monster's torso resembles that of a beetle. The beast has also acquired wings that were not there earlier in spite of its mantis origins. Animations involving the wings appear in cut scenes and during combat with the creature. Also drawn from the beetle are its thick, armored legs and the „fangs“ that encircle its head. The mantis-like forelegs and head survived as they merged smoothly with the other changes. Lastly, the frightener was given a new, final texture in shades of green. In this form it is ready to attack Kaer Morhen... and to die from the witchers' blades.



*The final drawing of the frightener
the basis for the model.*



The rendered model of the frightener.





KIKIMORE

Caldemeyn shifted from one foot to the other while gazing at the spider-like shape clad in dry, black skin, at the glimmering eye with its vertical pupil, at the needle-shaped fangs in the bloodied mouth.

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Lesser Evil

The first sketch of the kikimore.



Insects are probably the most inspiring prototypes for monsters. Repulsive yet intriguing, they are weird and „fantastic“ even before their forms are modified. We had to have huge arthropods in *The Witcher*, but it was clear from the outset they could not simply be giant versions of existing creatures.

We devised the concept of the kikimore when somebody suggested introducing social monsters to the game. The kikimores are organized not unlike a termite colony. The queen lays eggs from which soldiers and workers then hatch. Soldiers defend the colony from enemies, while workers build structures and supply food. This division of roles had to be reflected in the game's AI mechanisms: workers turn aggressive only when attacked or when aggression is artificially induced in them, while soldiers fight any enemy they spot.

The beasts' physical appearance underlines their different places in the hierarchy. Workers are smaller, modeled after spiders, though the similarity is not obvious. The characteristic shape of their limbs and cephalothoraxes suffices to evoke repulsion.

Kikimore soldiers resemble beetles. They are more massive and protected by thick, chitinous armor. Their horned heads and torsos, as well as the sharp thorns on their legs, clearly demonstrate them to be dangerous creatures.



The kikimore warrior resembles a threatening beetle.



In concept drawings, the artists sought to emphasize the kikimore's repulsiveness.

The queen bears some resemblance to the soldiers, mainly because of her bulky body. She is a mass of insect abominations that is almost impossible to defeat in direct combat. She has no eyes, which would be useless at the bottom of her dark lair. The pieces of flesh that resemble ribs and hang from her abdomen (visible in the rendered image) can either be ovipositors or atrophied limbs that have no use in her function as a constant reproducer.



The kikimore is one of the most dangerous monsters in the game.





KOSHCHHEY

Korin turned to look. From behind the rubble, about a hundred paces away, emerged spidery legs with lumpy joints. A moment later, over the pile of stones came a torso, minimum six meters wide, flat as a plate, clay-colored, rough and covered in barbed growths. Four pairs of legs strode forward steadily, dragging the bowl-like corpus across the scree. The fifth pair of legs was disproportionately long and armed with huge pincers studded with sharp thorns and spikes.

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Road of No Return

This monster owes its name to Russian folk tales, in which Koshchay the Immortal is a murderous sorcerer who renders himself immortal by concealing his life's essence inside an egg. He does eventually perish – when the egg itself is shattered. In Sapkowski's short story *The Road of No Return*, the koshchey is a nearly immortal monster, or at least one that proves extremely difficult to kill – all by virtue of having been created through a magic ritual known as Alzur's Double Cross, which also made the beast enormous in size. In the story, the protagonists barely manage to kill the creature; in the game, Geralt must face this challenge alone.

While working on the concept art and model of the koshchey, the artists looked to the animal world for inspiration, as they had in creating kikimores. Sapkowski describes the beast as possessing the features of an arthropod – half-arachnid, half-crustacean. It moves surprisingly fast for its size and sudden strikes of its forelegs would surely instill terror in anyone suffering from arachnophobia.

The top illustration on the right presents the koshchey as drawn by Bogusław Polch for his comic book titled *The Road of No Return*, which is based on Sapkowski's story.

A koshchey attacking. Its forelegs are raised and ready to strike.





An illustration from Bogusław Polch's comic book The Road of No Return.



A drawing of the koshchey inspired by Sapkowski's descriptions of the beast.





NOONWRAITH

They crossed a bridge over a canal lush with water lilies and duckweed, and rode past a strip of cut meadows. At a distance, cultivated fields stretched as far as the eye could see.

"It's hard to believe this is the edge of the world, the end of civilization," said Dandelion. "Look, Geralt. Rye like gold – and a peasant on horseback could hide in that corn! Or those turnips – they're huge."

"Know about farming, do you?"

"We poets must know a little about everything," said Dandelion in a lofty tone. "Otherwise we would embarrass ourselves in our writing. You must learn, friend, learn. The fate of the world depends on farming, so farming is something worth knowing about."

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Edge of the World

Crops swaying in the fields on a windless day indicate that a noonwraith is nearby. These monsters kill humans who venture into the fields at noontime; thus, farmers return home or seek shelter in the shade at this time of day.

Our noonwraith appears in a picturesque location known simply as the Fields, where not a drop of rain has fallen in a very long time. We could not resist including this traditional Polish folk creature in our game, especially since a good part of the story plays out in rural areas. In the conceptual sketch, the noonwraith wields a sickle – a symbol of the harvest and of working in the fields.



The first sketch presented the general concept for the creature.



The noonwraith is a sun-burned old woman. Clothed in a linen dress, she hovers just above the ground, her hair white from constant exposure to the sun. Streaks of light drift about her, and when necessary she uses these to blind her opponents. The noonwraith's frock and shoes suggest she was once a young girl who, venturing into the Fields, joined in a spectral dance and thus entered the spirit world as a wraith.

The final illustration depicts a nightwraith, a creature that haunts the fields after dusk. The nightwraith resembles the noonwraith in many respects; she rules the Fields after dark and is associated with the moon. This creature is a dark reflection of the noonwraith, which is emphasized by colors chosen for the illustration.

The noonwraith draws her power from the sun's rays.



The nightwraith is a „dark reflection“ of the noonwraith.





STRIGA

Velerad jumped up from his chair.

"The princess looks like a striga!" he cried. "The most strigish striga I have heard of! Her Highness, the monarch's daughter, the damned bastard child, is four cubits tall and shaped like a barrel of beer. Her jaw stretches from ear to ear and is full of razor-like teeth, and her red eyes match the red strings on her head! Her clawed, wildcat paws hang to the very ground! I'm surprised we haven't sent likenesses of her to friendly courts! After all, the princess – the pox choke her – has turned fourteen. It's time she was married off to a prince!"

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Witcher

Geralt of Rivia made his first appearance in a story titled simply *The Witcher*. His task there was to lift the curse holding Princess Adda, who was born a striga. This seemingly simple story of a contract for a professional monster slayer proved to be a fascinating tale of jealousy and hatred. No wonder Geralt's literary debut served as the basis for the film that opens the game.

The striga also had to appear in the game itself. Initial ideas called for it to be the result of Salamandra's experiments, but we ultimately decided it would once more be Adda, possessed by a recurrence of the curse.

The concept for the striga follows faithfully its literary description. A foul, well-muscled monster, the cursed princess runs about on all fours. Her jaw extends from ear to ear, and her fingers end in claws capable of tearing a man to shreds. Her breasts and red hair are the sole reminders that the striga is, in fact, a young girl possessed by an evil curse.



The striga is a creature born of hatred.

Toward the end of the film, the striga reverts to human form. The design for the beast had to guarantee a smooth transition. The colored sketches illustrate how the striga's face was made similar to Adda's. One of them depicts the princess just after her transformation back into a young woman.

In the cinematic that introduces the game, the striga is deadly, aggressive, and bursting with hatred. At one point the beast begins to fear Geralt and for a moment behaves not unlike a little girl. Presenting the storm of emotions with which the creature grapples would have been impossible without an array of animations and facial expressions.



*The first concept sketch of the striga
by Przemysław Truściński.*



Adda's face deformed by the transformation.

Princess Adda as a human and as a striga – the sketch presents the similarities in facial features.

The striga in different poses – as seen in the film that opens the game.



Princess Adda just after Geralt has lifted the curse.



