Phantasy Teo Online

Simon Marsiglia

Phantasy Ice Online

Expanding the starting point for creative process through the use of fiction

Simon Marsiglia

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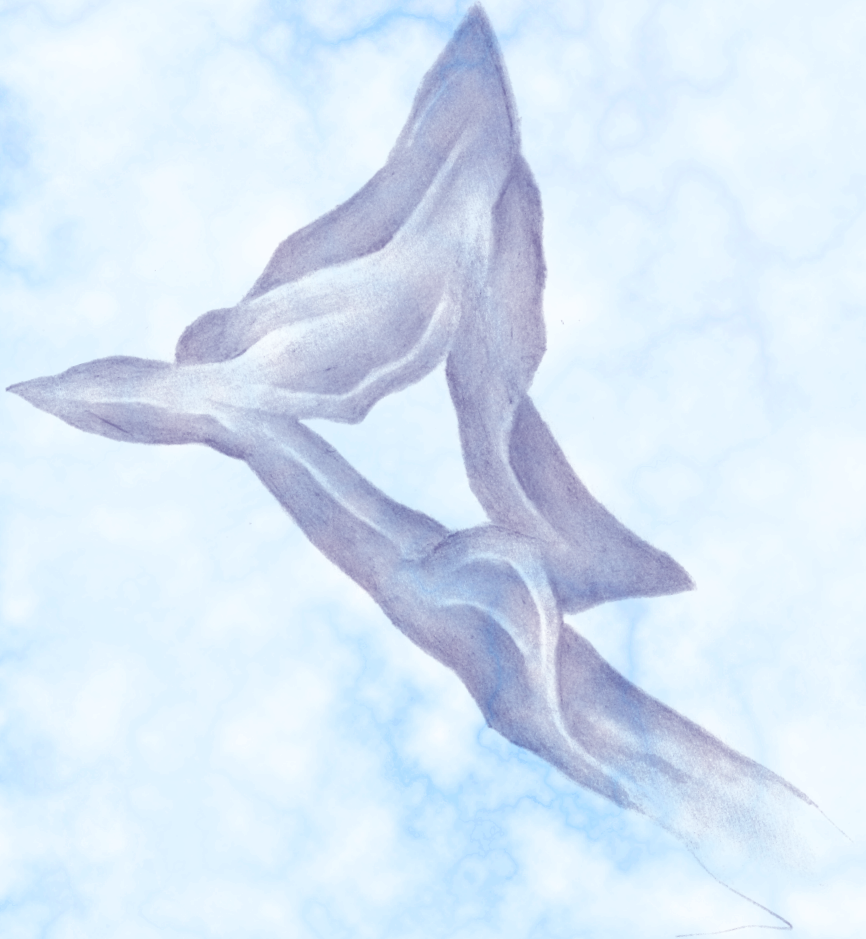
Welcome to Phantasy Ice Online

This text cordially invites you to follow along as I seek a new starting point for making things. To make sure that we embark on this adventure well prepared, there is some background information as to why I ended up searching for this new starting point in the realm of fiction and fictional characters. You will also be provided with the reason for me referencing jewellery and wearable ornaments in general. *Phantasy Ice Online* acts as a map depicting the route I took on my journey to find a useful tool for my practice. As you glance over the map you might spot some familiar places. On our quest for the tool we will pass by the ancient dungeon where the role-playing games live. Then we make a quick stop in the region of social media to restock our inventory, before we proceed to learn how to practise the craft of fiction in the realm of online tutorials.

Author's note
The first question
I posed was:
"Can the creative
practice be expanded
through role-playing,
and if so, how?"

The Author's notes are small tips and tricks that will help you on your way. They pop up like cookies on a website that you have to accept before you can go on. There is no behind the scenes or extra material available, meaning that you will experience this adventure through my eyes just as it unfolded. I'd like to thank you for joining me on this trip. Enjoy your stay.
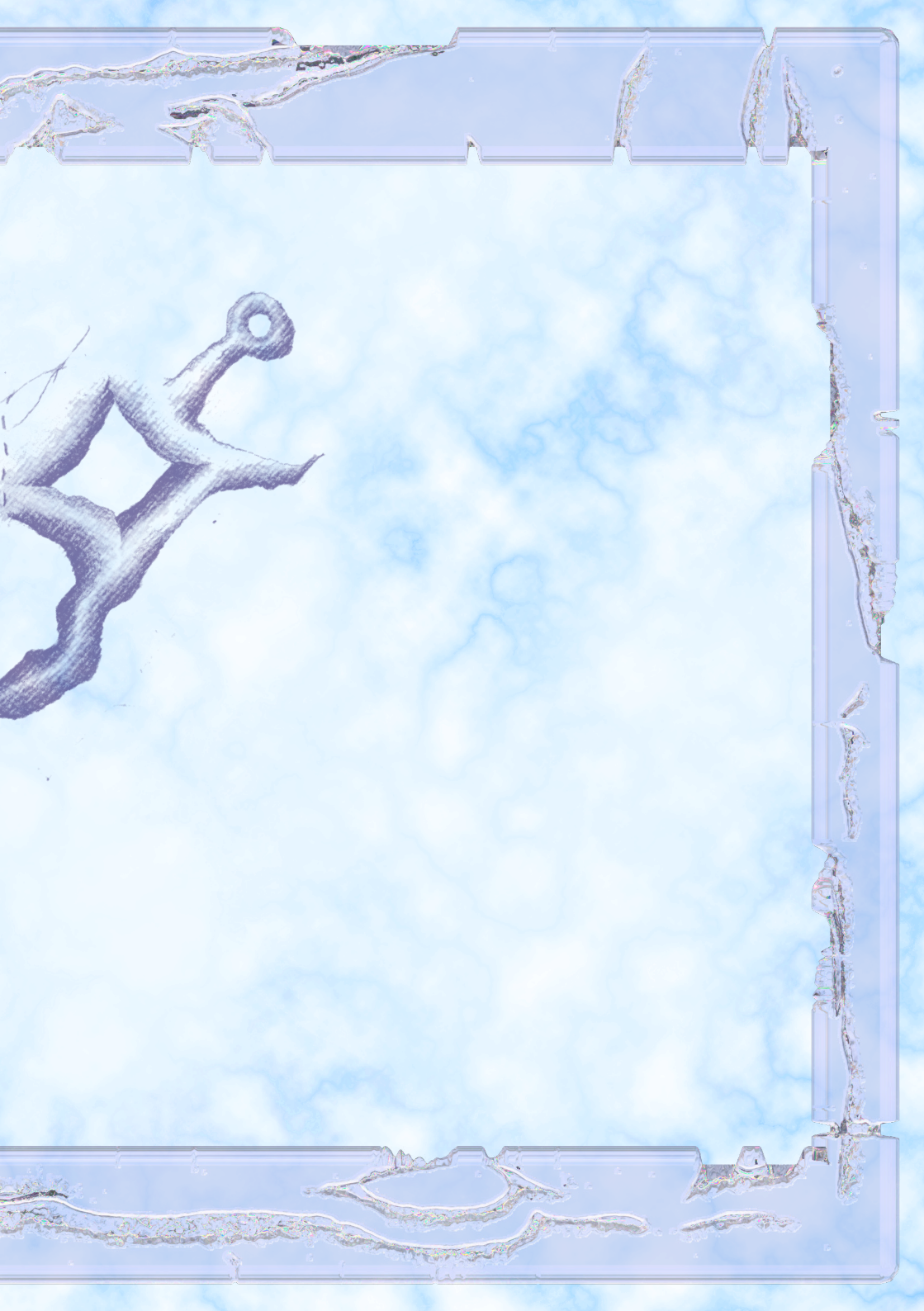
From Jewellery to Fictional Characters

