



ALEXANDER FORSEY / 2020474 / CREATION: ELEMENT 2A PORTFOLIO

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After a successful 10 week placement at Good Soldier Records, I am left with only **2 weeks remaining** to complete my MA final project. Whilst I understand this limits the quality of my project, I believe this sacrifice to have been worthwhile given the opportunities offered by my placement.

At the end of these 2 weeks, and three days after the submission deadline, I shall be starting a job as a full-time Junior Designer at Good Soldier. In the scope of my targets, I have already achieved everything I wanted whilst studying at Tileyard Education. I view acquiring this final qualification as a bonus. A tangible culmination of all the time and work I have invested into making my dream a reality.

Instead of viewing this monolithic task with dread, I view it instead as a challenge. This

portfolio will be detailing the process of creating an MA final project in 2 weeks.

In order to position myself in the most optimum trajectory for a favourable pass grade, I shall be retroactively sourcing a project from my time at Good Soldier. Fortunately, this project also aligns with the topic explored within my Thesis Proposal: pixel art and its role with music marketing.

Whilst this work began prior to the creation of this portfolio, I shall placing it within the context of a theoretical 2 week brief provided by the label (Good Soldier) to an outsourced entity — me. This will allow me to provide a more streamlined budget and also apply a timeline that is accurate, using the final deadline as the project pitch date.

Jack Cullen's 'Spilled My Coffee' has now been reworked by globally acclaimed electronic duo **HONNE**, due for release on 17th September 2021.

Amassing over 2M streams and backed by world-renowned radio DJs including Zane Lowe, Annie Mac & Jack Saunders, 'Spilled My Coffee' has already reached cult status. Following the original's success, it was picked up by Australian rapper **Allday**, which tipped the track into a whole new stratosphere.

British twosome **HONNE**'s rework of the modern classic adds a flavour of early-2000s downtempo to the original. In contrast to the initial iteration of the track, the deep bluesy vocals of **Jack Cullen** have been maximised with cosmic reverb, while **SNØW** and **Allday**'s verses turn to party rap, and are layered over newly imported guitar noodles (Good Soldier, 2021).

To promote the original releases, Jack Cullen's label **Good Soldier** commissioned an animated lyric video from design agency **F That**. The lyric video saw the performing artists immortalised in 8-bit form, skating through an urban landscape collecting items

inspired by the 'side scroller' genre of games. Accompanying this lyric video was a game, which by utilising Instagram's 'Story' function allowed the user to tap to jump over an obstruction.

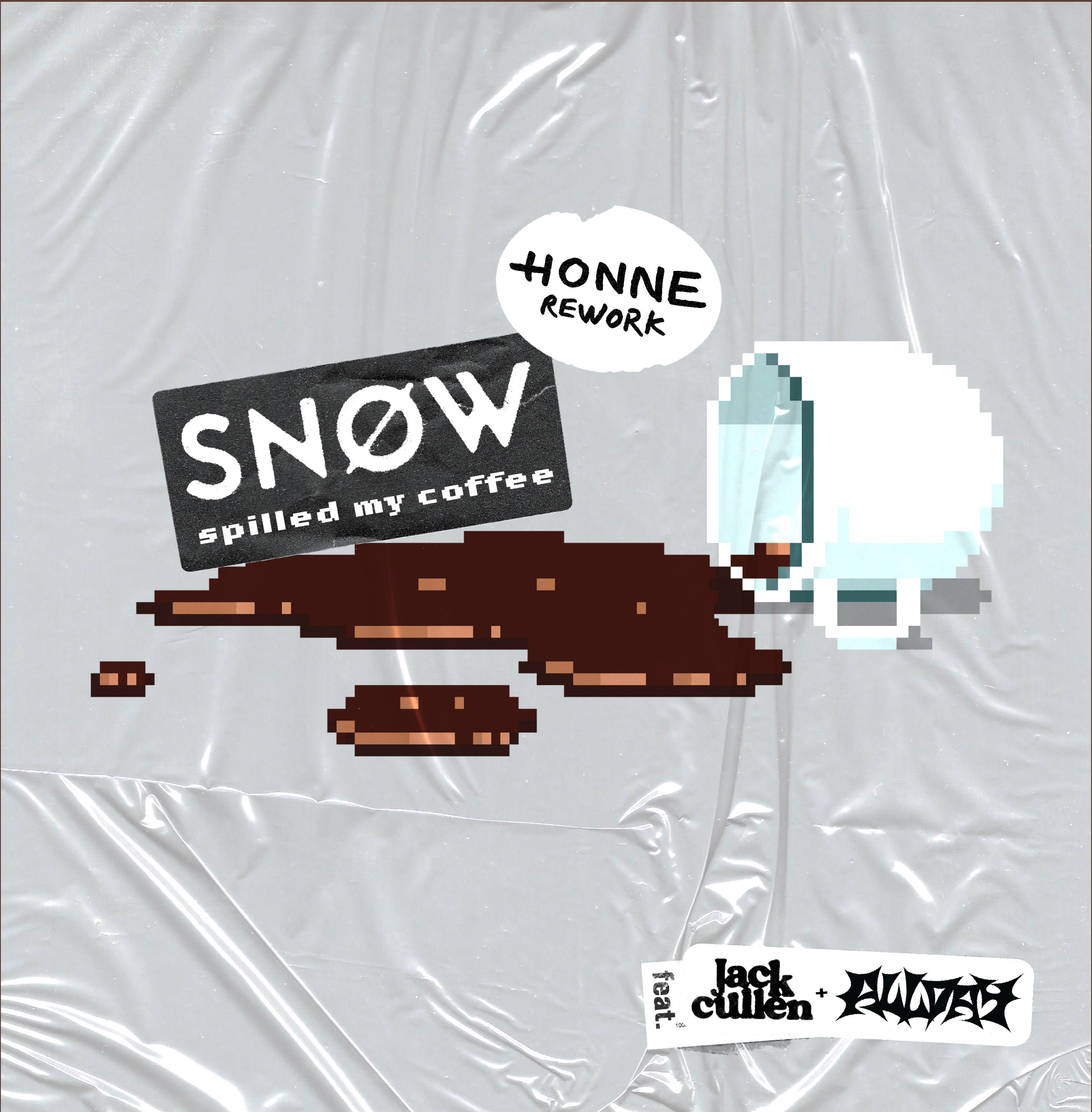
With every new artist that joined the 'Spilled My Coffee' family, a new character would become available. With this new reworking by **HONNE**, **Good Soldier** feel it only right to welcome the duo to the family.

THE PROJECT BRIEF

Analyse the previous style of the campaign creative direction, and create two new portraits depicting both members of **HONNE** (James Hatcher & Andy Clutterbuck). These must fit within the stylistic template established by **F That**.

Conceptualise a new game much in the same vein as the previous collaborations between **F That** & **Good Soldier**.

Deliverables: Two Portraits & Concept Artwork for a new game.





Budget Breakdown

Freelancer Day Rate: £160

Timeline: 2 Weeks

£160*10 Working Days = £1600

+10% Markup = £1760

Final Design Fee: £1760



(Temeng, 2021)

< SNØW

Described by tastemaker Zane Lowe as the “lo-fi king”, Snøw serves as the lead artist on this track. After hearing a demo of Jack Cullen’s song *‘It Doesn’t Matter’*, Snøw sampled a section and crafted a narrative around it (Temeng, 2021). The track glistens with light humour as the rapper discusses the trivialities of life.

Collected primary research divulged that Snøw’s position within the Lo-Fi scene was a major catalyst for the pixel art direction.



(Good Soldier, 2021)

< JACK CULLEN

Good Soldier signee Jack Cullen tackles the refrain on *‘Spilled My Coffee’*, with the opening lines of his track *‘It Doesn’t Matter’* becoming the main crux of the track. In this remix the vocals are layered with a thick reverb, but Cullen’s magnetic charm remains. According to Good Soldier’s Marketing Manager Harrison Seward, the goal of this release was “establish our artist Jack Cullen in the UK, as well as within the burgeoning, predominantly US-based lo-fi scene” (Seward, 2018).

ALLDAY >

Following success in Australia, Allday was approached to remix *‘Spilled My Coffee’*. Boasting 200k followers on Instagram, Allday brings further depth to the narrative established in the original iteration of *‘Spilled My Coffee’*.

This original version featured Lo-Fi artist Rxseboy, but his contribution was removed in the HONNE Rework, however Allday’s remixed verse remains.



(Allday, 2021)

HONNE >

British duo HONNE add a touch of glue to *‘Spilled My Coffee’*, bringing the assortment of artists making up the *‘Spilled My Coffee’* family even closer with a reworked instrumental that seeks to elevats an already very solid musical offering.

HONNE have a large presence within the UK and Indonesian music scenes, so having their name attached to the project brings with it a lot of marketing potential.



(HONNE, 2021)

SINGLE ARTWORK

The artwork plays on the song title and features a mug of coffee spilt across the canvas in a pixel art style. The typography is placed on top using stickers, and the artwork is then completed with a plastic shrink wrap texture. These textures and stickers are reflections of current trends within the Lo-Fi scene, where making artwork look tangible, as though it were printed is very popular.

Left: Original. Middle: Allday Remix. Right: HONNE Rework (Good Soldier, 2021)



LYRIC VIDEO

Created by design agency F That, the lyric video sees 8-bit interpretations of the artists skateboarding on a pavement, jumping over obstructions and acquiring 'power up' items to replenish their strength. The same visuals were reused as an Instagram game, where tapping through the artists' stories at the right time would make the character jump.

Left: Images taken from the lyric video. All assets were made by design agency F That. (Cullen, 2021)



With a limited window on when to conduct primary reserach, I decided to narrow my scope to three main areas. Two areas were internal and directly related to the campaign, and the third area would involve an influential pixel artist with no knowledge of the campaign, but who would be able to provide a better insight into the reasons pixel art has seen an uplift in popularity. I would identify one key individual from each area and conduct a short interview appropriate for the scope of this project.