KING OF THE WILD HUNT

Astride the horse skeletons sat skeletal riders wearing rusty plate armor and chain mail, shredded coats, and dented and corroded helmets adorned with bullhorns and headdresses of ostrich and peacock feathers. Beneath their raised visors glowed the specters' bluish eyes. Their tattered banners rustled. At the head of the demonic cavalcade galloped an armed wraith, a crown upon his helmet, around his neck a pendant beating rhythmically against his breastplate.

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Swallow's Tower



A sketch of the King of the Wild Hunt.

This powerful being leads a retinue of wraith raiders in their mad rush across the sky. The Wild Hunt, like a comet, is considered an ill omen, a harbinger of disaster and war. The King of the Wild Hunt is an unusual opponent, if only because he is from another world – a fact well known to Sapkowski's fans.

When we decided that the King of the Wild Hunt would appear in the game, we knew he had a serious part to play. From beginning to end, this nightmarish ruler appears on Geralt's path as an oppressor and a portent of misery. The King of the Wild Hunt is linked to the forces of Destiny; he hovers just outside the main narrative, only appearing to remind the witcher of painful events or to provoke difficult discussions.

A silver sword may not be enough to defeat this foe.

Our protagonist's most powerful opponent is thus one of the game's most important and mysterious characters.

The King of the Wild Hunt wields a scythe – an attribute of death. Beneath his ragged robes, he wears elements of an ancient suit of armor. The ornaments on his clothing and crown evoke associations with flesh-eating maggots.

Models of the specters making up the Wild Hunt were based on this concept drawing.

The King of the Wild Hunt with the scythe – an attribute of Death.





WYVERN

In a grossly small cage, curled up in a ball, lay a lizard covered in dark, peculiarly adorned scales. When the beaked one struck the cage with his rod, the reptile thrashed about, running its scales across the bars. It stretched its long neck and emitted a piercing hiss, demonstrating sharp, white, conical teeth that contrasted starkly with the nearly black scales around its maw.

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Time of Disdain

Ordinary folk often mistake wyverns for dragons. Witchers, however, immediately recognize these flying lizards, which tread upon the ground on two heavily-muscled legs. They also know that when fighting this beast, they must avoid the venomous stinger at the end of its tail and its jaws that bristle with deadly teeth.



This sketch presents the wyvern as a viper-like creature.



A color concept drawing of the wyvern.

The concept for the wyvern emerged from the human fear of reptiles. With its flat head and long neck, the creature resembles a snake; its extended tail only strengthens this impression. The dinosaur-like hump on its back makes it all the more terrifying. The bright colors of the sketch immediately suggest a venomous creature. Thin, long spikes seem to protrude directly from its curved spine, and along with the beast's general posture serve to emphasize its malicious and treacherous nature.

If you are not a witcher, you had better not mess with the wyvern.

On one of his quests, Geralt has a chance to fight alongside a group of these beasts. It is a pleasure to witness the destruction they spread amongst foes unfamiliar with the ways of fighting these fearsome creatures.



The rendered model of the wyvern.





FLEDER

"Have you ever heard of a vampire ripping its victim to shreds?"

"No, it never happens that way."

"Never with lesser vampires (...). From what I know alps, catacans, mulae, bruxae and nosferat do not mutilate their victims terribly. Fleders and ekimmae, on the other hand, can be brutal with the corpses of their prey."

Andrzej Sapkowski, Baptism by Fire



A concept drawing presenting all the vital features of the fleder's anatomy.

The fleder is a lesser vampire. Its appetite for blood is the only thing it shares with the noble princes of the night. A creature with animal instincts, deprived of any human impulses, it seemed inappropriate to make him a stereotypical vampire with flat, black hair and dressed in a long black coat. These obvious attributes eliminated, we had to devise features less typical of a bloodsucker. Its head – triangular, with a flat face and horn-like protrusions – renders it similar to a vampire. The concept art and model depicted certain bat-like features, including the monster's face and ears (which became horns). With its glowing red eyes the fleder also resembles a demon, while fans of Coppola's movie may note a similarity with the aged Dracula.

The fleder is not a good flier, the membranes under its arms allowing only short jumps and attacks from above. Though not particularly smart, it knows that it gains an advantage and increases its chance of victory by suddenly attacking unsuspecting victims. Since the fleder's arms are also wings, its hands have thin extensions that enable it to pin down its prey. The long, prehensile toes on the beast's feet allow it to hang head down from the ceiling as shown in the rendered image.



Fleders can soar into the air and attack from above.



The fleder – a lesser vampire.



BRUXA

She was in the dry fountain, clinging to the dolphin's back, embracing the moss-covered stone with tiny hands so white they seemed translucent. Enormous, wide-open eyes the color of anthracite peered at him from beneath her tangled storm of black hair. (...) The creature atop the dolphin followed him with her gaze, turning her little face. Her expression was one of indescribable longing and so enchanting that again he heard the song (...)

Andrzej Sapkowski, A Grain of Truth

In Sapkowski's stories, this silent and seductively beautiful creature resembles a rusalka. In fact, she is a vampire, and one of the deadliest beings Geralt must face. The concept art, and later the model, had to capture all the traits of this alluring yet frightful fiend.

The bruxa is built on contradictions. Her white pupils and blank face contrast sharply with her feminine silhouette. The long scarlet claws could be an elegant body adornment or simply marked with the fluids of a recent victim. Dried blood covers her breasts and mouth, leaving no doubt that the bruxa is a vampire, a monster in a beautiful woman's body.

The enlarged image of her torso reveals the texture details. The bruxa's skin is ghastly pale, wrinkled, and somewhat transparent, rendering visible the blood vessels underneath.

In the game, these female vampires inhabit dark crypts and ancient ruins. They approach gracefully and are easy to overlook. The abrupt attacks of bruxae stun Geralt; while he is helpless, they suck his blood to regain strength. The wounds they inflict hemorrhage intensely. An eerie cry echoing through corridors indicates an approaching bruxa – at once both beauty and the beast.



A colored drawing of the bruxa.



The bruxa – a deadly seductress.



Initial concepts of the monster.





VODYANOI

"The ocean is vast, Agloval. No one has ever seen what is there, beyond the horizon, if there is anything there at all. The ocean is larger than any wilderness to which you have exiled elves. It is less accessible than any mountain or valley where you might have massacred bobolaks. And there, at the ocean bottom, lives a race that uses weapons, knows the secrets of working metal. Beware, Agloval. If archers begin following the divers to the surface, you will provoke a war with something you know nothing of. The thing you wish to disturb may prove a hornets' nest. I advise you to leave them the sea; the sea is not for you."

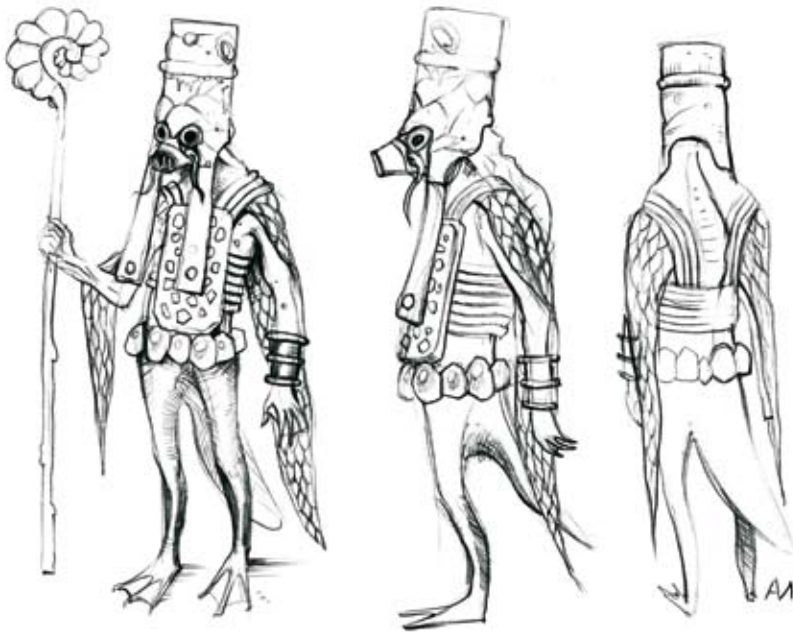
Andrzej Sapkowski, A Bit of Devotion

The race of underwater creatures described in the short story A Bit of Devotion is undoubtedly intriguing: a civilization thrives in the depths of the sea, developing in parallel to those on land. This motif provided an opportunity to tell a tale of two worlds colliding. In the game, relations between the vodyanoi (inhabitants of the Underwater City whom humans contemptuously refer to as „fishpeople“) and the villagers of Murky Waters are tense. A mysterious deity named the Lady of the Lake and, of course, our protagonist, Geralt of Rivia, step in to mediate.