Where I make a valid argument for the choice of topic

Jewellery had been uncharted territory for me just a few years ago. It was something I would *see* briefly while browsing through 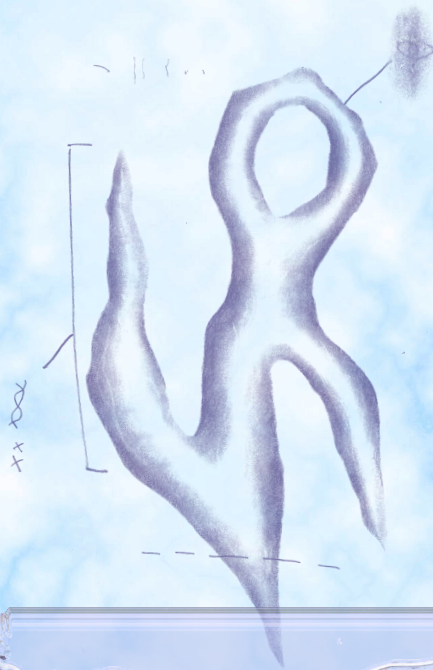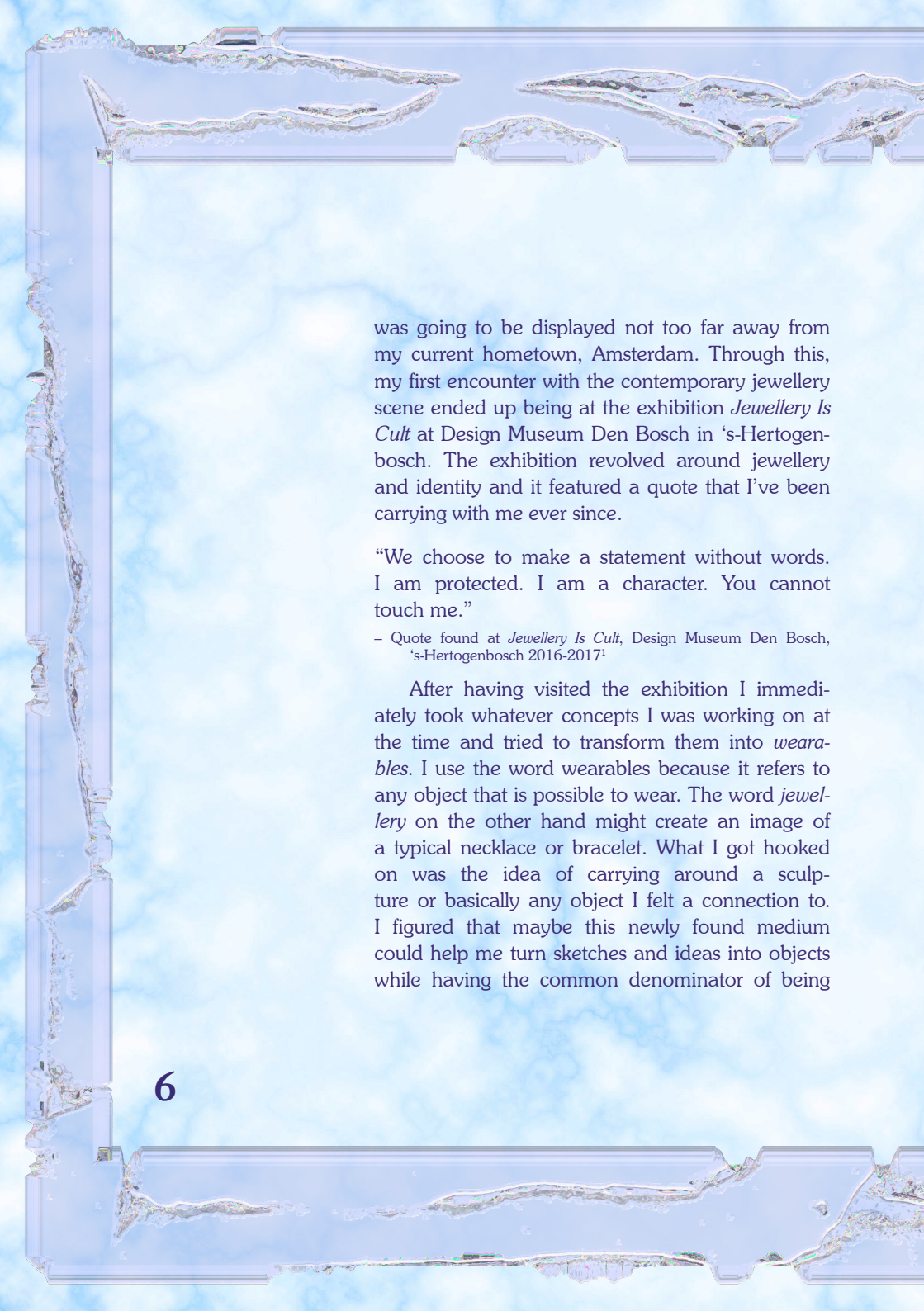Instagram, or in music videos on Youtube. When I arrived in Amsterdam to study at Rietveld in 2016 I was mainly interested in making drawings using pencil and charcoal. I was keeping track of a wide variety of illustrators such as Ester Eriksson: cartoonist using funky alterations of Disney characters, and Love Dahlstedt: maker of massive pencil drawings. They have very different styles but both incorporate aspects of pop culture into their work. I found it interesting that two very different styles could have such a clear common denominator. Through following the practices