Within our Academic Development class, Dr Lindsay Davies emphasised the importance of asking interview questions that would get you the most productive answer. These interviews are a perfect conduit to apply these taught academic skills. This would cut down on the amount of back and forth and ensure the project can progress within the limited timeframe.

Following some discussion with members of the Marketing Team, the Marketing Manager, Harrison Seward, was identified as the most knowledgeable in regards to the ‘Spilled My Coffee’ campaign. Being the Marketing Manager, I knew Harrison would be busy, so I needed to ensure my questions were precise

and would garner more concise yet pragmatic answers.

Having worked alongside the Good Soldier Creative Team for 10 weeks, I knew that the Creative Director was the busiest individual, overseeing many projects at once, and would therefore have the least amount of time to answer my questions. In light of this, I identified my co-designer Arthur Coppens as an ideal candidate. In contrast to the to-the-point answers I knew I would gather from Harrison, from my experience working alongside Arthur I knew he wold be able to provide more thought out and expansive answers, looking at pixel art’s place within the wider context of design.

For my third source regarding pixel art as a medium, I reached out to a prominent artist whom I have followed for over a decade — Kyle-Dove. I reached out via Discord, a platform designed to build communities and direct message others, and was pleasantly surprised that someone so busy was willing to help out!





INTERVIEW WITH HARRISON SEWARD
Marketing Manager @ Good Soldier Records.
Conducted between the 14th—23rd of October
via email.

With Harrison’s knowledge of marketing, his creative background, and his direct involvement with the ‘Spilled My Coffee’ campaign, I knew he would be the perfect person to interview to acquire more analytical, objective answers in relation to the campaign.

His answers aided in the creation of a much more accurate and informed audience profile.

AF: At what point in the discussion of how to market the release did the idea of using pixel art/8-bit imagery arise?

HS: In the early planning stages (approx. 8 weeks out).

AF: What factors did the marketing team consider when opting to use 8-bit imagery?

HS: How does it fit with the music? Will our target audience identify with the creative? How much work will it take across the campaign / suite of assets? Will it be possible to accomplish all of this with our budget in mind?

AF: What demographic(s) were you targeting with this campaign?

HS: 18-30 Lo-Fi music fans (including gamers).

AF: What was the target outcome?

HS: Establish our artist Jack Cullen in the UK, as well as within the burgeoning, predominantly US-based lo-fi scene.

AF: Did the outcome match your expectations?

HS: As Jack Cullen’s first release on Spotify, we secured plays from Zane Lowe, Annie Mac and Jack Saunders, as well as placement across a range of flagship playlists, in the UK and the US, including Lorem, Our Generation, Alterna Rap, Lemonade.

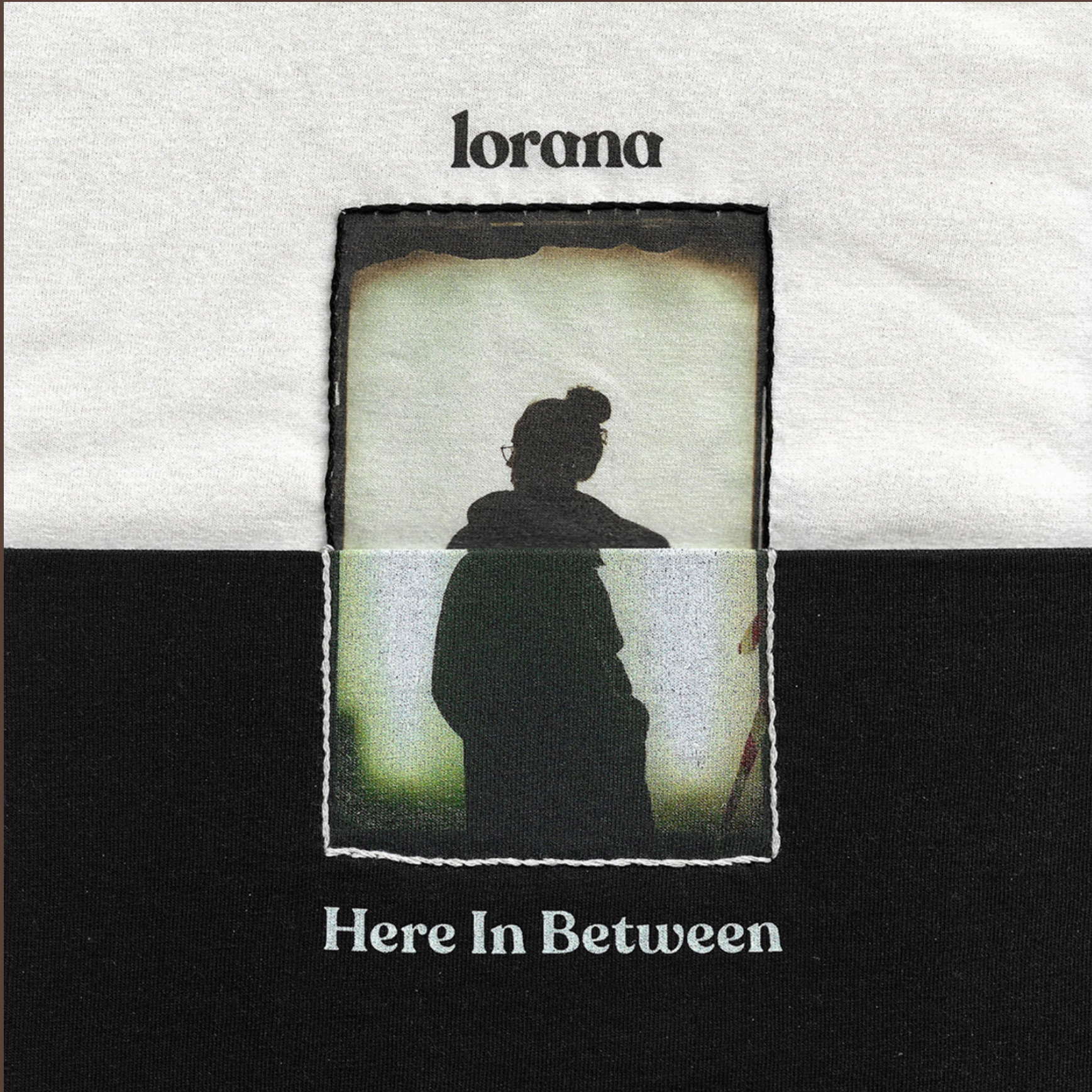
AF: With these insights in mind, would you change anything regarding the project?

HS: No - the creative plan was excellent and the execution was fantastic, and played a huge part in the initial support and resulting impact of the track. (Seward, 2021)

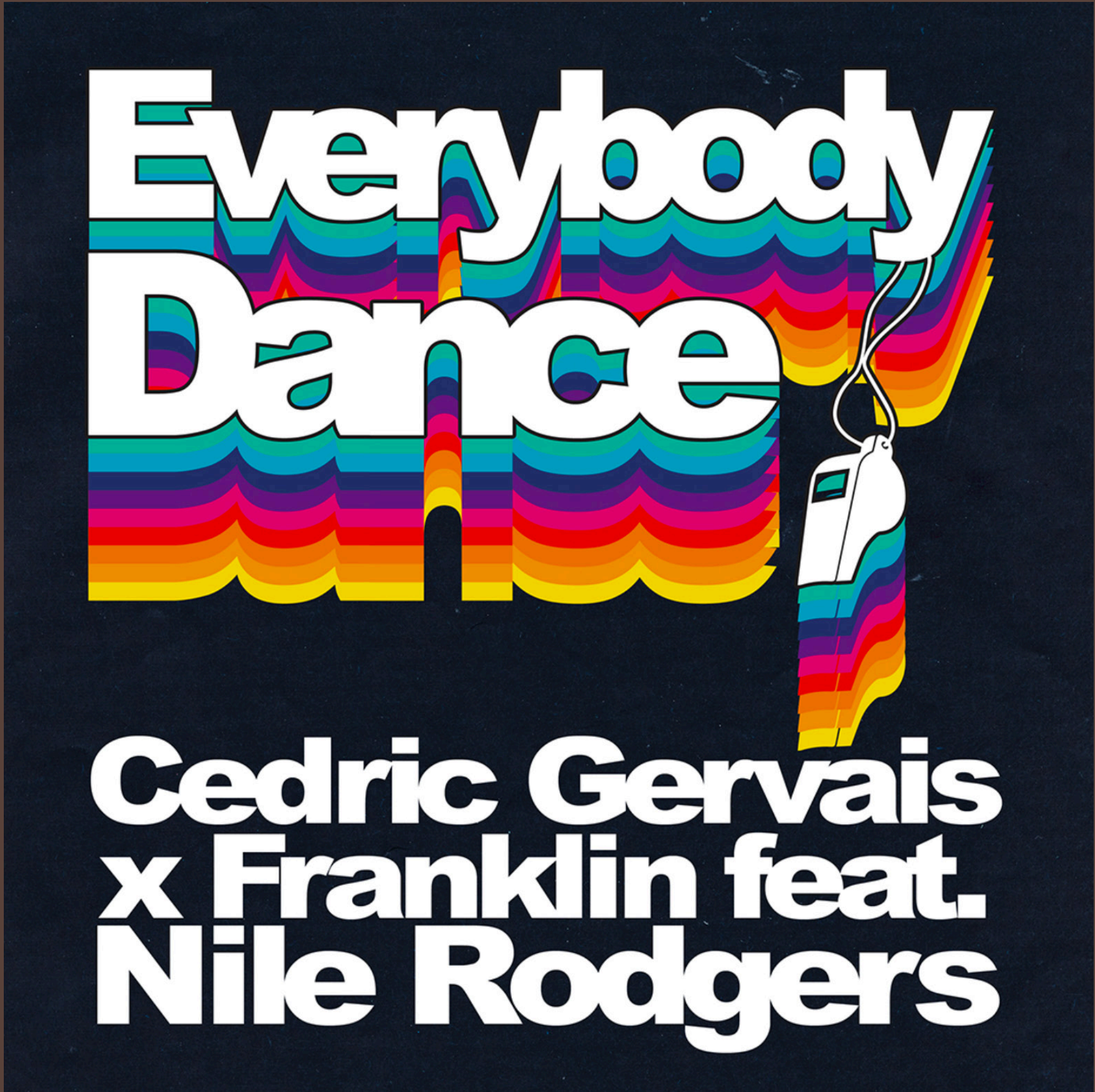


INTERVIEW WITH ARTHUR COPPENS
Junior In-House Designer @ Good Soldier Records. Conducted on the 19th of October via email.