The sketches depict members of two vodyanoi castes as well as acolytes of the menacing water god Dagon. The artist concentrated on clothing and accessories in an effort to emphasize the distinctive nature of the underwater civilization. The priest wields a staff and wears a high hat with straps of leather falling on his shoulders – objects resembling the staff, miter and vestment of a bishop. His mask and the bracelets on his hand emphasize that the vodyanoi know metallurgy and view metal as a rare and valuable resource. The remaining elements of his ceremonial outfit feature more common materials: his belt is made of oyster shells and stones, the straps of his vest of leather, his stone-encrusted breast-plate of wood. The stones have a religious significance connected with the cult of the water god known as Dagon.



This detailed sketch of the fish-man presents his apparatus for breathing on land and various ornaments made of precious stones.



This Dagon worshipper venerates the evil underwater god.

The vodyan warrior wears a lighter outfit. His armor does not restrain his movement, enabling him to fight ably both under water and on land. As vodyanoi absorb oxygen naturally only from water, he wears a mask that allows him to breathe on land. Modeled after old gas masks, this breathing apparatus grants the warrior and all vodyanoi a singular appearance.

The straps and plate on the warrior's chest are also lighter. They are not armor, but (as in the case of priests) religious objects. The netting evokes connotations with water, and was probably looted off of fishermen during a raid.

In the early development stages, vodyanoi – as opposed to other monsters – were supposed to use weapons, hence the harpoon in the sketched warrior's hand. This idea was ultimately abandoned; even though they are thinking creatures, fishpeople use their claws in combat.

The third sketch depicts a vodyan dissident and worshipper of the menacing water god Dagon. The schismatic and his comrades emphasize their autonomy by wearing a different mask, one modeled after a knight's helmet. The breast plate is larger than that worn by warriors, because Dagon's acolytes consider themselves to be priests.



A vodyanoi warrior. The concept drawings depicted him wielding a weapon.



DAGON

With only a slight churning to mark its rise to the surface, the thing slid into view above the dark waters. Vast, Polyphemus-like, and loathsome, it darted like a stupendous monster of nightmares to the monolith, about which it flung its gigantic scaly arms, (...) bowed its hideous head and gave vent to certain measured sounds.

H.P. Lovecraft, Dagon

When it became clear that there would be a water god in the game, the choice of his name proved rather obvious. It should seem familiar not solely to Lovecraft fans, because Dagon, an ancient creature, is also mentioned in the Old Testament.



In this drawing the artist emphasized Dagon's reptilian and amphibian features.

In *The Witcher*, Dagon is a minor deity and ruler of the Underwater City. He is worshipped by the vodyanoi and a sect of swamp inhabitants. His horns, framing the head like an aureole, bring to mind ancient demons, while the embellishments on his body emphasize that the vodyanoi are a civilization of thinking creatures rather than another breed of monsters. Dagon's worshippers highly value precious stones, particularly turquoise. The vodyanoi use the latter to make decorative elements for their artworks, clothing, and buildings. The eyes of Dagon's statue on Black Tern Island are made of this stone, which also appears in other parts of the temple and on the breast plates of vodyan mages and warriors. The god himself likewise wears turquoise-encrusted adornments.

As one would expect of a divinity, Dagon is a huge creature, towering above his worshippers and humans alike. Only the golem's model is taller. His limbs are actually fins, rendering him a great swimmer, but rather awkward on dry land. As most of the time he lays dormant in depths where the sun does not shine, he does not rely on sight, and his eyes resemble narrow cracks. Dagon emerges from the deep only when summoned by ritual.

Dagon – an underwater god worshipped by both humans and vodyanoi.



Geralt striking at Dagon.







ARMORED HOUND

"Progress," he said solemnly, "will illuminate the shadows, for that is its purpose, just as, without looking far, the purpose of an anus is to shit. It will ever be lighter, we will fear darkness and the Evil lurking there less and less. There may come a day when we will altogether cease believing that something lurks in the dark. We will scoff at those fears, call them childish, be embarrassed about them! But darkness will exist forever and always. And Evil will persist in that darkness, with its fangs and claws, murder and blood. So witchers will always be needed."

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Lady of the Lake

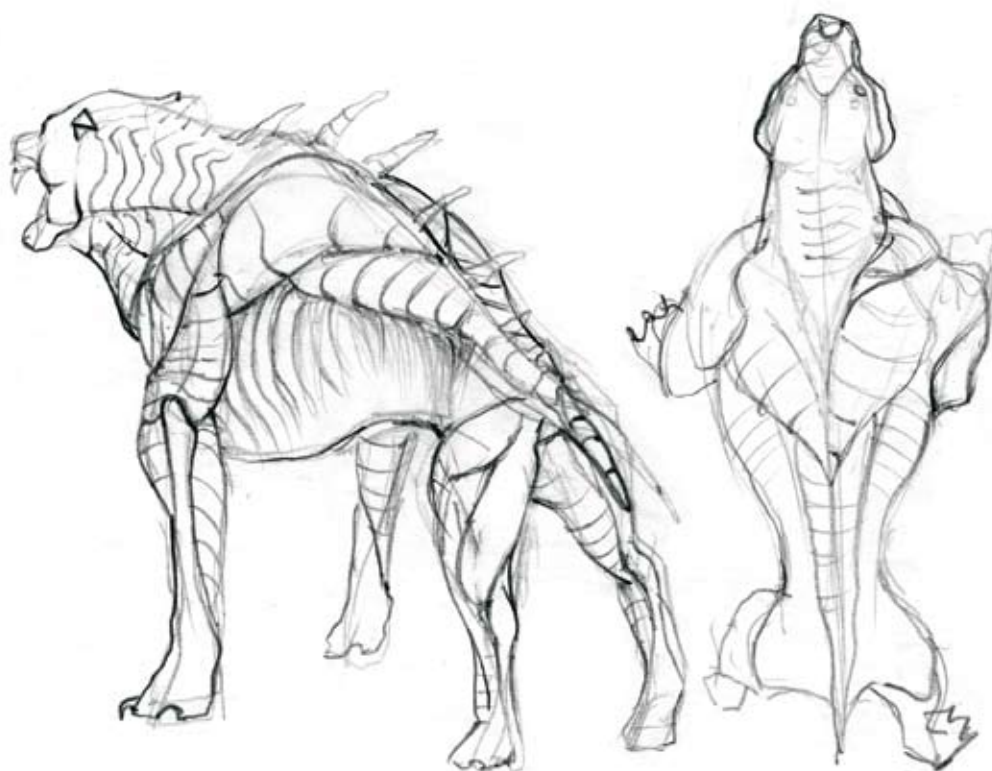


Salamandra – the ominous organization which the witcher must defeat – uses animals in its initial experiments with mutagens. These attempts result in mutated bloodhounds: primitive, vicious creatures that beast-masters lead on chains before unleashing them to wreak havoc.

The creature's silhouette was modeled after that of a fighting dog. Its head evolved gradually into a shape similar to that of a pit bull's head. As with other monsters, we strove to make the creature resemble extinct beasts, predecessors of today's predators. The mutations pursued by Salamandra were meant to emphasize the wildest and most primitive characteristics of the bloodhound's ancestors, to some extent reversing evolution.

The crude armor in which the creature is clad underlines its barbaric nature. An armored hound of the Order wears kilograms of steel without noticing their weight or experiencing any discomfort. The armor protects the beast's vital organs and underlines that it is no wild monster, but a creation of man.

Details of the armored hound's anatomy.





A concept drawing of the armored hound's muzzle.



In this sketch, the hound resembles a dog even less.

The armored hound is a product of the first mutagen experiments.