of Eriksson and Dahlstedt I came across the work of Göran Kling, a jewellery artist known for making one-off pieces based on mass-produced fakes, such as championship rings or various smileys. I became interested in Kling's jewellery due to how it referenced symbols connected to pop culture. I found out that his work
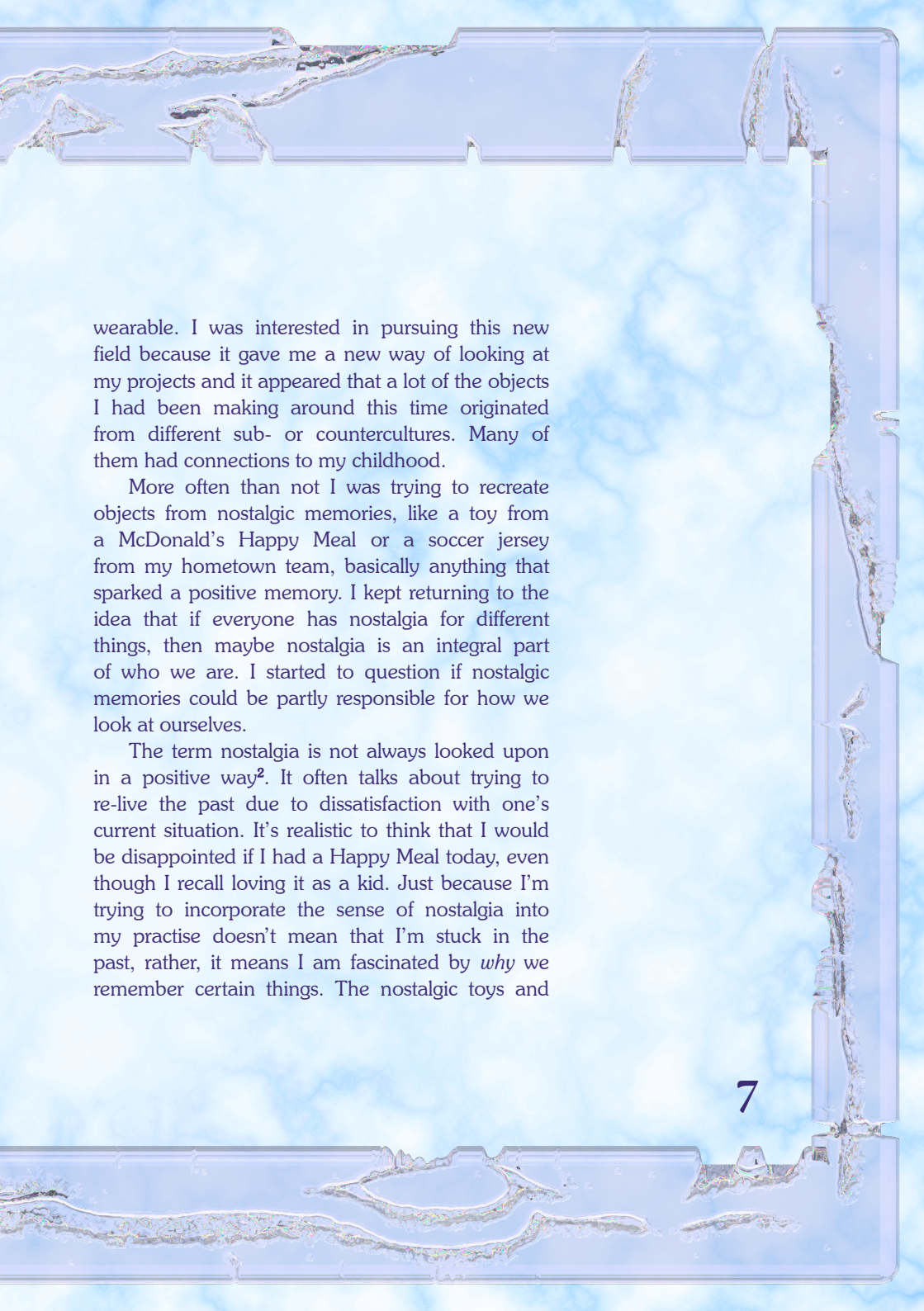
was going to be displayed not too far away from my current hometown, Amsterdam. Through this, my first encounter with the contemporary jewellery scene ended up being at the exhibition *Jewellery Is Cult* at Design Museum Den Bosch in 's-Hertogenbosch. The exhibition revolved around jewellery and identity and it featured a quote that I've been carrying with me ever since.

"We choose to make a statement without words. I am protected. I am a character. You cannot touch me."