Arthur was the primary designer during the duration of the 'Spilled My Coffee' design. I was interested most in hearing about the decision to collaborate with F That on the visuals for this campaign.



Lorana — 'Here In Between' EP Artwork (2020)
Arthur Coppens, Digital Artwork (Lorana, 2020)



Cedric Gervais, Franklin — 'Everybody Dance (feat. Nile Rodgers)' Single Artwork (2020)
Arthur Coppens, Digital Artwork (Good Soldier, 2020)

AF: Why did you choose pixel art/8-bit imagery for this specific release?

AC: Our head of creative picked the pixel art/8-bit direction as it fits the playful, lo-fi and colourful direction we wanted to establish our act Jack Cullen in. It feels nostalgic and cool. Especially to a younger audience, as their first games weren't Pacman, Snake or Space Invaders. This generation is heavily influenced by the games they play, so by referencing this world, we hoped the project as a whole would speak to this audience. The song Spilled My Coffee is a collaboration with lo-fi hip hop legends Snow and rxseboy so going for a rather lo-fi art direction made total sense.

AF: The actual creation of the campaign visuals was outsourced to an external agency. What drove this decision?

AC: We outsourced the creation of the pixel art characters, lyric

videos and other assets to our good friends at F-That. They were able to take our references and turn it into something incredible that we wouldn't have been able to do in-house. We have a great in-house creative team and try to do everything we can within our team but we do have our limits of course.

AF: Pixel art is becoming more widely used with the marketing of music (for example, the recent official visualiser for Trippie Redd & Drake's collaboration 'Betrayal'), why do you think this is?

AC: We believe that pixel art is part of the current zeitgeist as everything from the past few centuries is currently coming back. It's cool to see that pixelart is getting everywhere at the moment, The current The Wombats campaign is another good example of artwork using isometric perspective and old school game influences. I'm curious to see where this will move in the next few years! (Coppens, 2021)



INTERVIEW WITH KYLE-DOVE
Pixel Art Hobbyist. Conducted on the 19th of October via Discord Direct Messaging.

Kyle-Dove’s Deviantart profile boasts 760k views across almost 500 works uploaded over 15 years. His work (predominantly within the Pokémon community) has left a lasting impact on many young artists interested in game design. I’ve idolised Kyle-Dove’s work for over a decade, it was an amazing experience to pick his brains about pixel art and also how to maintain a sustainable workflow.



First Steps in a New Region (2020)
Kyle-Dove, Digital Artwork (Kyle-Dove, 2020)



Jurassic World Mainstreet (2020)
Kyle-Dove, Digital Artwork (Kyle-Dove, 2020)

AF: You’ve been working with pixel art for 15 years, how do you believe pixel art as a medium has changed as a commercial force?

KD: It’s been an interesting change for sure - I think it’s fair to say that pixel art started off as a bit of a “functional” art style - where artists were forced to use pixel art due to technical limitations in palette/canvas/etc. With the advent of 3D and these technical limitations being removed, artists were no longer limited to pixel art, which has meant a bit of a lack of mainstream pixel art entertainment. Instead, most of us producing pixel art are doing it for the passion of it. We’re making a deliberate choice to use this art style and to express ourselves with it in a way no other art form can - It’s not about what’s “prettier” or mimicking real life - it’s about conveying our vision in a specific, defined way.

I think also with pixel art - it’s historically been tarnished with a bit of a geeky association - conjuring up images of geeks in a basement. But as with a lot of “geeky” culture lately - people are starting to embrace it in the mainstream and it’s a lot more known and loved by the public now.

AF: Pixel art is currently experiencing a renaissance, with prompt accounts such as Pixel Dailies amassing 80 thousand followers on Twitter. In your opinion, what could have caused this?

KD: As I touched on in the previous question - I believe that society is being a lot more open about embracing their love of unconventional and “geeky” culture. Take “Squid Game” for example, a wildly popular TV show that isn’t even in english being embraced by everyone - in the old days this would be seen as a weird, geeky thing too and shunned by most people. Or “Among us” which is an indie game made in pixel art that has

taken the world by storm.

I think also Pixel art as an art form carries a lot of nostalgia for people, bringing back fond memories of their childhoods. It’s no surprise to me in a world of constant reboots and remakes, that pixel art is making a comeback. In fact - it’s often labelled as “retro” or “8-bit” when that’s not even the correct term. People are longing an escape to the past, and pixel art can provide that.

Finally I think pixel art is so accessible - it’s often very simple, and sized up can make great logos and icons. Especially in this day and age where we’re so online all the time, and people’s attention spans are so small, pixel art can do a better job of filling your phone screen than a traditional painting. Pixel art can also be very memorable and very marketable - so I’m not surprised to see it being used on fashion and merchandise, even NFTs lately.

AF: Creating digital art is physically intensive on the body, what approaches do you take to maintain an ergonomic workflow?

KD: Honestly, I’ve been lucky that I’ve not had much issue. For a while, I did start to notice some wrist pain on long durations of creating pixel art. At the time, I had recently changed my home set up and noticed my hand on my mouse was raised higher than my elbow, which I knew was bad form. I made the change to my set up so my elbow was always level or higher than my hand and I’ve not had any wrist pain since. I regularly take breaks and make sure I’m always using tools with a high zoom level to reduce any eye strain when working with pixels. (Kyle-Dove, 2021)

AGE DEMOGRAPHIC: 18-30

NO TARGET GENDER

WESTERN REGIONS — UK, USA, AUS

LIKES: LO-FI MUSIC, GAMING

TRENDY WITH NOSTALGIC REFERENCES



FINDS MUSIC ON PLAYLISTS/YOUTUBE

ENJOYS FINDING NEW GENRES

USES MUSIC AS A TOOL TO UNWIND

AMBIVERTED PERSONALITY

FREQUENTS SITES LIKE TWITCH, REDDIT

CREATING THE PORTRAITS

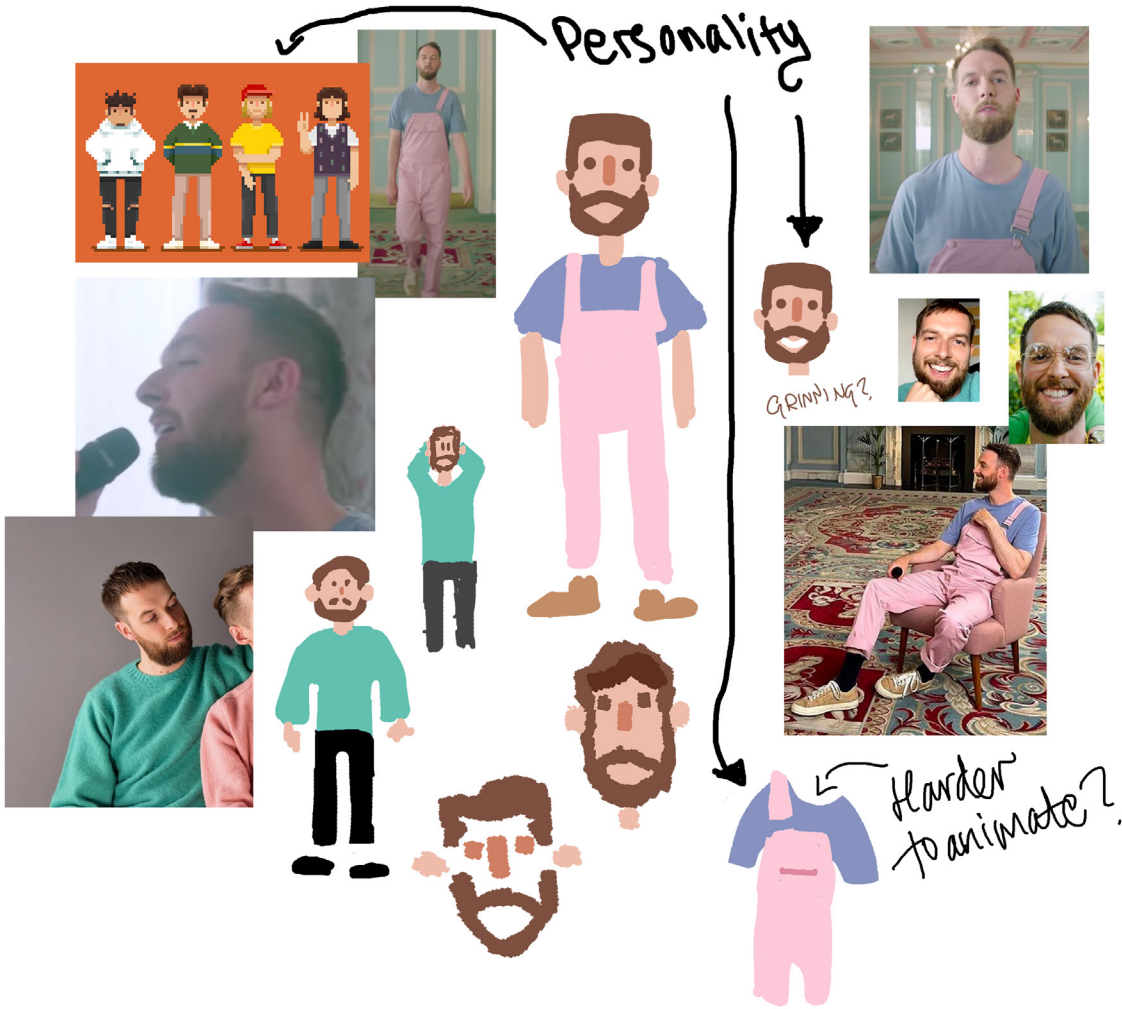
One of the major appeals of working in the pixel art medium is the challenge of conveying as much information within such limited means. In the case of the previous portraits created by F That, personality is captured within body language and clothing choices. For my HONNE portraits I wanted to do the same.