MUTANT

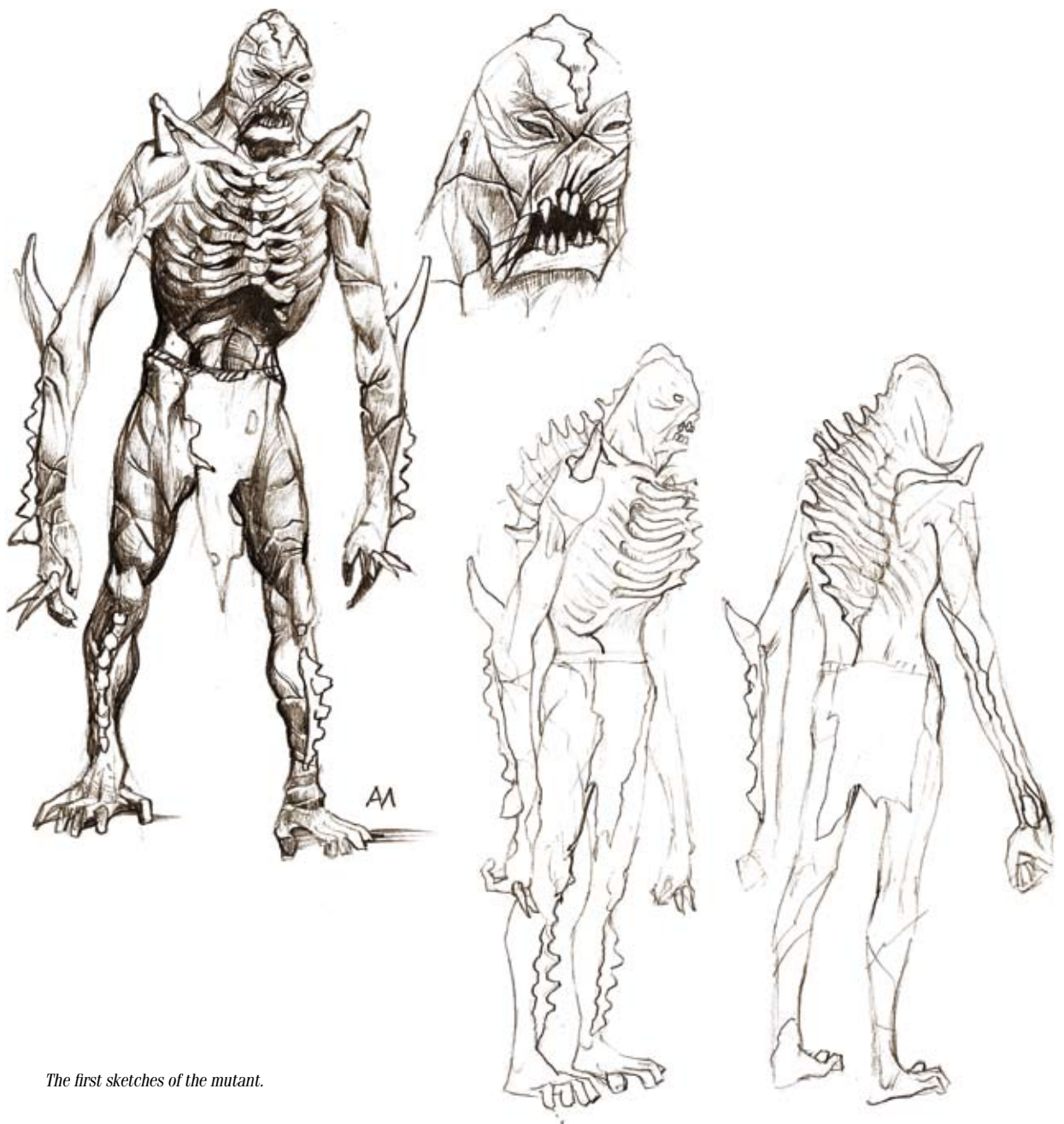
On the third day all the children died – save one, a boy of just ten years. He thrashed about violently, madly, and fell of a sudden into a deep stupor. His eyes were glassy; his hands incessantly gripped the bedding or waved about in the air as if in search of falling feathers. His breathing was loud and rattling; a cold, sticky, foul-smelling sweat appeared on his skin. A potion was administered intravenously and another attack ensued. This time blood flowed from his nose, his coughing turned to vomiting; the boy weakened entirely and became limp.

The symptoms persisted for another two days. Then the child's skin, drenched thus far in sweat, turned dry and feverish. His pulse, no longer full and firm, remained palpable though lazy rather than quick. He did not wake once, nor did he utter any cries. On the seventh day, the boy awoke as if from slumber. He opened his eyes – and his eyes were like those of an adder...

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Blood of the Elves

A fast, agile, and cunning opponent – such is the mutant, a result of the first series of experiments conducted on humans by the Order of the Flaming Rose. It is not yet a perfect weapon, but the mutant provides excellent support to the Order's heavily armored forces.

For the Order, this creature is a sort of test, a prelude to the proper experiment that leads to the creation of the perfect warrior. This monster had to look like an abortive prototype. The exposed bones of the chest, missing skin, and strongly deformed face suggest that the experimenters did not have full control of the deformations. Bony crests on the beast's back, head, and forearms indicate that the genes of a monster were used in the mutation. The detailed sketch depicts the mutant's head, its muscle layers in disarray after shrinking, tearing, and shifting during mutation.

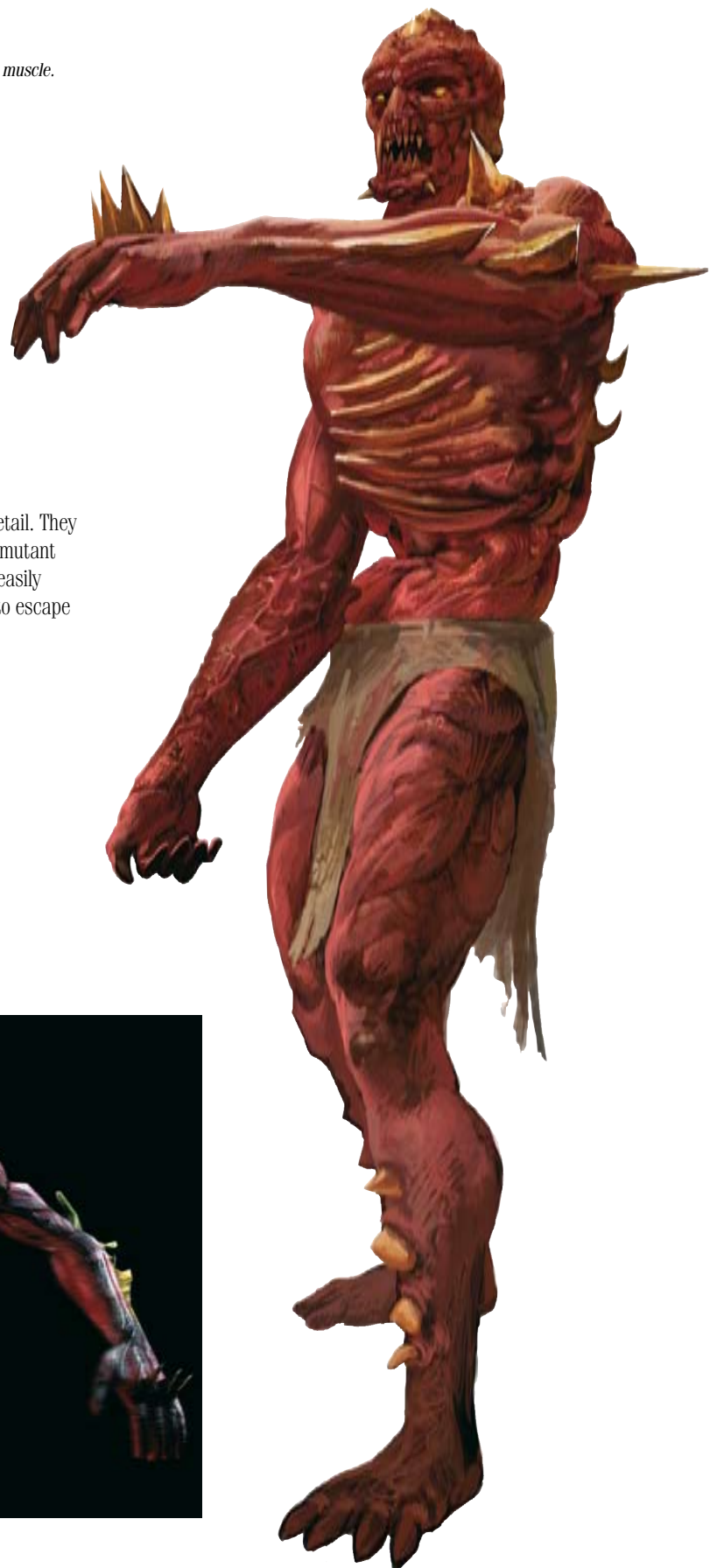


The first sketches of the mutant.