– Quote found at *Jewellery Is Cult*, Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch 2016-2017[1]
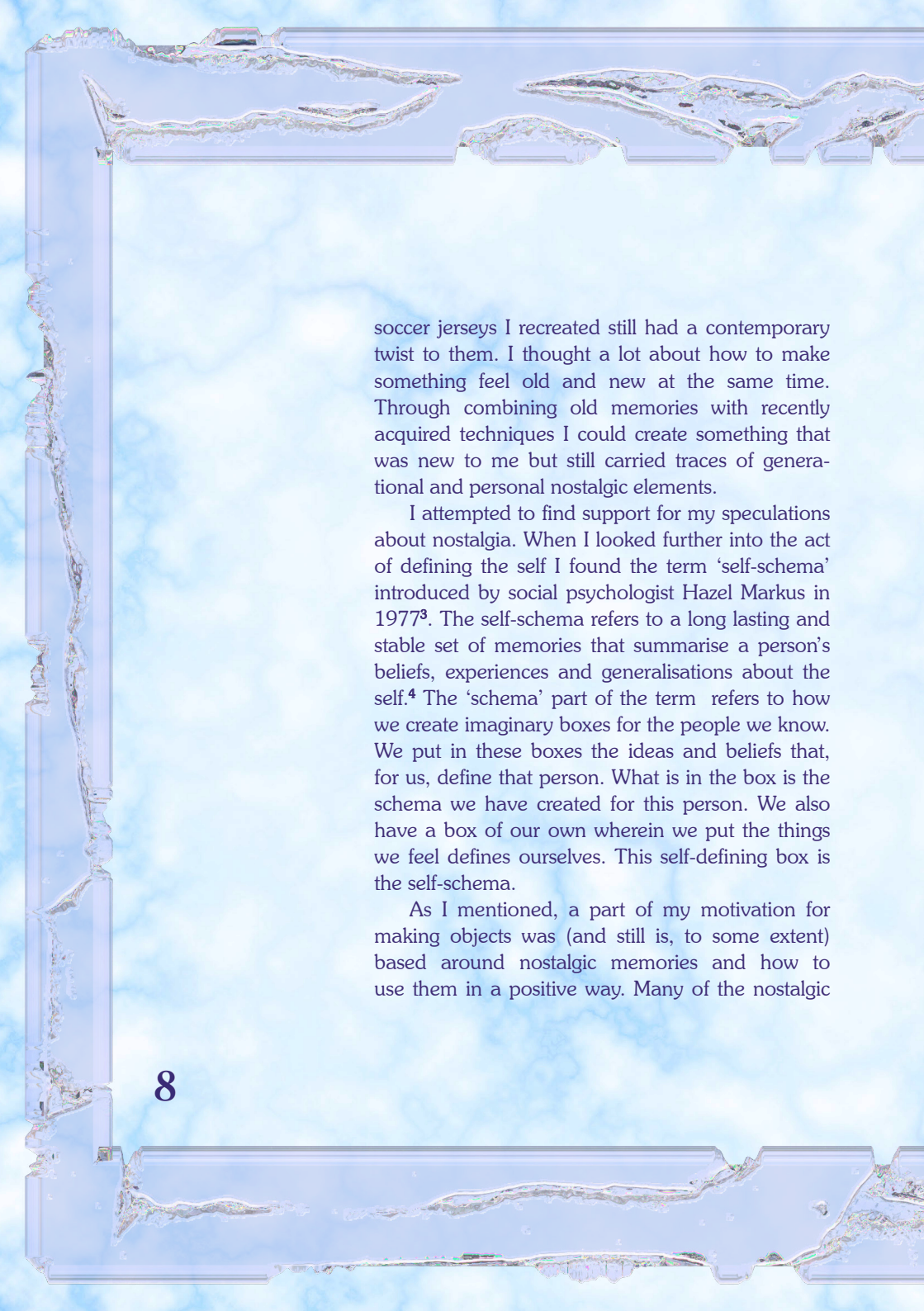
After having visited the exhibition I immediately took whatever concepts I was working on at the time and tried to transform them into *wearables*. I use the word wearables because it refers to any object that is possible to wear. The word *jewellery* on the other hand might create an image of a typical necklace or bracelet. What I got hooked on was the idea of carrying around a sculpture or basically any object I felt a connection to. I figured that maybe this newly found medium could help me turn sketches and ideas into objects while having the common denominator of being

wearable. I was interested in pursuing this new field because it gave me a new way of looking at my projects and it appeared that a lot of the objects I had been making around this time originated from different sub- or countercultures. Many of them had connections to my childhood.

More often than not I was trying to recreate objects from nostalgic memories, like a toy from a McDonald's Happy Meal or a soccer jersey from my hometown team, basically anything that sparked a positive memory. I kept returning to the idea that if everyone has nostalgia for different things, then maybe nostalgia is an integral part of who we are. I started to question if nostalgic memories could be partly responsible for how we look at ourselves.

The term nostalgia is not always looked upon in a positive way[2]. It often talks about trying to re-live the past due to dissatisfaction with one's current situation. It's realistic to think that I would be disappointed if I had a Happy Meal today, even though I recall loving it as a kid. Just because I'm trying to incorporate the sense of nostalgia into my practise doesn't mean that I'm stuck in the past, rather, it means I am fascinated by *why* we remember certain things. The nostalgic toys and

soccer jerseys I recreated still had a contemporary twist to them. I thought a lot about how to make something feel old and new at the same time. Through combining old memories with recently acquired techniques I could create something that was new to me but still carried traces of generational and personal nostalgic elements.