A quick look at the HONNE Instagram account made it obvious that pastel colours were a staple within the duo's branded closet. To this effect, I picked out two outfits that I thought would compliment each other and got to sketching with my newly purchased Drawing Tablet.

Interestingly, the most difficult part was making the hair both accurate to the people the portraits were modelled after all whilst remaining consistent with the style of the original portraits by F That.

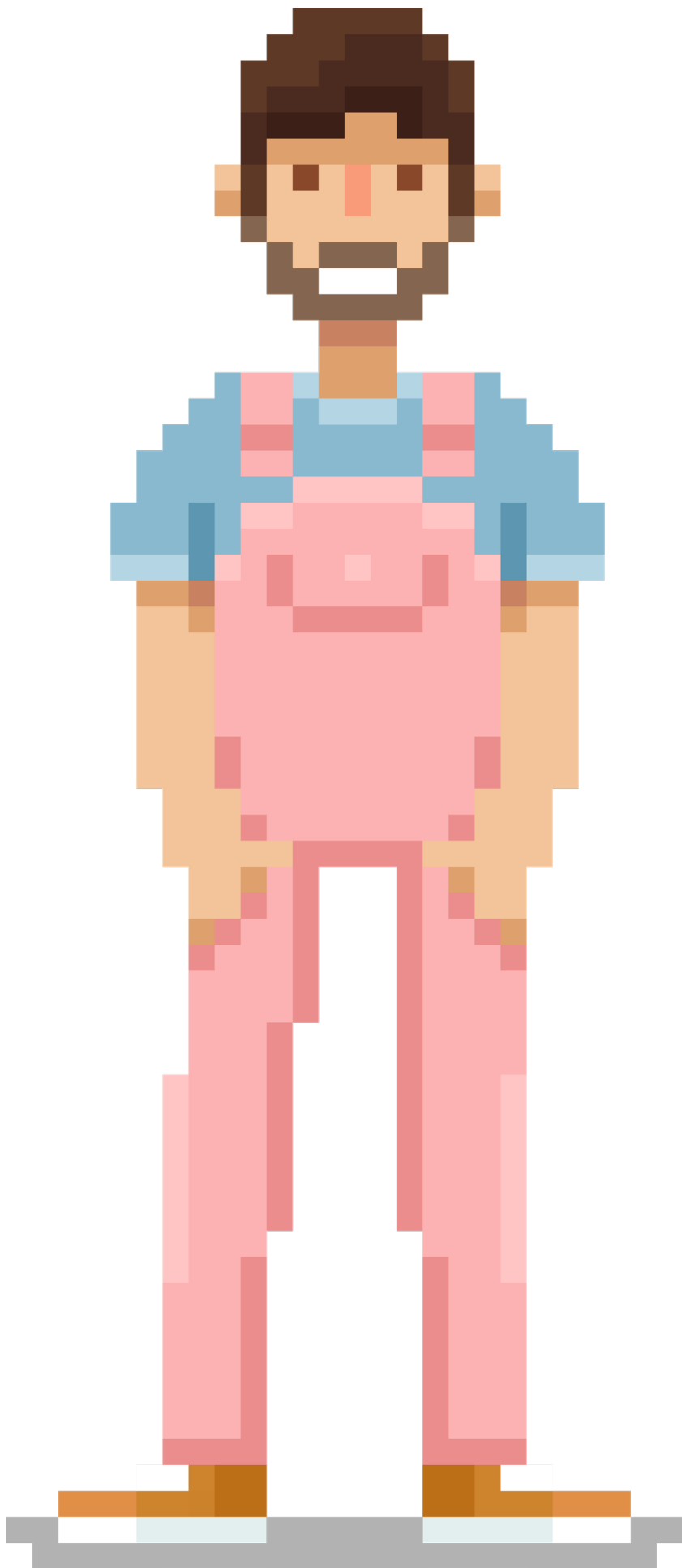


(HONNE, 2021)

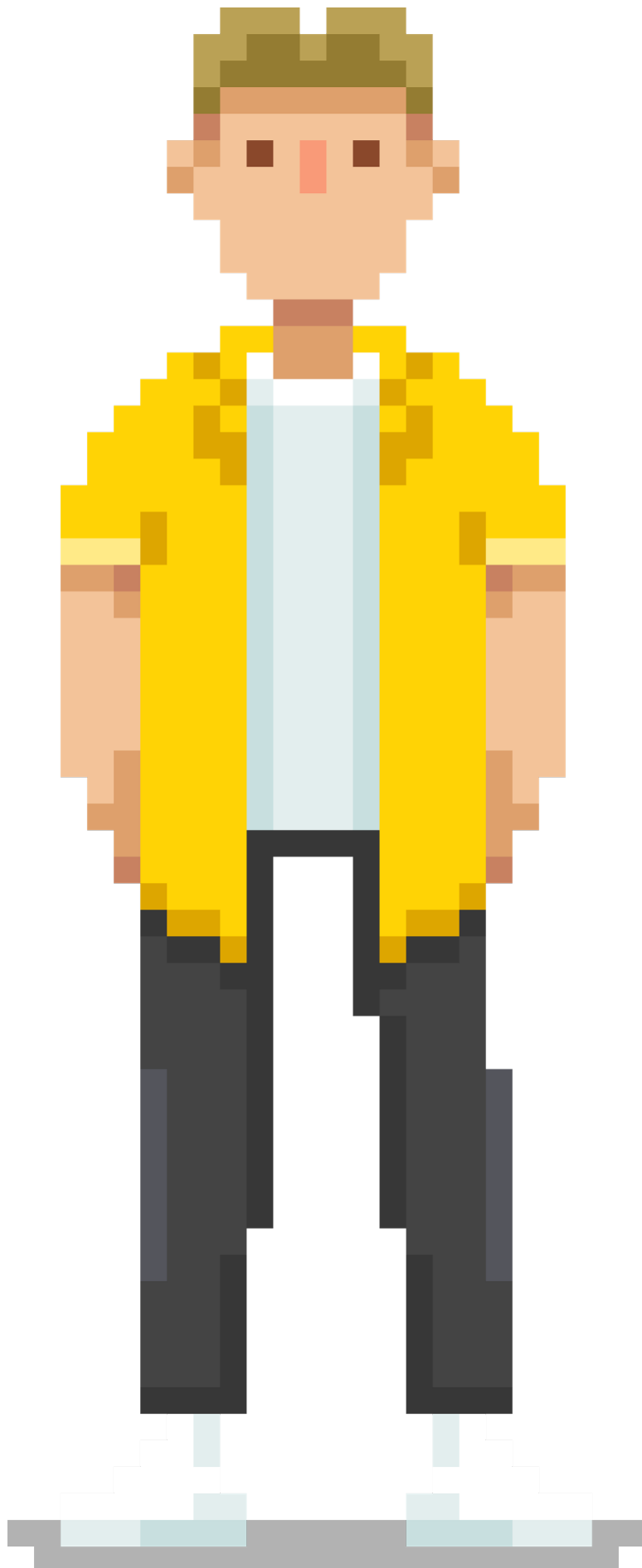


(Forsey, 2021)

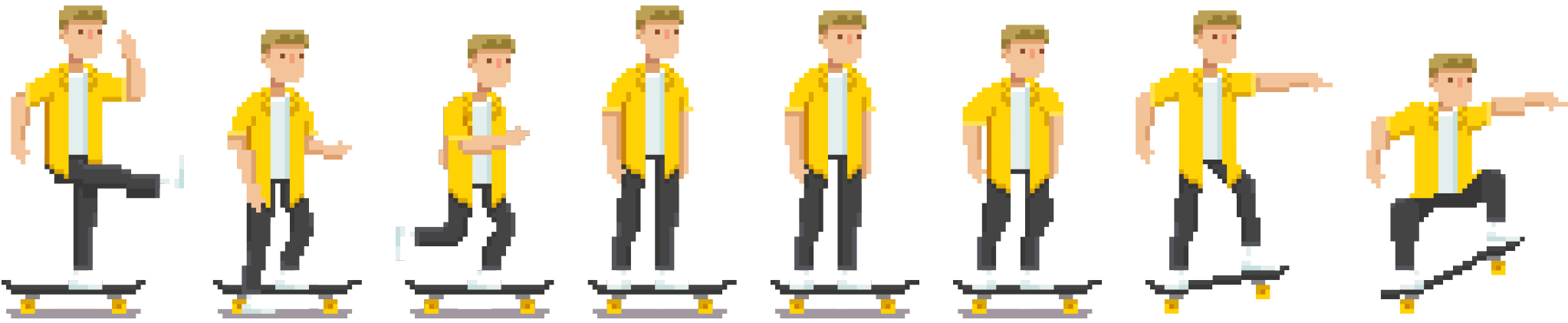
(HONNE, 2021)



(Forsey, 2021)



(Forsey, 2021)



(Forsey, 2021)

spilled my coffee



SNØW

jack
cullen

FLAY

HONNE

CAMPAIGN ASSETS

Placed next to the rest of the artists, I'm confident with my designs. They both feel consistent stylistically yet also distinct enough to stand on their own.

With the portraits approved and the accompanying frames and animations made, the files were transferred over to the team at **F That**, who created an updated lyric video using the previous incarnation as a base. With

the two new skaters included and Rxseboy removed, the characters skate together through the familiar urban cityscape.

Left: Social media asset (Good Soldier, 2021).

Below: Image taken from the lyric video. All assets were made by design agency **F That** (Good Soldier, 2021).





(Cerroni, 2021)

INSTAGRAM FILTER

In addition to delivering the portraits & animation frames, I was also asked to deliver individual cuts of each character's head to be used for the interactive Instagram AR filter.

This was done by co-designer Arthur Coppens using Spark AR. The whole process was painfully simple, almost beyond belief, and really drove the immersiveness of the project in. Instead of feeling like loose assets, this project now began to feel like a campaign.