The colors on the sketch create an impression of exposed muscle.

The creature's feet are an intriguing anatomical detail. They are, in fact, another pair of hands that render the mutant similar to a monkey. With four hands, the mutant easily climbs trees and jumps from limb to limb in a bid to escape or to await its foes in ambush.

Mutants are fast and agile creatures.







GREATER MUTANT

*"I witnessed the autopsy of one," said the mage.
"Geralt, what we found inside the skull and spine
was impossible to identify. Red sponge of some kind.
The internal organs all in disarray, some missing
altogether. Everything covered in moving cilia and
pink and blue scraps. A six-chamber heart. Two
chambers practically atrophied, but present. What say
you to that?"
"I've seen humans with eagle talons instead of hands,
with wolf fangs. People with additional joints, organs
and senses. All products of mages fumbling with
magic."
"You have seen diverse mutants, you say," said the
sorcerer raising his head. "And how many did you
slay for money, in accordance with your witcherly
vocation? Hm?"*

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Lesser Evil



As yet uncolored, the sketch provides merely a general idea of the monster's appearance.



The greater mutant seen from all sides.

These huge creatures are humans who were exposed to the process of mutation. This violent transformation stripped them of all humanity and transformed them into strong, aggressive beasts possessed by destructive rage.

The author of the concept drawings captured the greater mutant's main features: its imposing, barbarian stature and the monstrous facial expression and bodily deformations deriving from the transformation. The artist emphasized the beast's mass and muscularity by stripping it of its skin, as shown in the colored illustration. The bony, protruding spikes indicate that its skeleton was also strengthened. Rendering the mutant similar to some sort of archaic monster, they also suggest the transformation was extremely painful.

A mass of muscle, protruding spikes, mighty fangs – a challenge for the witcher.



The greater mutant was designed to be a barbaric brute.



GREATER BROTHERS

It's obvious. They seek to mutate the child, subject him to change and to the Trial of the Grasses, but they don't know how. Of the old ones, only Vesemir remains alive, and he was never more than a fencing instructor. The laboratory in Kaer Morhen's cellars is a dusty collection of vials full of legendary potions, alembics, ovens, and flasks... Yet none of them knows how to use these. This is indisputable: the mutagenic potions were developed long ago by a renegade mage, and his successors improved them over the years, magically controlling the process of Change to which they subjected children. At some point the chain ruptured. Magic knowledge and skills were lost. The witchers have their herbs and the Grasses, they have their laboratory, they know the potion formulae, but they have no mage.

Andrzej Sapkowski, The Blood of the Elves



A mutated knight clad in armor that no human could wear.

A detailed sketch of the armored mutant, the Flaming Rose emblem on his chest.



A Greater Brother with hussar wings.

The hero encounters these mutated knights of the Flaming Rose toward the end of the game. The madman who subjected them to mutation dreamt of creating better, stronger, more resistant and obedient human beings. He fulfills his dream only in part, for his knights become something very near to monsters.

When Geralt spots these armored beasts alongside normal knights, he sees first hand the terrible effects of their mutation. To strip these monstrous and gloomy mutants of a measure of pathos, we jokingly christened them „Greater Brothers,” a name that would ultimately remain with them.

The concept drawings present the beings' evolution. They are protected by heavy armor that only creatures with overdeveloped muscles and unnaturally strong bones could possibly wear. Wings are attached to the spiked spaulders, bringing to mind military banners and evoking the image of hussars, a type of Polish heavy cavalry.

The armor they wear and the shields and maces they carry remind us that they were once knights of the Order. Obviously, the size of these devices has been adjusted to the monstrous scale of their bearers. Their allegiance to the Order of the Flaming Rose is indicated by the emblem on their chest, visible in the colored sketch.



A Greater Brother striking with his mace.



CREATING CHARACTER MODELS

INTRODUCTION

In the five years during which *The Witcher* was in production, the means of creating game characters changed many times. The changes were made in response to increasing expectations regarding computer game graphics and to new ideas for improved character presentation. Initially, each model was made up of barely over one thousand triangles mapped with a single color map (texture) having a resolution of 512 by 512 pixels. The character models were modular, consisting of a dozen or more volumes. Currently, each character model in *The Witcher* is a single volume constructed, in many cases, of more than five thousand triangles and enhanced with an entire palette of shaders that utilize four textures with a resolution of 1024 by 1024 pixels each. Thus, as our methods evolved, the work that went into each model increased several fold. We wanted to produce the best possible game with the best possible graphics, to make *The Witcher* stand up to scrutiny and to competition from other contemporary titles.



The Witcher, character model creation stages. Left to right: mesh, low poly model, normal map model, normal map and color texture model

CHARACTERS

The game ultimately includes over one hundred thirty figures, many of which have several texture versions. Over two hundred characters populate Vizima and its environs. Men, women and children of all states – peasants, townsfolk, and nobility – walk the city's streets. They include craftsmen, traders, wealthy merchants, as well as priests, beggars, and prostitutes. This diversity and multiplicity was required to create a living city where life proceeds as in a real city. Our figures stroll about, sweep the sidewalks in front of their homes, practice fencing, and even conduct alchemical experiments. All these activities required various animations that we created using motion capture technology. Geralt can interact with any character, so a system of emotional indicators was added to assist expression. The system produces the impression that game characters live their own lives, reacting to the experiences life throws at them with sadness, delight, or anger.

The protagonist, Geralt of Rivia, is our most important character. Geralt had to be absolutely exceptional and polished. In producing the concept drawing, Przemysław "Trust" Truściński underlined the 'dark' side of the witcher's profession, equipping him with the tools of his trade: a trophy hook, a slotted belt for potion vials, and silver-studded gauntlets. "Trust" also made the character "handsome as a bandit." With time, the white-haired, scar-faced witcher evolved into a charismatic man who looks at once handsome and ominous. In final form, Geralt is made up of more than ten thousand triangles that enabled us to present all the nuances of the character.

MONSTERS

In a game about a professional monster slayer, the models of creatures are as important as those of other supporting characters. The creators of these models faced the difficult task of breathing life into beasts proposed by designers. The game includes approximately thirty monster models, though this number grows to seventy if textured versions are included.

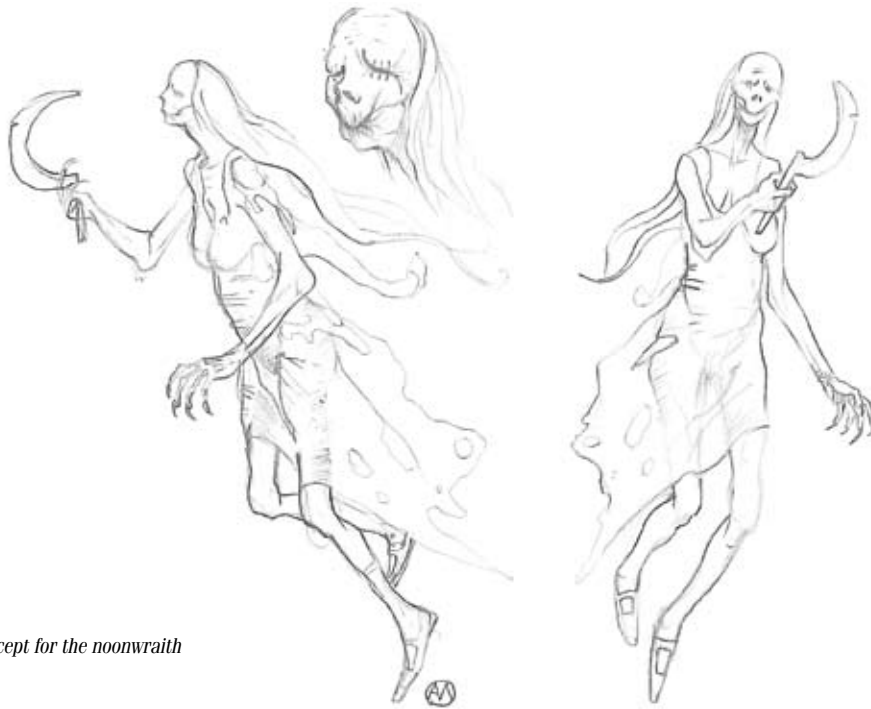
The technology for producing monsters differs from that for producing human or humanoid figures. Monsters do not need separate, high poly heads, because they rarely engage in dialogue. However, producing a design and then a model based on a brief written description taken from a book can be challenging. On the other hand, monster design is limited only by technical barriers, so one can let one's imagination run free.