I attempted to find support for my speculations about nostalgia. When I looked further into the act of defining the self I found the term 'self-schema' introduced by social psychologist Hazel Markus in 1977[3]. The self-schema refers to a long lasting and stable set of memories that summarise a person's beliefs, experiences and generalisations about the self.[4] The 'schema' part of the term refers to how we create imaginary boxes for the people we know. We put in these boxes the ideas and beliefs that, for us, define that person. What is in the box is the schema we have created for this person. We also have a box of our own wherein we put the things we feel defines ourselves. This self-defining box is the self-schema.
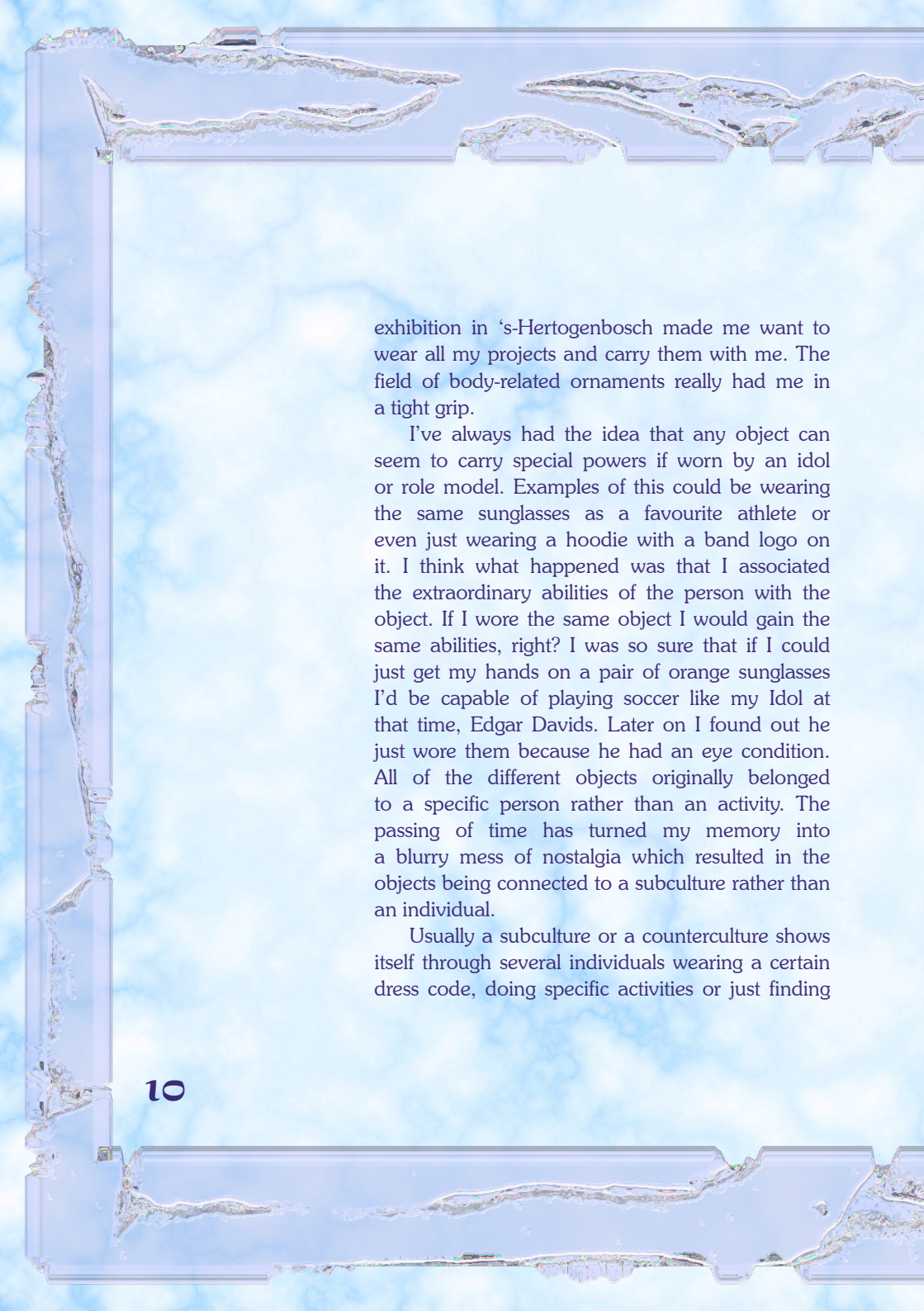
As I mentioned, a part of my motivation for making objects was (and still is, to some extent) based around nostalgic memories and how to use them in a positive way. Many of the nostalgic

symbols and objects (for me) were related to subcultures like hip hop and sci-fi, but also related to specific formal languages such as those belonging to fast food menus and sports gear. I wanted to take these objects and give them a new context. I tried to combine objects from my childhood memories and clash their different styles in order to create my own subculture.

Subculture uniform and accessory (2016-2017) here worn by Melle Van Herwaarden

The reason for combining the objects from my childhood memories was to somehow put a twist on their sense of nostalgia and thus create something new that was not bothered by the past. The kind of nostalgia that I was interested in was related to objects, and especially wearable ones. The

exhibition in 's-Hertogenbosch made me want to wear all my projects and carry them with me. The field of body-related ornaments really had me in a tight grip.