(Forsey, 2021)



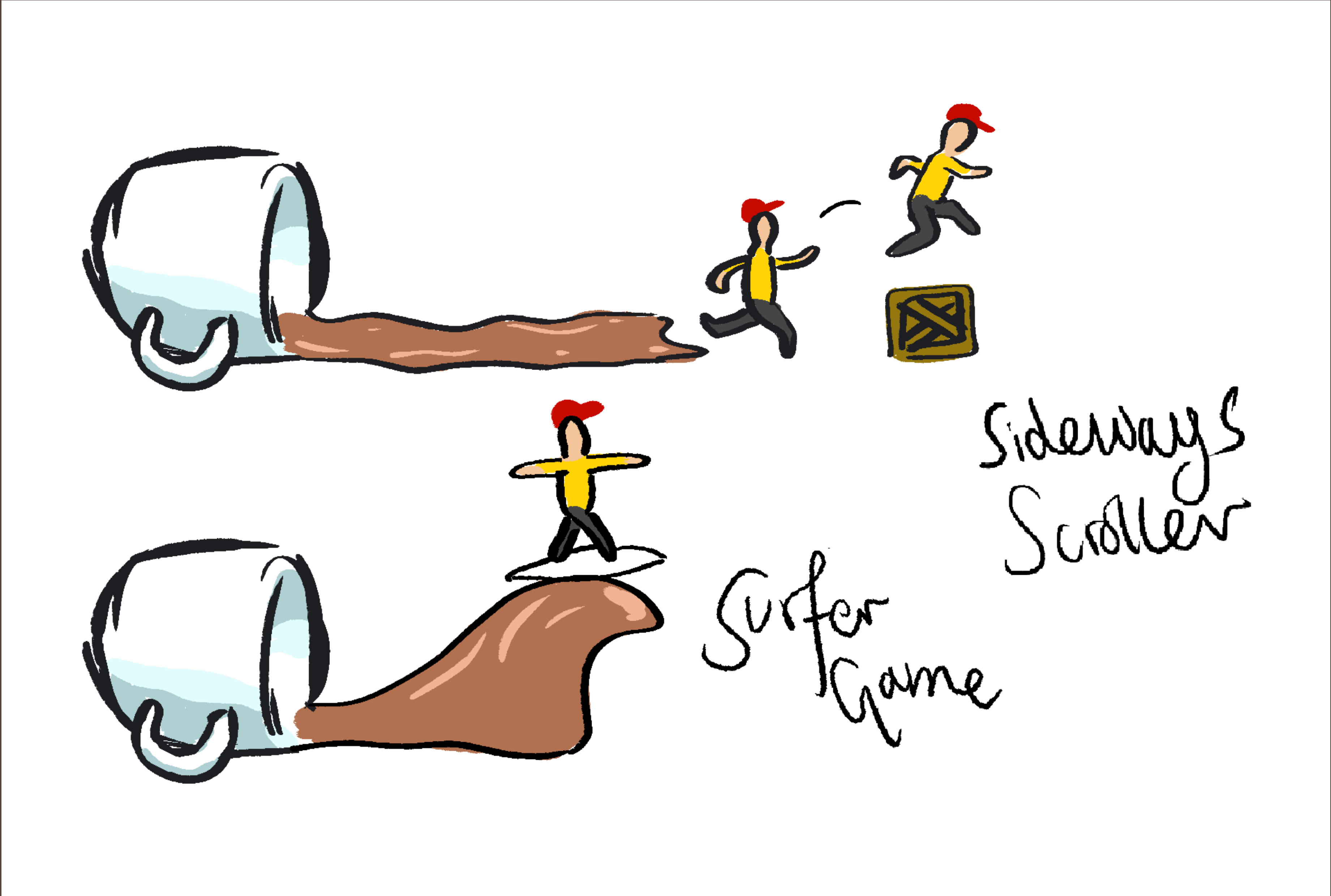
(Murphy, 2021)

OPTION 1 — EXPANSION

A somewhat safe but perfectly viable option would be to expand upon the sideways scrolling/ endless running concept already explored within the previous visualisers.

One thought I had involved the player escaping a giant mug of spilt coffee (a reference to the lyrics). Hitting obstructions would result in the player drowning in the coffee. An expansion of this idea saw the player surfing on top of the wave.

Below: Concept Game Assets. (Forsey, 2021)
Right: Concept Artwork. (Forsey, 2021)



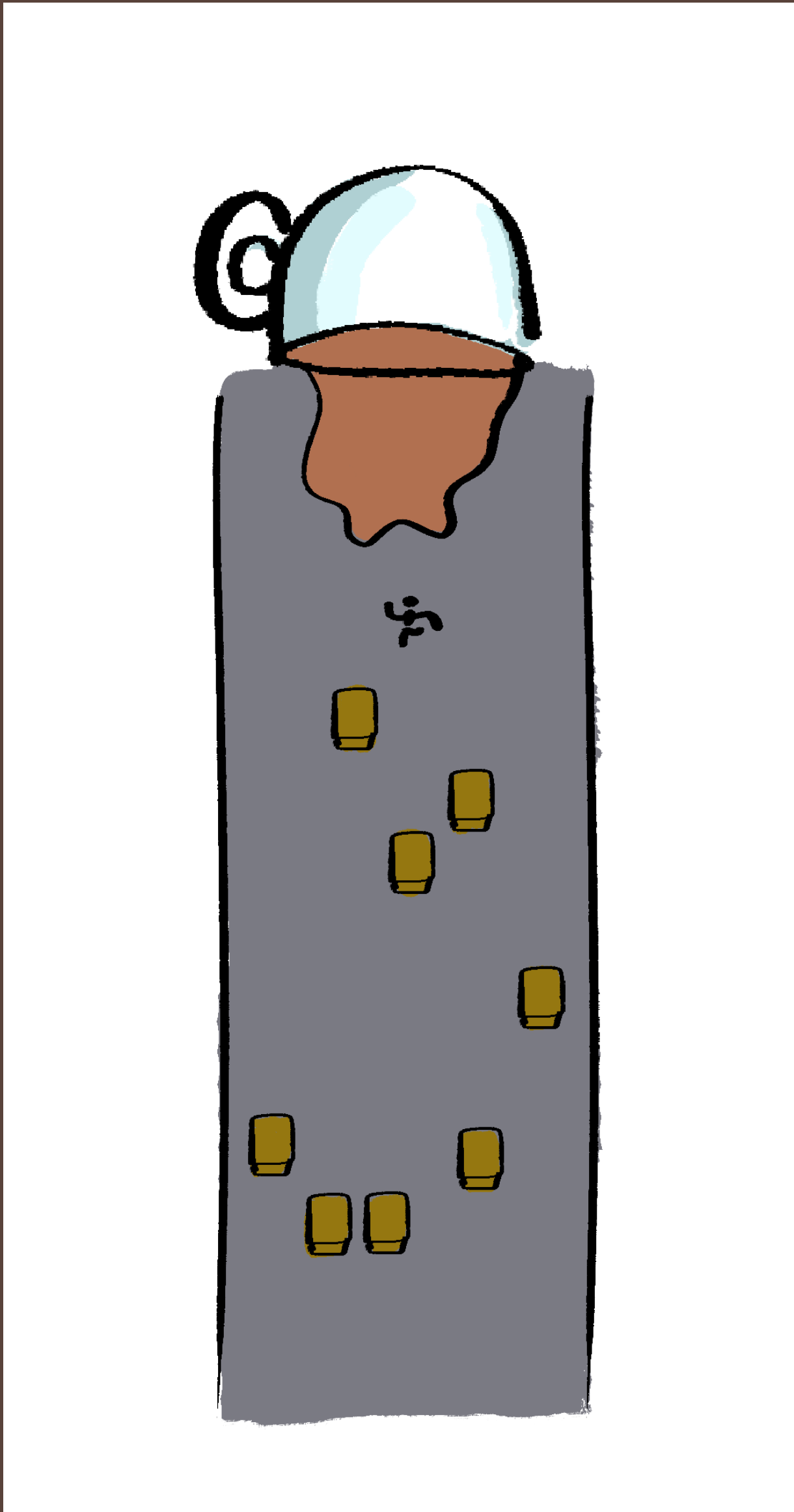
OPTION 2 — A NEW DIRECTION

Thinking more about the style of gameplay, I looked to gaming trends. Hardware consoles have been replaced by mobile apps, and with a target demographic for the release being 18–30 year olds, it made sense to look at similar mobile games this demographic grew up with. The gameplay mechanic in an ‘endless runner’ game is to last as long as possible without losing, usually collecting items such as coins on the way and tapping or clicking to avoid colliding with obstructions. This fast-paced gameplay is understandably addictive, but can also get old quickly.

The journey begins with ‘Canabalt’, which in the same vein as the ‘Spilled My Coffee’ skateboarding game featured in the lyric video involves tapping to jump over roofs and objects. Released on both mobile and desktop in 2009, ‘Canabalt’ is often credited as the catalyst for the endless runner genre. The gameplay combines side scrolling and endless running, tied together neatly under a flat, minimal visual style. Upon closer inspection, these sleek visuals are actually made up of procedurally generated pixel art.

As the limits of mobile gaming expanded, 3D once again took over. Temple Run, first launched in 2011, expanded upon this addictiveness in a refreshing way. Instead of side scrolling, the character runs forward, twisting and turning as they run away from angry monkeys. Fast forward another few years to 2017 and Subway Surfers, a similar endless runner game where the graffiti artist player runs away from officers, becomes the year’s most installed game (Riaz, 2018).

In order to avoid reductiveness, it makes sense to move away from the side-scrolling gameplay and instead look to the success of games like Temple Run & Subway Surfers. I believe combining the vertical nature of these games with the lo-fi themes established earlier in the campaign would culminate in an effectively nostalgic game.