Sapkowski's world lacks monsters typical of the fantasy genre like orcs and goblins. The author himself devised most of this world's creatures, while casting others, deeply rooted in mass culture, in new, highly non-stereotypical roles. Monsters in *The Witcher* had to be both original and realistic, while befitting the world as portrayed. Fleders that hang like bats from the rafters of abandoned buildings, drowners that lurk just beneath the surface of swamp waters, or noonwraiths that dance in fields when the sun is at its zenith are not only providers of experience points, but pieces that shape this particular fantasy world as a whole.

We drew inspiration from animals and especially insects, amazing for their diversity and exotic body structures. The frightener, koshchey, and kikimore are based on enlarged photos of arthropods. Elements of animal anatomy can be seen in almost all models, from the fish-like vodyanoi to the snake-like wyvern.

THE CONCEPT

The creative process begins when the game script calls for Geralt to encounter a new enemy or supporting character. Information is collected on the character's race, distinguishing features, modus operandi, and the weapons he or she wields. This description is assigned to an artist, who produces a general vision of the new figure presented in a series of concept drawings. These drawings are produced quickly, in large numbers and variations. They present a creature's most important features, those that will make it memorable and easily recognizable. The monochrome sketch that is approved becomes the basis for further development.



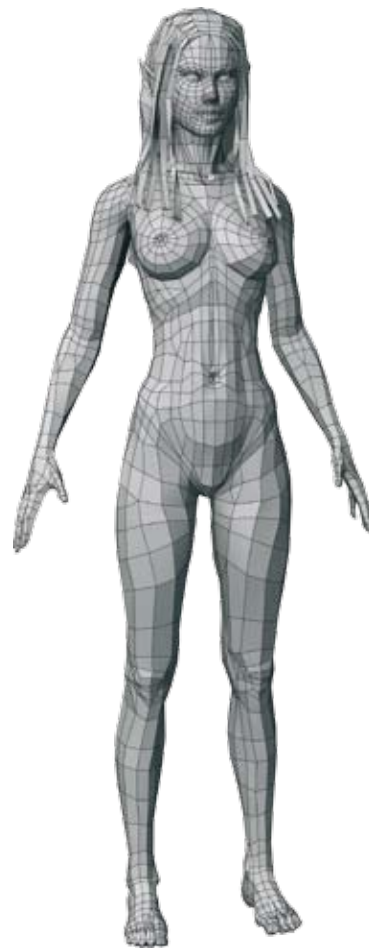
Concept for the noonwraith

An approved concept may require additional sketches illustrating complex elements, details, or distinguishing features that need to be correctly rendered in the final model of the figure. Examples might include accessories and adornments in the decorative style of a given race, visible tattoos, or even details of a monster's appendages that reveal its attack methods. The final drawing of each figure is colored in an effort to make it more vivid and to provide a guideline for the artist creating textures for the final model.



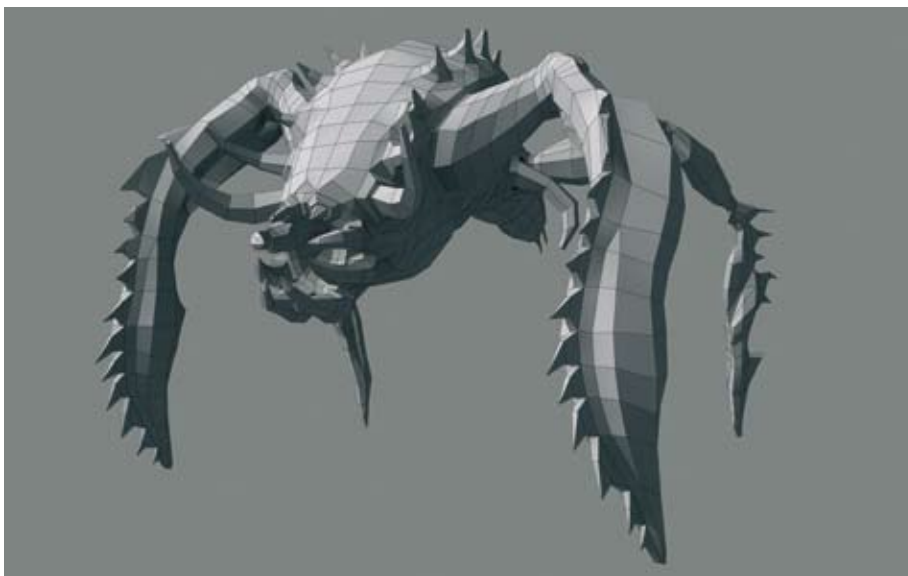
THE MODEL

The completed concept drawing is given to a 3D artist produces the character model. Before starting, he establishes the limits that will apply to the model, deriving primarily from player equipment capabilities. The number of triangles that can make up a figure is the first essential piece of information. This rarely exceeds five thousand, though larger monsters or significant characters can consist of as many as twice that number. Equally important are the bones and skeletal structure, which will be used to animate the figure. Protruding armor elements, spaulders, or belts can be problematic, as they might intersect other model parts in animations, which must be avoided. It is also worth carefully considering any elements that will respond to game physics. These might include hair, clothing, or even the breasts of game heroines.



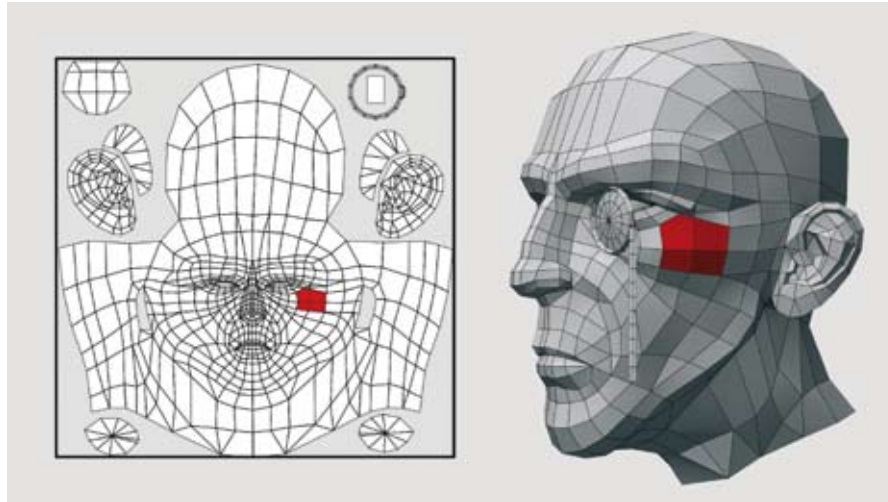
Mesh of the driad

Humanoid models have two parts: the head and body. Facial expressions must be visible in the close-ups that occur during dialogue, so a separate set of textures is produced for the head. The number of polygons in this body part is often comparable to that in the rest of the body. Monster modeling is governed by other rules: the protagonist rarely speaks to monsters, so their head and body can be a single, integrated volume. This also means that they can have more fanciful shapes.



UV MAPPING

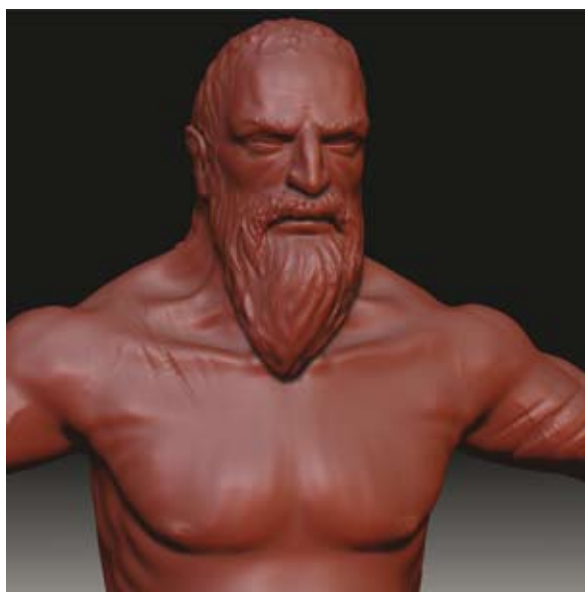
The next stage in the process, UV mapping, is required to prepare the model for the application of maps, including color, reflection, and normal maps. This operation consists of translating the surfaces of a 3D model into a flat 2D surface called a texture.