I've always had the idea that any object can seem to carry special powers if worn by an idol or role model. Examples of this could be wearing the same sunglasses as a favourite athlete or even just wearing a hoodie with a band logo on it. I think what happened was that I associated the extraordinary abilities of the person with the object. If I wore the same object I would gain the same abilities, right? I was so sure that if I could just get my hands on a pair of orange sunglasses I'd be capable of playing soccer like my Idol at that time, Edgar Davids. Later on I found out he just wore them because he had an eye condition. All of the different objects originally belonged to a specific person rather than an activity. The passing of time has turned my memory into a blurry mess of nostalgia which resulted in the objects being connected to a subculture rather than an individual.
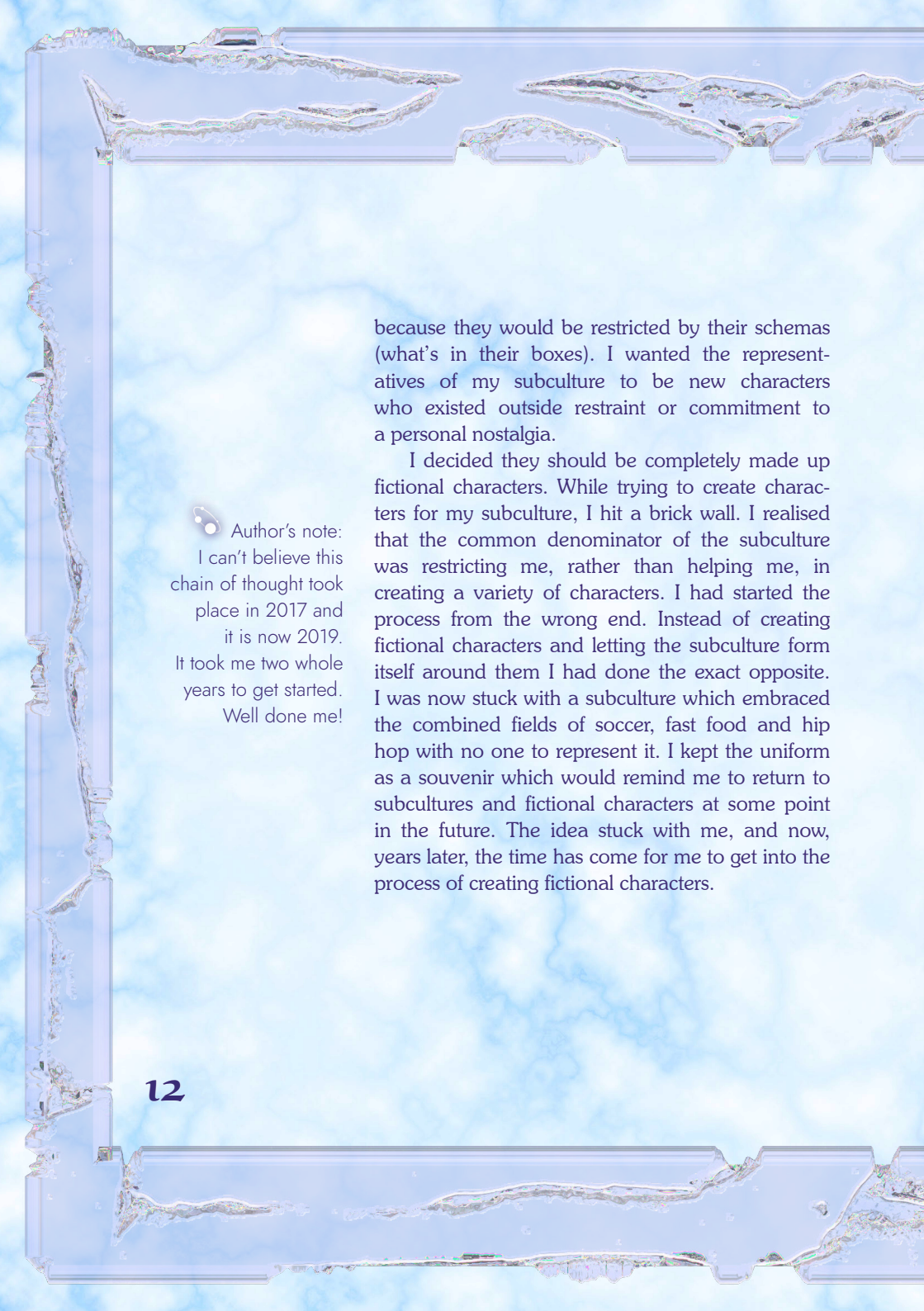
Usually a subculture or a counterculture shows itself through several individuals wearing a certain dress code, doing specific activities or just finding

interest in the same things. When I was working on making my own subculture I immediately went for a soccer related outfit to create a feeling of belonging together. I never followed a specific team as a kid but would often be interested in the shirts with the coolest sponsors.

Because I was new in the Netherlands when I began working on this project in 2017, I wanted the sponsor for my team to reflect my new surroundings. I went with the Dutch fast-food chain FEBO as inspiration for the pattern and logo of the shirt, and to add a source to my subculture. I still felt like my subculture was missing something. The sports influence was supplying the uniform, and the fast food was supplying the visual language, but where was the accessory inspiration going to come from? As I wanted my subculture to be really loud and extroverted I decided to go with hip hop.

As a kid I had this fake bling-bling necklace with a pendant capable of rotating 360 degrees. It was the shit! So I went and made the loudest most obscene hip hop-esque accessories I could think of where I could include aspects of sports and fast food. Since I was trying to create a subculture I definitely needed people to represent it, but I had no interest in those being real life individuals
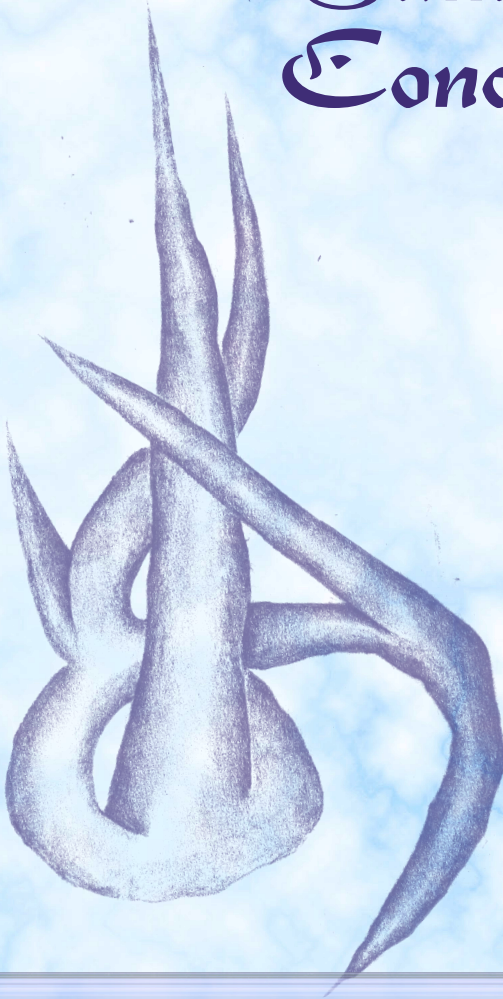
because they would be restricted by their schemas (what's in their boxes). I wanted the representatives of my subculture to be new characters who existed outside restraint or commitment to a personal nostalgia.