Concept Sketch
(Forsey, 2021)

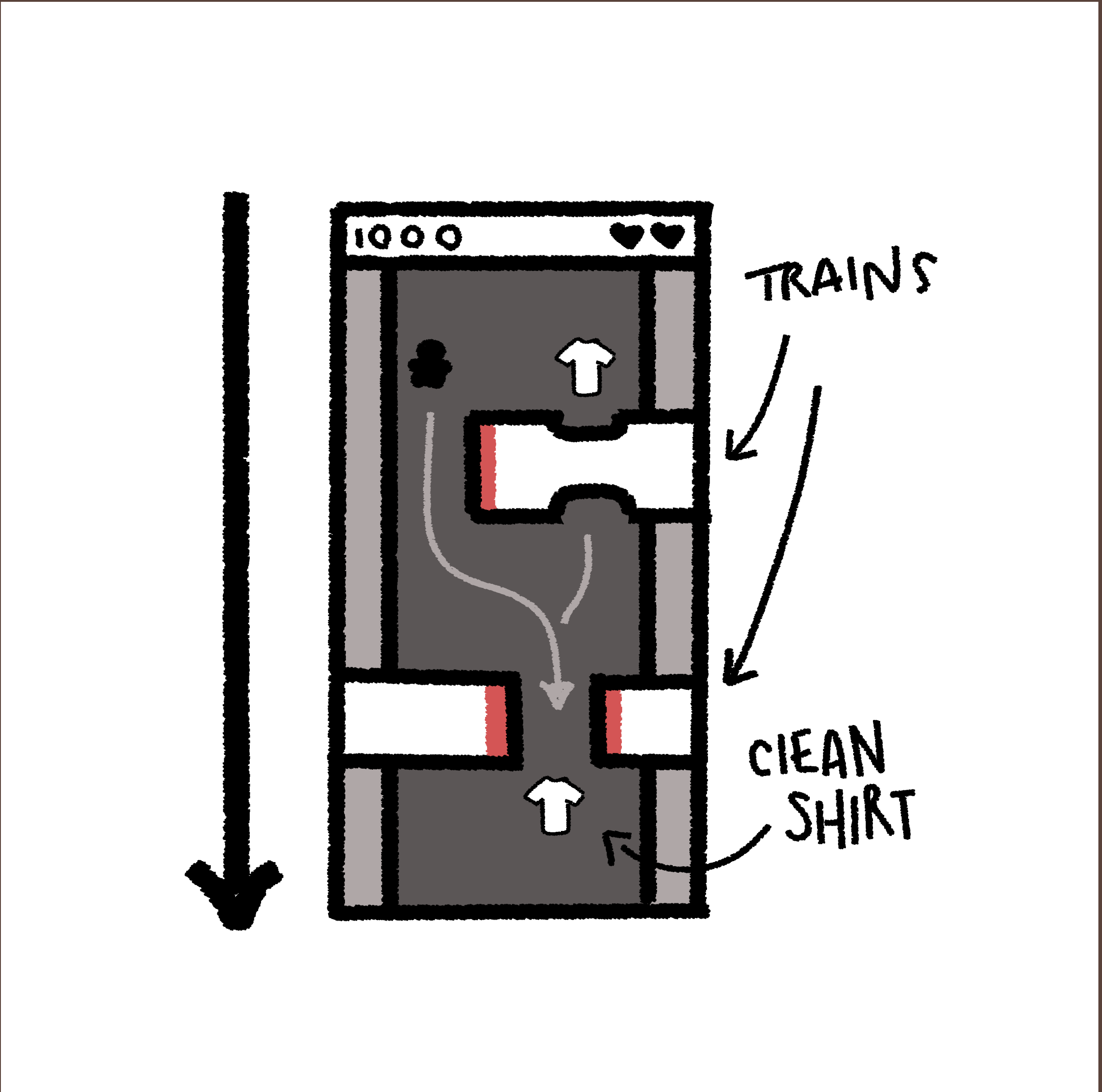
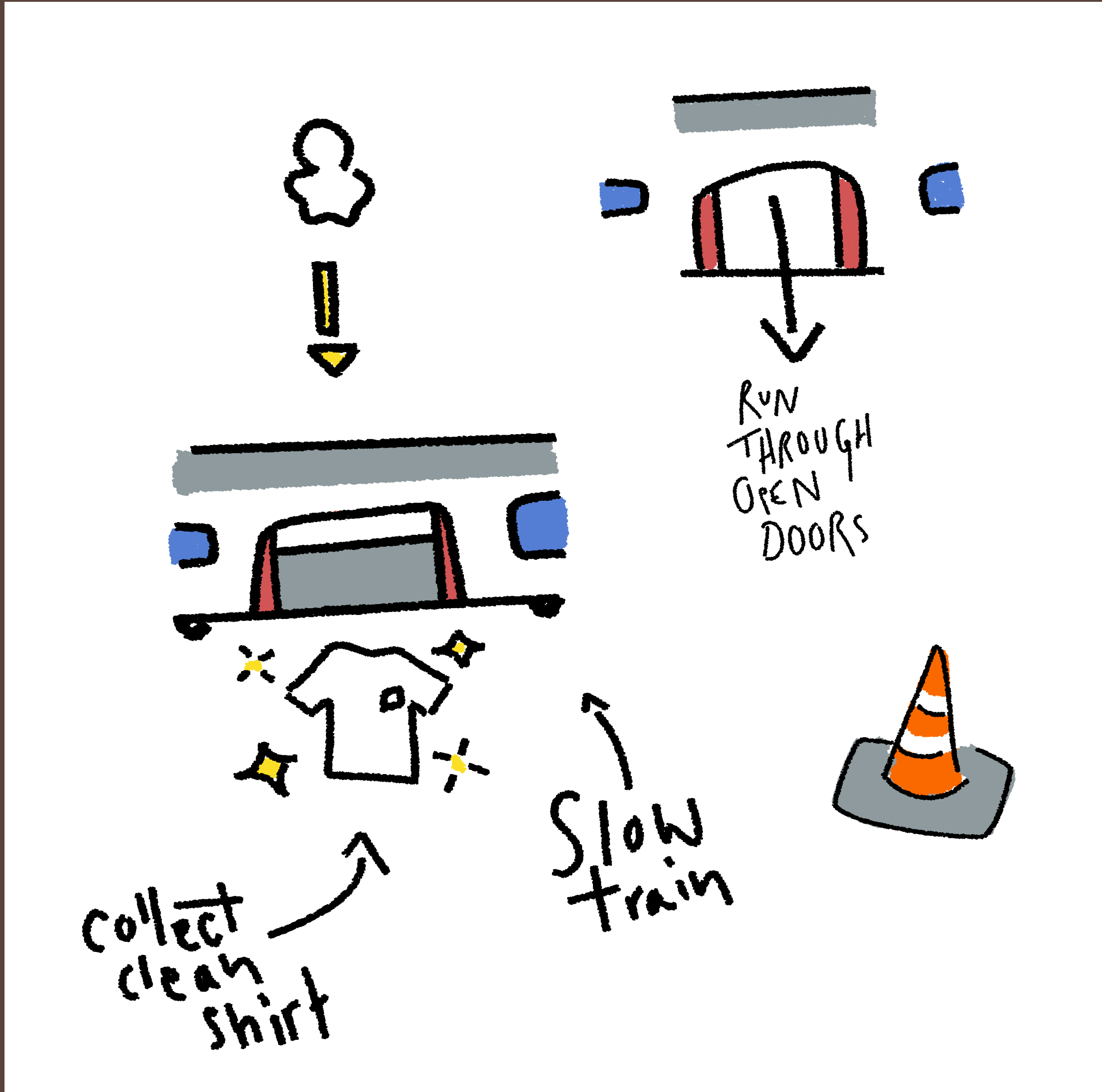


Canabalt
(Saltsman, 2009)



Temple Run
(DxCheetah, n.d)

Subway Surfers
(Kiloo, SYBO Games, 2012)