The same section of a model highlighted on its 3d mesh and its UV map

NORMAL MAPS

Once the low polygon model is complete, it is time for the hardest task – namely, creating the normal map. This process consists of projecting a high polygon model with a great geometric density upon a low polygon model. The high polygon model can have several million triangles and must be produced in parts due to hardware limitations. This projection makes the low-poly model uncannily resemble the high-density model. A well prepared normal map is betrayed as such only by the model's hard edges.

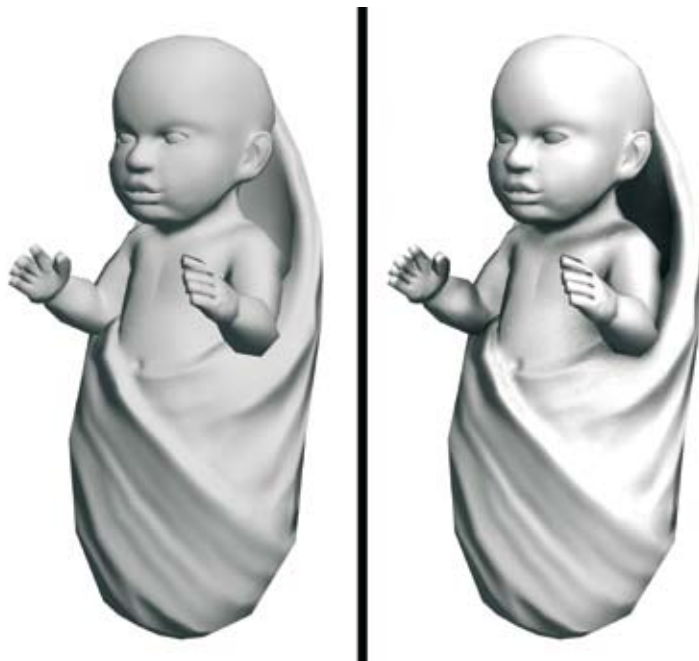




A normal map projection. Left to right: pure low poly model, high poly equivalent, normal map textures for the head and body, low poly model with applied normal map

AMBIENT MAPPING

Before color is added, the high poly model is used to prepare the ambient map. This texture is an excellent base for the color map as it brings out all the grooves and folds of the model. Like a normal map, the ambient map is produced from the high poly model for application on the low poly model



DIFFUSE

The color texture vastly affects the final appearance of a character. In an effort to achieve maximum realism, it is produced from photographs that are stitched together and modified to cover the entire model. This does not consist of simply pasting fragments of photos on a model; much work is required to make each color texture satisfactory.

Once the color map is complete, the model is practically ready. Additional textures, however, are applied to augment the character model's realism.



SPECULAR

The specular texture controls light reflection on the model's surface. A relatively simple texture to produce, it significantly improves the figure's appearance. For instance, it is used to make armor shine and any garments worn underneath it appear matte. This texture is added to each character model.



TRANSLUCSION

When applied to a model, translucence textures cause backlight to shine through selected model elements. This effect is usually applied to character ears and monster membranes. These textures are used very rarely in the game.



ALPHA

Transparency textures can produce many interesting effects that vastly improve the general appearance and complexity of models. Apart from obvious applications like hair, they can also be used to create tattered clothing and fur.

SKIN



The completed model is assigned to a technical artist, who has the task of preparing the model for animation. With this in mind, the technical artist adds a skeleton, i.e. the model's internal structure that will actually be animated. Model parts that are to move are assigned to the 'bones' of this skeleton.

Paweł Mielniczuk
3D Artist



MONSTER GLOSSARY

ALGHOUL – A particularly large ghoul that is fattened and craves warm meat is called an alghoul. It prefers to kill its victims, because it loves to eat, but it also likes to prepare its own meals.

ARCHESPORE – Archespores caused the witchers to consider adding herbicide to their arsenal. Fortunately, fire proved an equally efficient remedy for these cursed plants, and using the Igni Sign does not require carrying an inconvenient tank on one's back.

ARMORED HOUND – This mutated and heavily armored hound of the Order is actually a small tank. It does not have a cannon, but it gladly lunges at opponents, knocks them down, and rips their throats open with a single snap of its jaws. Armored hounds are always hungry, so they usually devour their prey, which also makes them more fuel efficient than tanks.

BARGHEST – These creatures, summoned by the Beast, haunt Vizima's outskirts. There are those who claim they are ordinary dogs transformed into monsters by some curse; others believe they came from the spirit world to torment the town's inhabitants. Packs of barghests appear out of the blue, in the middle of the night, to kill those who are late getting home.

BASILISK – Legend has it this venomous lizard is native to the deserts of Zerrikania. The fact that witchers often encounter basilisks in dungeons and cellars contradicts the legend and suggests these creatures can reproduce under any conditions like many of their nasty monster brethren.

THE BEAST – The list of misfortunes that can befall the inhabitants of a village includes plague, war, and taxes. The worst misfortune, however, entails the appearance of a ghostly hellhound known simply as „The Beast.“ Many bad things can be said about this creature, but they all come down to two things: blood and pain. Lots of blood. And lots of pain.

BLOEDZUIGER – Travelers crossing swamps can be sure to encounter both leeches and bloedzuigers. The latter also feed on blood, but their gullets are particularly large and their stomachs are filled with acid, so they suck and digest both their victims' blood and intestines. Unlike leeches, bloedzuigers are rarely used in medicine.

BRUXA – Beauty and the beast in one: a female vampire with a gorgeous body and an insatiable appetite for blood. The bruxa is dangerous for two reasons: it is an incredibly agile, steel-resistant opponent, and also a born manipulator capable of bending every man to her will.

CEMETAUR – The most powerful of all necrophages, the true king of the necropolis. A cemetaur spells certain death to anyone but a witcher. This is a well-known fact among grave-robbers and all who live near battlefields.

COCKATRICE – Common folk say this beast is born from an egg laid by a rooster. Malicious and aggressive when young, it grows extremely large for a bird. When it makes its nest in the dark corner of a dungeon, it defends its territory to the death – its own or the intruder's.

DAGON – This underwater god, worshiped by vodyanoi and a sect of humans, waits at the lake bottom for the right configuration of stars. Since it is not certain when this will come (or if it will come at all), it whiles away the time terrorizing all who live both under the water's surface and on land. So it does what ancient, underwater beasts do best, and what we all love them for.

DAGON WORSHIPPER – Like every evil, ancient god, Dagon needs loyal and fanatical followers who can give the world a taste of the impending doom that will ensue with the coming of their lord. Recruited from among the vodyanoi, Dagon worshippers do this perfectly – unless they run into a witcher.

DEVOURER – They say the tale of Baba Yaga was devised by a man who happened upon a devourer. If so, a disclaimer is required: the tale was softened. It provides only a faint idea of what can happen to a stray traveler who should have the misfortune of passing near a devourer's lair.

DOG – Everyone knows what a dog is. Usually, man's best friend is no target for a witcher's sword. Still, it may so happen that a dog becomes wild, cursed, unnaturally ravenous, or all of the above. In these instances, a witcher may need to play dog catcher.

DROWNED DEAD – Irredeemable criminals who end their lives in the waters of Lake Vizima become drowned dead, a very dangerous variety of drowner. Fate refused them a chance to amend their ways and return to society, so they remain villains after death, drowning absolutely innocent citizens.

DROWNER – They say that whatever hangs, shall not drown. Unfortunately, sometimes the bodies of hanged criminals are thrown into the lake. The weight of the villains' crimes causes them return as drowners. Since bad things do not befall the wicked, to get rid of a drowner, you must bear the cost of hiring a good witcher.