I decided they should be completely made up fictional characters. While trying to create characters for my subculture, I hit a brick wall. I realised that the common denominator of the subculture was restricting me, rather than helping me, in creating a variety of characters. I had started the process from the wrong end. Instead of creating fictional characters and letting the subculture form itself around them I had done the exact opposite. I was now stuck with a subculture which embraced the combined fields of soccer, fast food and hip hop with no one to represent it. I kept the uniform as a souvenir which would remind me to return to subcultures and fictional characters at some point in the future. The idea stuck with me, and now, years later, the time has come for me to get into the process of creating fictional characters.

Author's note:
I can't believe this chain of thought took place in 2017 and it is now 2019. It took me two whole years to get started. Well done me!

Jumping to
Conclusions
Like...

Where I pretend that I already have the keys to the kingdom

Once I had created some fictional characters I could give them ornaments or objects that they would appreciate and value based on their self-schemas. My intention with this was to plant an idea of the characters' appearances and make them come to life in the eyes of the beholder. I had hoped that I could make viewers of my work feel more invested in the objects by connecting them to a story.

Example

It's the Winter of 3001 and another year has passed in space colony number 456. Ara wonders what the ancestors back on Earth would be doing at this time of year. The only object that Ara has ever encountered that originated from Earth is the brooch that has been in her family for generations. It's made from an organic Earth material and coated with something shiny. In the middle of it there is a small capsule of water from Earth.

Reflections

Here the character is located in a space colony in the year 3001. Ara, as the character is named, knows that in the past their ancestors were alive back on Earth. The character's only physical connection to Earth is an inherited brooch. Once I have established this I can then start to imagine how this amulet would look based on information from the fiction. In this case it should be made out of something that could be acquired on Earth but not in the space colony, such as wood or as Ara calls it: "an organic Earth material". The brooch could also have been coated with something shiny and hard to protect the valuable material it's made from. Already here I have enough information to imagine what it could possibly look like.

So far we have considered the following:
1. How can I create a character?
2. What if this character has an object?
3. Through this, can I establish what the object looks like?

The natural development for this chain of thought would be to imagine how the object in the fiction has been created. A so-called hypothetical process. If I can create a fictional character (in this

case Ara) I can also create a speculative scenario for how Ara's ancestors created the object.

4. What if I can create a scenario for how the object is made?

It's like building up a scene for a movie, the roles need a description that tells us what they are, but they also need a stage and something to do on it. If we continue with the example of the story about our dear friend Ara, we can imagine how they would have dealt with the situation. Maybe Ara's ancestors ventured to a sacred tree and cut off a piece of it with a specific tool. Maybe Ara has created a place where several amulets are kept hidden because Earth material is a very valuable asset in the space colony. These are all important variables I will keep in mind further down the road when it comes to creating fictional characters … Anyway, back to my practice!
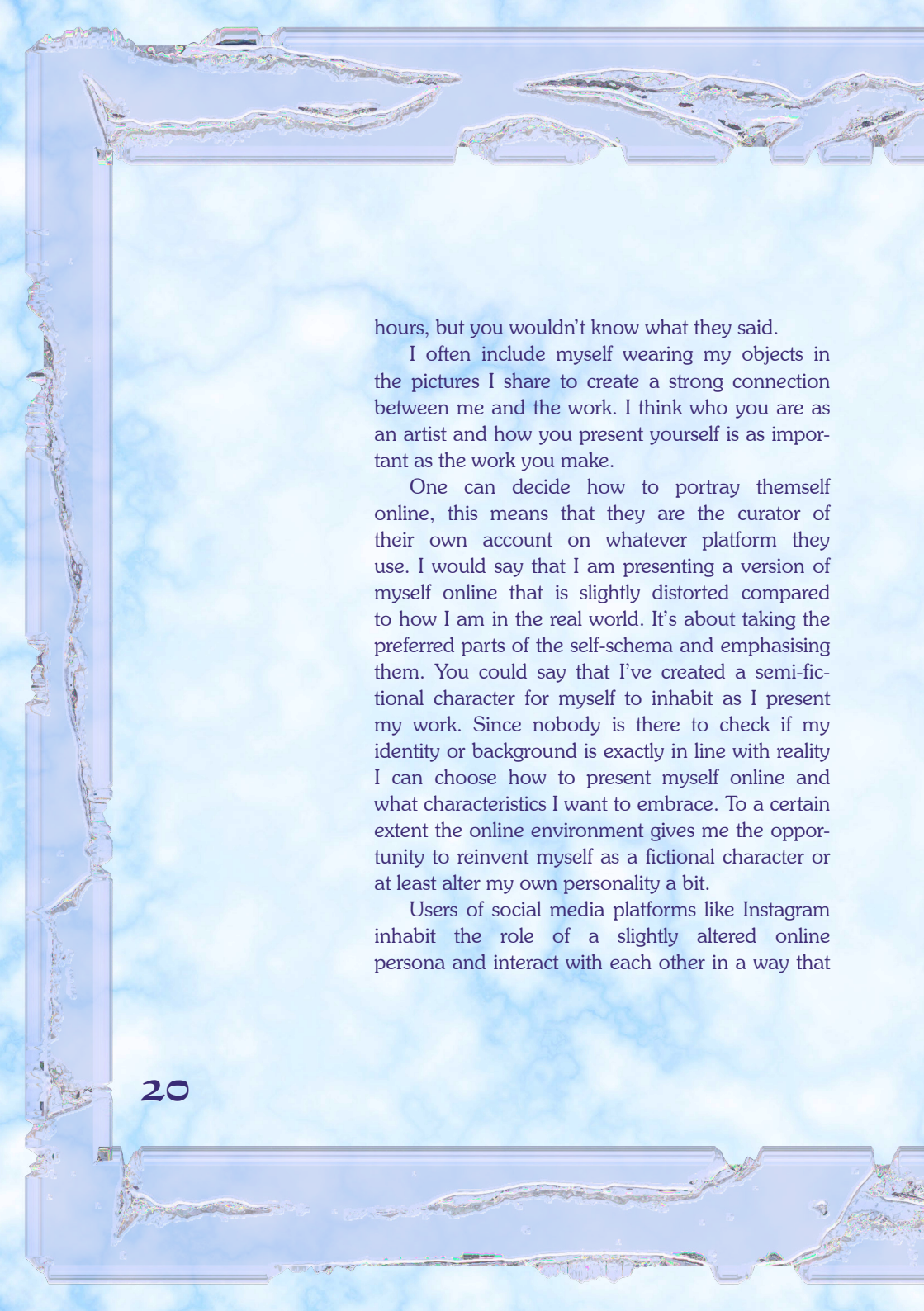
What Do I Do?
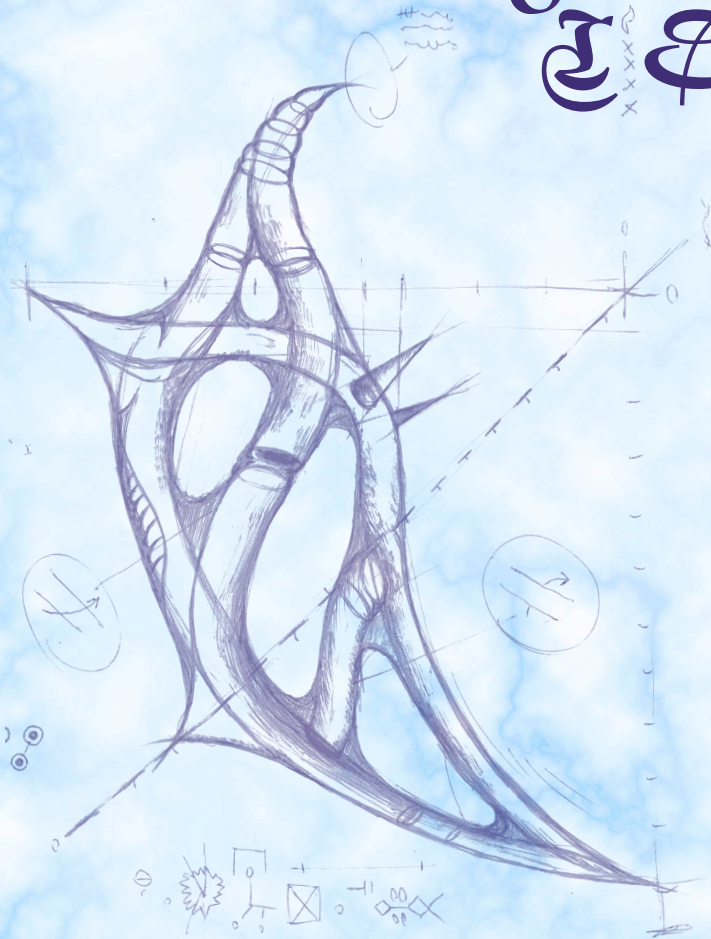
[chorus: Me]
Me me me me ×8