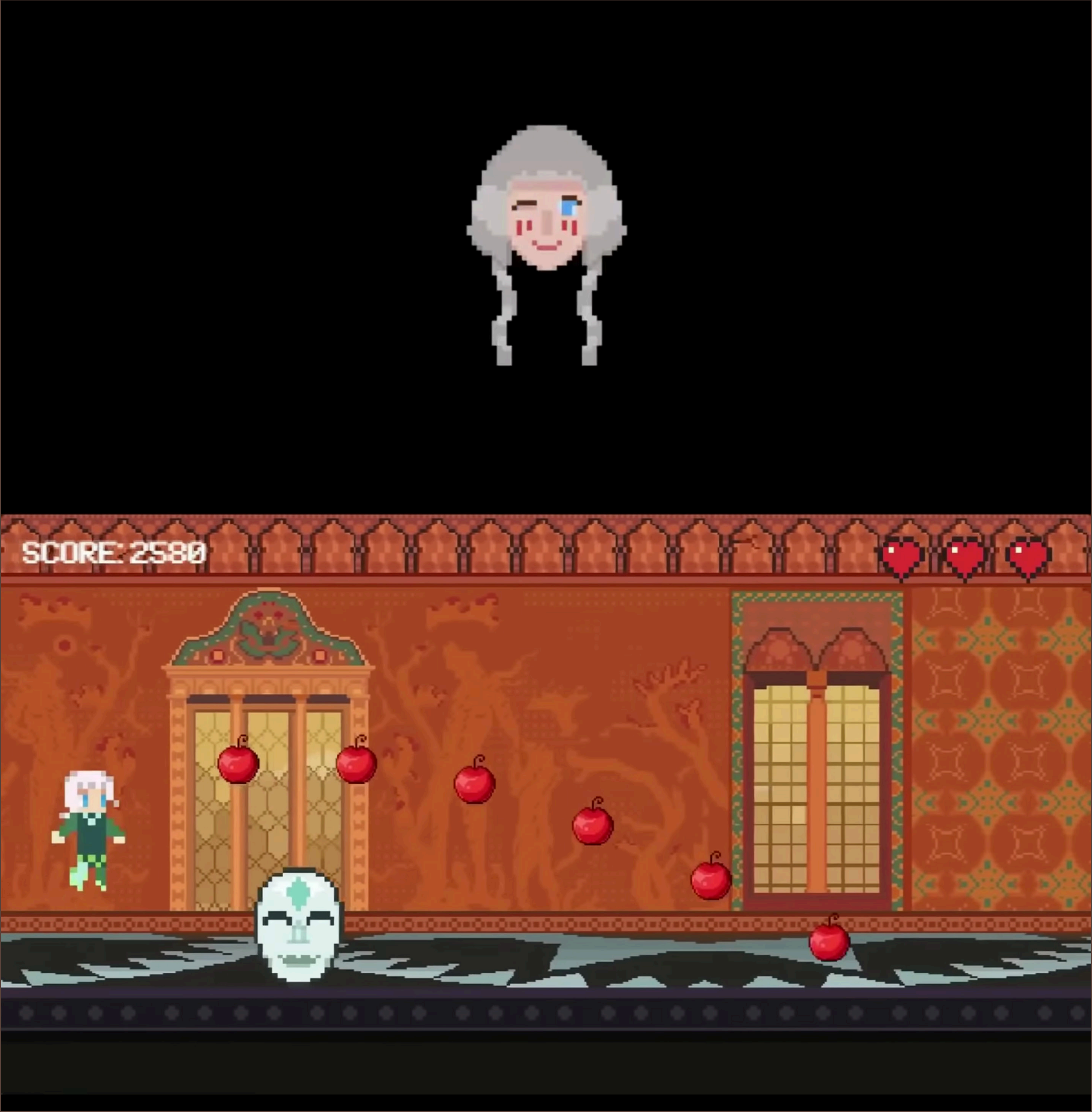
AURORA 'CURE FOR ME' CAMPAIGN

The link to the playable 'Cure For Me' game was first sent out via postcards, and then later via an unpromoted QR code campaign, so it's not surprising that finding any mention of this game is difficult when getting access to it was equally as difficult. When it came to returning to take screenshots, I was pained to discover the website had been taken down only a few months after the single was released in July 2021. Fortunately, the track's visualiser was someone just playing the game for 3 minutes. It was comforting to know at least that a pixel artist's hard work wasn't going unseen, however it was going uncredited. No mention of the creators could be found anywhere, I even contacted a friend who works closely with the artist at her management company to no avail.

The visualiser opens with a small facial portrait of AURORA (the artist) winking, almost like a loading screen. Similar to the 'Spilled My Coffee' visualiser, the gameplay involves jumping over an obstructing objects whilst collecting apples that increase your score. Hitting the objects results in the loss of a 'heart', three collisions and the game ends.

Analysing the visual aspects of the game, the choices are chaotic and result in an ugly clashing of different sizes and styles. The protagonist — AURORA herself — is rendered in an extremely minimal, stylistic way, featuring no defined outlines. The masks she jumps over are rendered in a similar style, however have black outlines, which help them stand out against the busy backdrop. In complete contrast to this, the apples she collects are rendered in a more accurate, high resolution style, almost like scaled down vectors — it's likely that these were stock images. Whilst a blessing for the time-wary designer, the variation in pixel density leaves a disjointed stain on the general ambience of the whole piece, and is something to avoid when creating my game.

Right: Images taken from the official visualiser for AURORA's single 'Cure For Me', released on July 14th, 2021 (AURORA, 2021).





(Merrit, 2020)



(Klope62, 2001)

For the visual style of my characters, I looked to game likes Earthbound (left) and Pokemon (above). Both feature heavily stylised overworld sprites, which even now retain a distinct charm. Even though my mockup screenshots would be static, I created walking frames to simulate movement.



(Forsey, 2021)



CHOOSING THE RIGHT PALETTE

With my character frames created, they weren't quite evoking the same feelings I used to get whilst playing retro pixel art games. One solution to this was seeking a more authentic colour palette in order to raise the consistency between the characters.

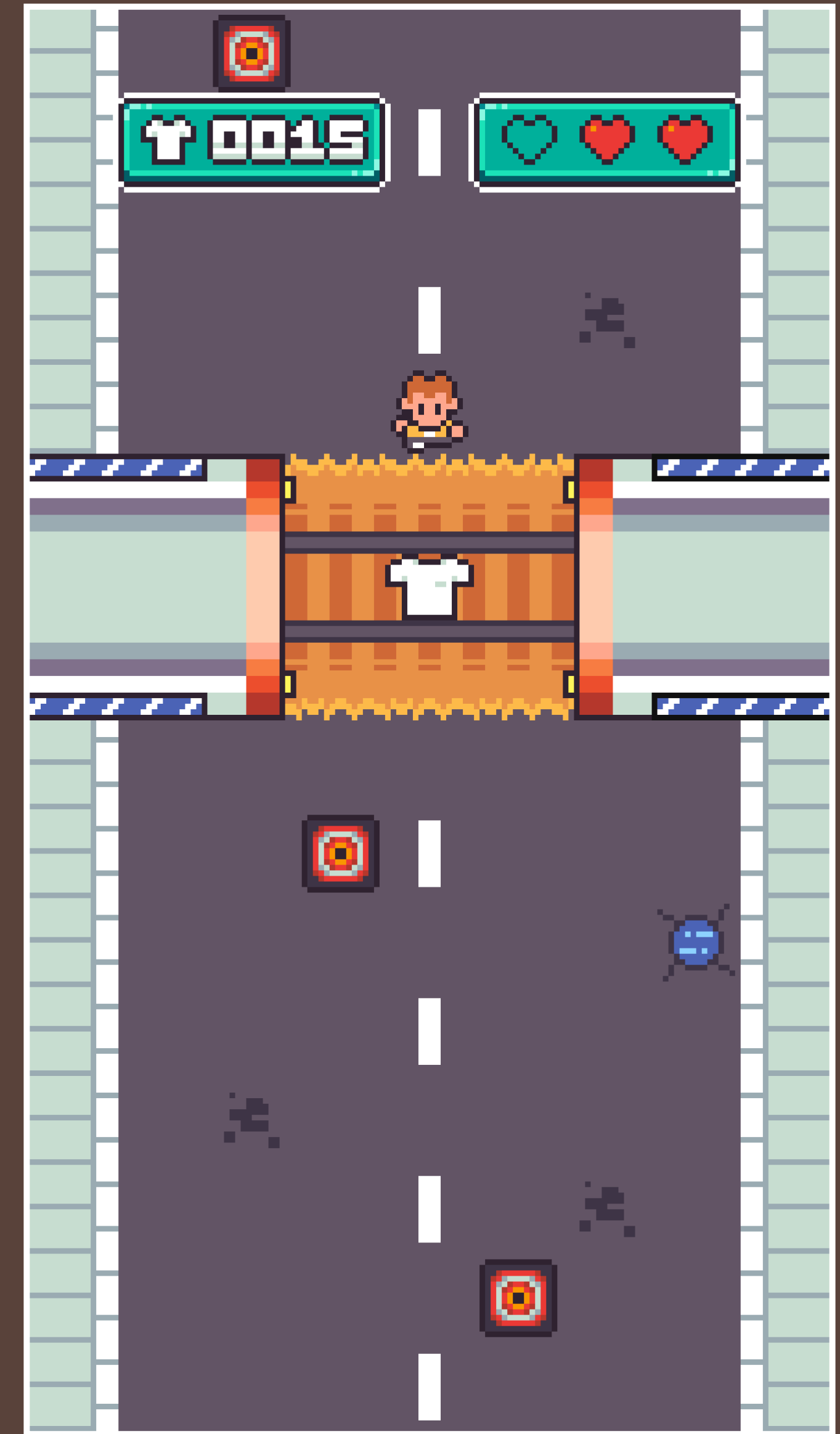
Making use of Lospec, a website designed with pixel art in mind, I located a retro palette inspired by the Nintendo 64 created by a user called Kerrie Lake. Such a minor change went a long way. (Lake, 2019)