ECHINOPS – Born of curses, these monstrous plants emerge wherever a murder or other malicious deed was committed – if the crime in question was never atoned for. Bursting with ill will, they attack all the living, whether honest and pious or sinful and mean.

FLEDER – Fleders are lesser vampires, but this description can be deceiving, for lesser does not mean weak and stupid. True, they are primitive and bear a closer relation to animals than to humans; but when they drop on their prey from above, they can be as dangerous as their noble cousins. Even to a witcher.

FRIGHTENER – The frightener is nearly invincible, especially when controlled by a mage. Even witchers prefer to avoid fighting this beast if they can. Fortunately, this overgrown insect is sensitive to loud noises which deafen it and render it defenseless.

GARKAIN – A vampire so foul that the mere sight of it paralyzes opponents, especially sensitive ones. Apart from using its ugliness as a weapon, the garkain knows a whole variety of ways to pin down its victims and suck their blood.

GHOUL – After the Great War, necrophages generally grew bolder and multiplied in the Northern Kingdoms. Ghouls are the most common corpse-eaters and usually roam around in packs. For a ghoul, a living human is raw material that must be processed before it can become a meal. Shredded to pieces with fangs and claws, the human corpse should then be left to age.

GOLEM – Frustrating jobs happen in every profession. Golem contracts are just such a job for witchers, as they involve slashing through solid rock animated by magic. Luckily, what is brought to life by a lightning bolt can very well be destroyed by one. This is something we all truly wish the golem, from the very bottom of our hearts.

GRAVEIR – There is no greater delicacy for the graveir than marrow from the cracked bones of a dead man. When feeding, this creature becomes very attentive to guests. A witcher appearing during lunchtime, silver sword in hand, can expect to be invited to join the meal – sadly, though, not in a manner that in any way conforms to the general rules of hospitality.

GREATER BROTHERS – These mutated knights are clad in heavy armor and wield humongous shields, making them hard nuts to crack, even for a witcher. The only thing worse than a Greater Brother is a monster that uses weapons with great skill and adroitly employs combat tactics that have been tried and tested on the world's battlefields.

IFRIT – Ifrits are genies from the Plane of Fire. When summoned, they generally do not grant wishes, unless the summoning party wishes to die or to have someone killed. These creatures are undoubtedly intelligent, but mortals cannot penetrate their minds. That is just as well, because their visions of an all-encompassing inferno would most certainly drive any human mad.

KIKIMORE QUEEN – Witchers know hundreds of ways of fighting monsters. When tackling the queen of a kikimore swarm, only one method is effective – run like the wind. This tactic makes it hard to kill the beast, but it does ensure survival, which is a kind of victory.

KIKIMORE WARRIOR – Kikimore warriors defend workers and their queen from intruders. They are very dutiful in this, killing anything that comes near the colony. Luckily, their territory is easily recognized as it is devoid of all animal life and littered with skeletons picked clean. Keep your eyes open when exploring the swamp!

KIKIMORE WORKER – Kikimore workers are resourceful, cautious, and as industrious as ants. It is hard to believe that these spider-like creatures have so few admirers willing to observe and emulate them. Perhaps this is because researchers and collectors of insects seldom return from expeditions to kikimore colonies, and thus never disseminate their findings about these splendid creatures.

KING OF THE WILD HUNT – No enemy is more terrifying than the King of the Wild Hunt, who leads a horde of ghastly riders across the sky. Doom incarnate, he fears no opponent, for he can always decide that his adversary is doomed, which usually determines the outcome of any clash.

KOSHCHEY – The koshchey is created through Alzur's Double Cross, a vile ritual known to some sorcerers. It is a member of that infamous group of gigantic beasts that can cause destruction on a massive scale while killing droves of people. Neither a crab nor a spider, it is tough as nails. Even a witcher might find the soft meat inside hard to get at.

MUTANT – Scientific progress requires sacrifice. No one knows this better than the victims of mutants, beastly creatures bred using mutagens. Mutants are a step toward the creation of a superhuman; their makers can assume the experiment is progressing nicely given the beasts' strength, resistance, and cruelty.

MUTANT ASSASSIN – Mutation and training makes witchers excellent killers. The problem is their conscience, which prevents them from carrying out political assassinations or causing terror among common folk. The laws of the market say that if there's demand, it must be satisfied as soon as possible – which is why Salamandra created the mutant assassin.

GREATER MUTANT – While ingenuity and technique have their advantages, sometimes a sweeping blow with a huge club is the best solution in combat. That is why Salamandra created Greater Mutants. After all, someone (or something) has to wield that huge club.

MIDDAY BRIDE – Two bad things can happen to a girl on her wedding day: a runaway bridegroom or transformation into a noonwraith. The latter seems to be worse, as it limits the list of wedding gifts to those people who enter the fields at high noon. They become easy prey for this wraith who wears a wedding garland on her head.

NIGHTWRAITH – When the sun sets, the fields become the domain of midnight demons who draw their power from moonlight. Dark as the night itself and filled with grief, they roam the fields lit by silver light. Woe to those who are spotted by a nightwraith.

NOONWRAITH – These monsters appear in fields when the sun is at its highest. Swaying grains on a windless day announce their arrival. They dance in circles in the light of day and draw farmers in to join them. Since they are wraiths, no one who joins them leaves the circle alive.

SKULLHEAD – Skullheads inhabited the world long ago, during the last ice age. Fortunately, they are extinct – which is good news, for they were aggressive barbarians and resistant to steel. It should be stated clearly: peaceful coexistence with skullheads would be as possible as with dwarves and elves. The logical conclusion is that the latter nonhumans should also be eradicated as soon as possible.

WEREWOLF – If you find hair on your sheets in the morning, if despite last evening's ablutions you pick bits of meat of suspicious origin from your teeth, these may be signs that you're a werewolf. Contact a witcher as soon as possible. And don't forget to pay up front.

WOLF – Hunting wolves is the job of the king's foresters, but a witcher traveling through wild backwoods may sometimes find himself surrounded by a pack of these animals. He must deal with them like he does with other beasts. Swiftly.

WRAITH – Sometimes witchers must put to rest ghosts who haunt the living. Wraiths appear near cemeteries or in homes they inhabited during their lives. They usually have no memories and are guided strictly by hatred towards the living. May they rest in peace.

WYVERN – Peasants mistake them for dragons, and it is hard to tell them apart. Wyverns are great flying reptiles with snake-like necks and long tails that end in a venomous trident. Swooping down from the sky, they easily snatch their prey and carry it off to their nest. And they don't much care if it is a sheep or a man.

ROYAL WYVERN – This larger and more dangerous breed of wyvern is highly aggressive and venomous. The creature is particularly terrifying because it has no fear of even throngs of peasants armed with pikes and pitchforks. This is especially true when it is feeding.

VETALA – An intelligent, talking ghoul is a rarity. And yet from time to time one encounters a specimen that ruins the reputation of the rest of the species by soliloquizing over dead bodies and engaging in cogent discussions with witchers. Rumor has it that evolution equipped Vetala with a dangerous weapon: he can talk people to death. That rumor is not necessarily an exaggeration.

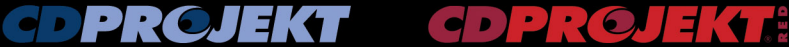
VODYAN PRIEST – Written sources confirm that the fishpeople are very religious and hold their priests in high esteem. If only they could restrict themselves to praying at their underwater altars! Unfortunately, during vodyanoi raids on shore, the priests support their warriors with religious spells. In these instances, an honest, hard-working witcher must put in that extra effort.

VODYAN WARRIOR – Vodyanoi seldom come on shore, but when they do, it is always with evil intentions toward humans. They avenge real or imagined injuries, retaliating against pearl divers who trespassed on their territory or simply going on crusades. Warriors make up the core of the underwater army and while they must wear breathing gear on land, they are no worse in combat than human warriors.

ZEUGL – The zeugl inhabits the sewers beneath Vizima, feeds on sewage, and grows at an alarming rate. The beast is always hungry, so it reaches out with its tentacles for living creatures and tries to shove them into its huge maw filled with multiple rows of teeth. The zeugl is paralyzingly hideous, foul-smelling, and surprisingly strong for something resembling a rotten potato, so it usually manages to devour its opponent.

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