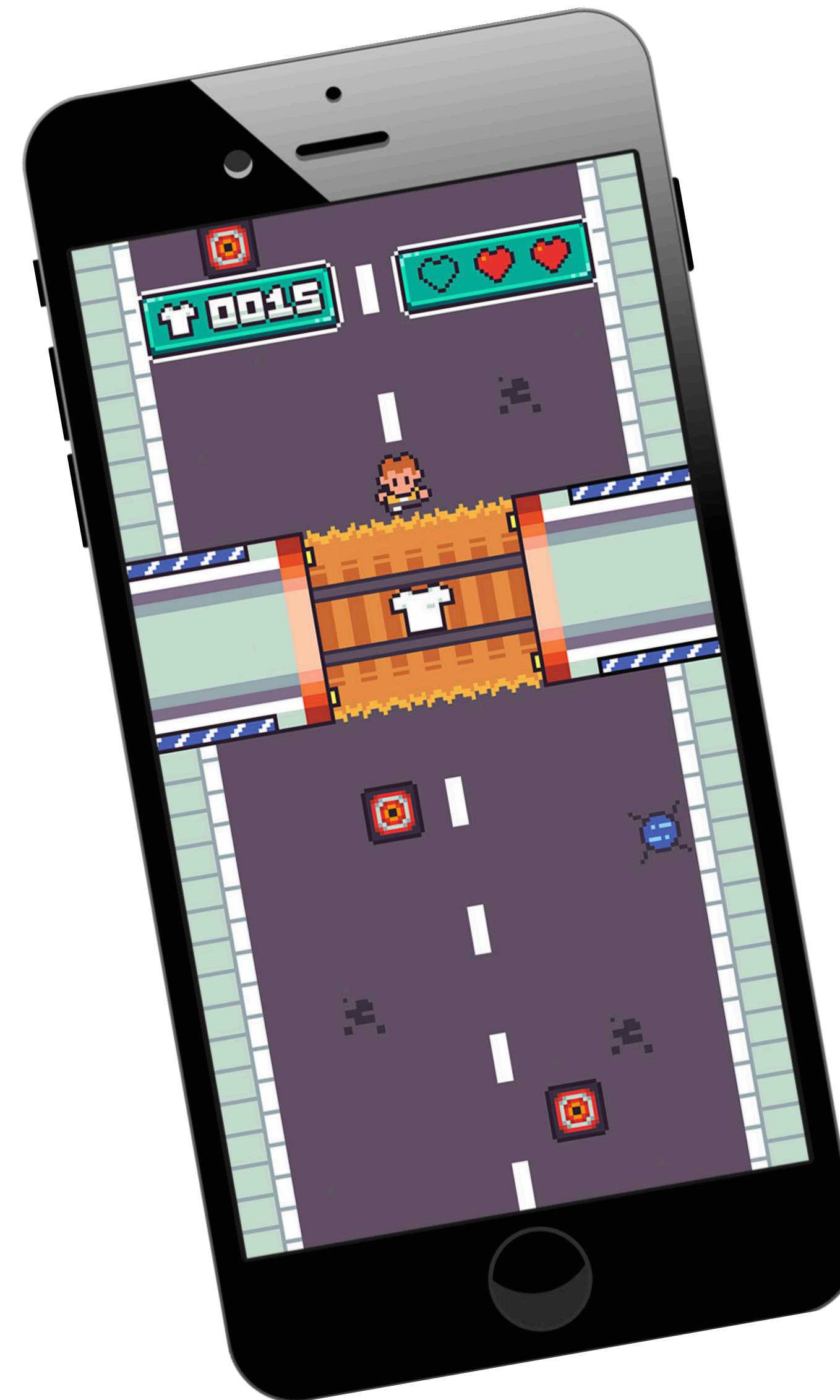
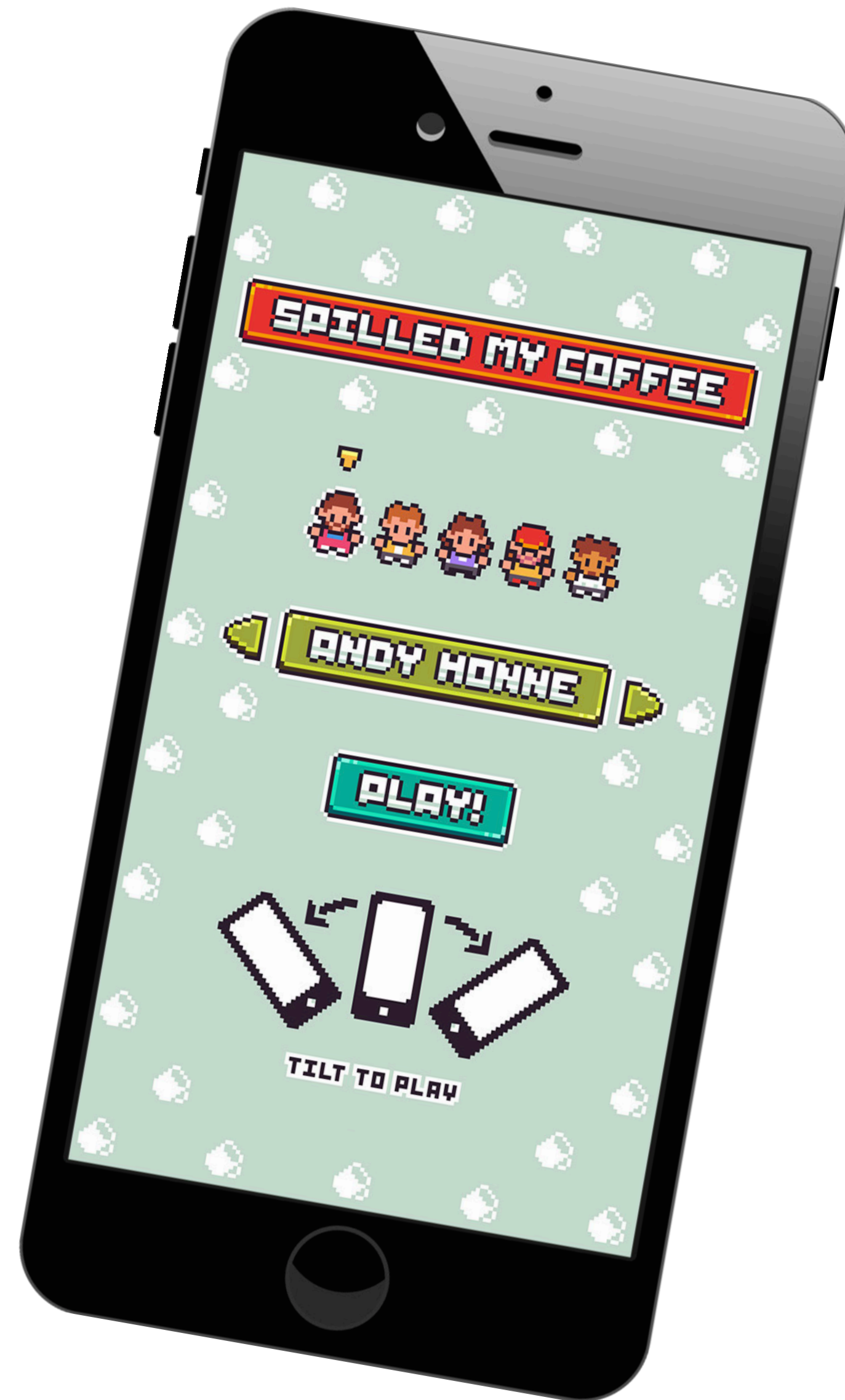
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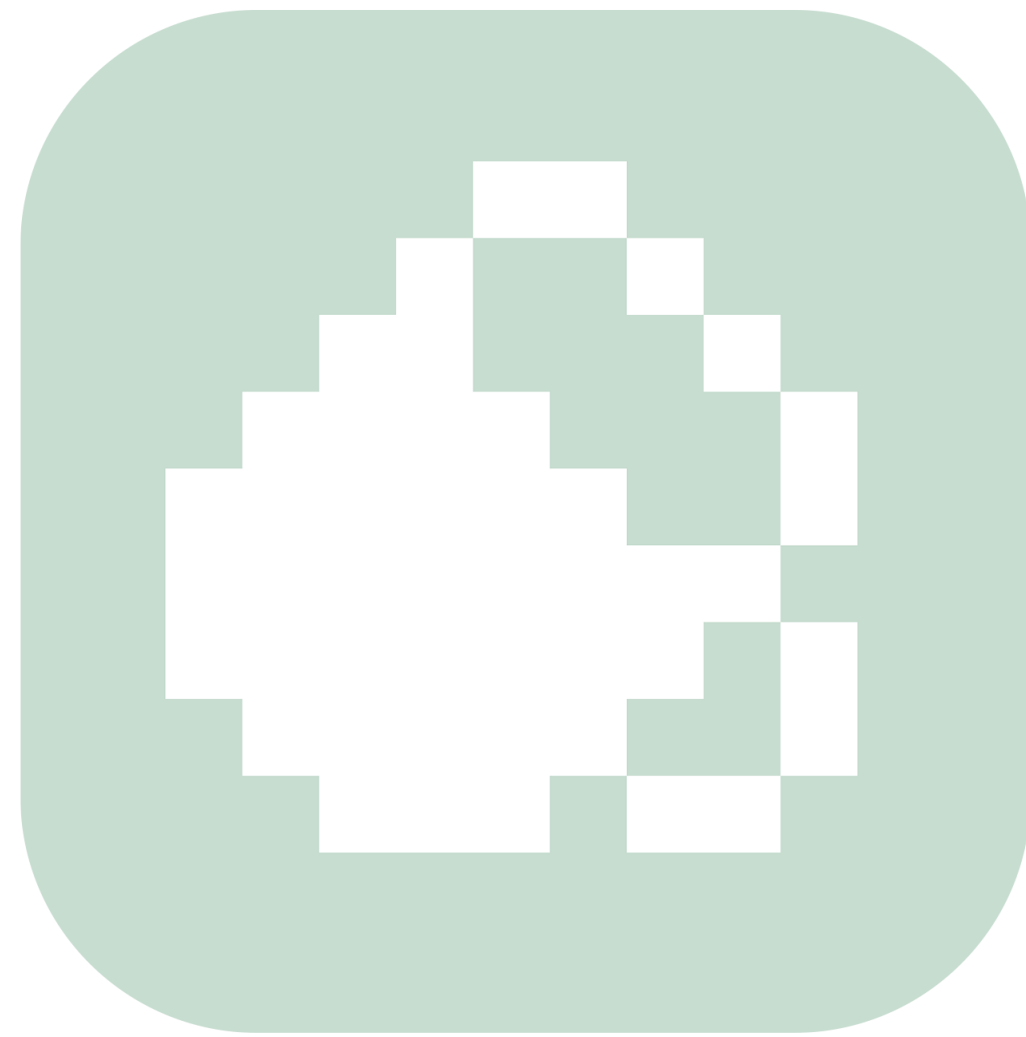
Alongside some test screenshots showing the gameplay, I also wanted a 'character select' screen. In response to this I created some basic UI assets, also made using individual pixels.

The train assets were the most difficult to create, with the limited colour range not translating into 3D all too clearly. Despite this, I'm proud of what I've managed to create in such a short time.









AURORA (2021) AURORA - Cure For Me (Visualiser) [YouTube Video]. 14 July. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XykvxXg_JUI [Accessed: 28th October 2021]

Allday (2021) Album Artwork for ‘Drinking With My Smoking Friends’ [Artwork]. Los Angeles, America. [Accessed: 25th October 2021]

Cerroni, A (2021) HONNE Instagram AR Filter [Image]. Self-published. London.

Coppens, A (2021) LinkedIn Profile Picture [Image]. Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/arthurcoppens/> [Accessed: 25th October 2021]

Coppens, A (2021) On ‘Spilled My Coffee’ & Pixel Art. Interview by Alexander Forsey [Email], 19th October.

Cullen, J (2021) Spilled My Coffee (feat. Allday) - HONNE Rework [YouTube Video]. 17 September. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSPUqcAFuRY> [Accessed: 25th October 2021]

DxCheetah (n.d) Screenshot of Temple Run [Image]. Available at: https://templerun.fandom.com/wiki/Tree?file=Temple_run_tree_root.jpg [Accessed: 26th October 2021]

Forsey, A (2021) Endless Runner Concept Sketches 1 [Artwork]. Self-published. London.

Forsey, A (2021) Endless Runner Concept Sketches 2 [Artwork]. Self-published. London.

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