Today I create various body related ornaments
as well as objects. I use online platforms such as
Instagram to present my work and receive imme-
diate feedback. Immediate feedback means that
one has direct contact with the people looking at
their work. Imagine you could walk into a crowd
carrying a sculpture around your neck. You would
receive reactions and thoughts on what your are
wearing. If the sculpture was just standing in the
corner of a white cube gallery a whole bunch
of people could stand there and talk about it for

Me, wearing
my own work, MAD,
New York, 2019

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hours, but you wouldn't know what they said.

I often include myself wearing my objects in the pictures I share to create a strong connection between me and the work. I think who you are as an artist and how you present yourself is as important as the work you make.

One can decide how to portray themself online, this means that they are the curator of their own account on whatever platform they use. I would say that I am presenting a version of myself online that is slightly distorted compared to how I am in the real world. It's about taking the preferred parts of the self-schema and emphasising them. You could say that I've created a semi-fictional character for myself to inhabit as I present my work. Since nobody is there to check if my identity or background is exactly in line with reality I can choose how to present myself online and what characteristics I want to embrace. To a certain extent the online environment gives me the opportunity to reinvent myself as a fictional character or at least alter my own personality a bit.

Users of social media platforms like Instagram inhabit the role of a slightly altered online persona and interact with each other in a way that

reminds me of a role-playing adventure or a video game. You are controlling something that is representing you but at the same time you are disconnected from the restrictions of your self-schema. Even with the slightest distortion such as renting something and pretending it's yours can turn you into a fictional character. There aren't really any rules for how to build your online persona. As long as you abide by laws, general rules and guidelines for the online platform you can shape your online character without limitations.

Classical role-playing games, on the other hand, are accompanied by rules regarding character creation within their imaginary world. I figured that I could use role-playing games as a tool to help me get into character making. That being said, I'm not planning to create a step by step guide for how to create objects but rather something to utilise as a starting point. The only encounter I've previously had with tabletop games is painting little plastic Warhammer figures with really expensive paint, so please have patience with me as we go through the basics.

Role-playing Games: A Crash Course

Roll my dice, flip my coin!

In this part I look at the aspects used to define a role-playing game (hereafter refered to as 'RPG') and how they have developed from analog experiences to digital ones. Since I'm likening the worlds of role-playing games to those of social media platforms, I decided to look into how role-playing has gone from completely analog to a full on digital online experience thinking that I could find some parallels.

So here we go, this is what I learned about RPGs: Original RPGs[5] or TRPGs (tabletop role-playing game) is take place in fictional settings inhabited by characters whom the players act as, often sat around a table with each other[6]. The participants act out a story through the eyes of their fictional characters, as led by a Dungeon Master, who makes pivotal decisions. Changing one's voice to match a character, or wearing objects affiliated with the character is possible, but the playing of the game often happens solely in a 'Theatre of the mind'[7]. This term refers to the combined ability, setting, tools, and techniques by which radio performers create an imaginary scene in their audiences' minds by only using the media of sound.

I tried to create a scene that would represent a 'Theatre of the mind'*:*

As they were walking through the forrest the wind had started to increase in strength.

　　Sounds of leaves blowing in the wind

They were worried they wouldn't make it home before the storm.

Q: "I'm worried we won't make it home
　　before the storm"
P: "Don't worry, we will reach the cabin in time."

Sound of horses slowing down and a door creaking
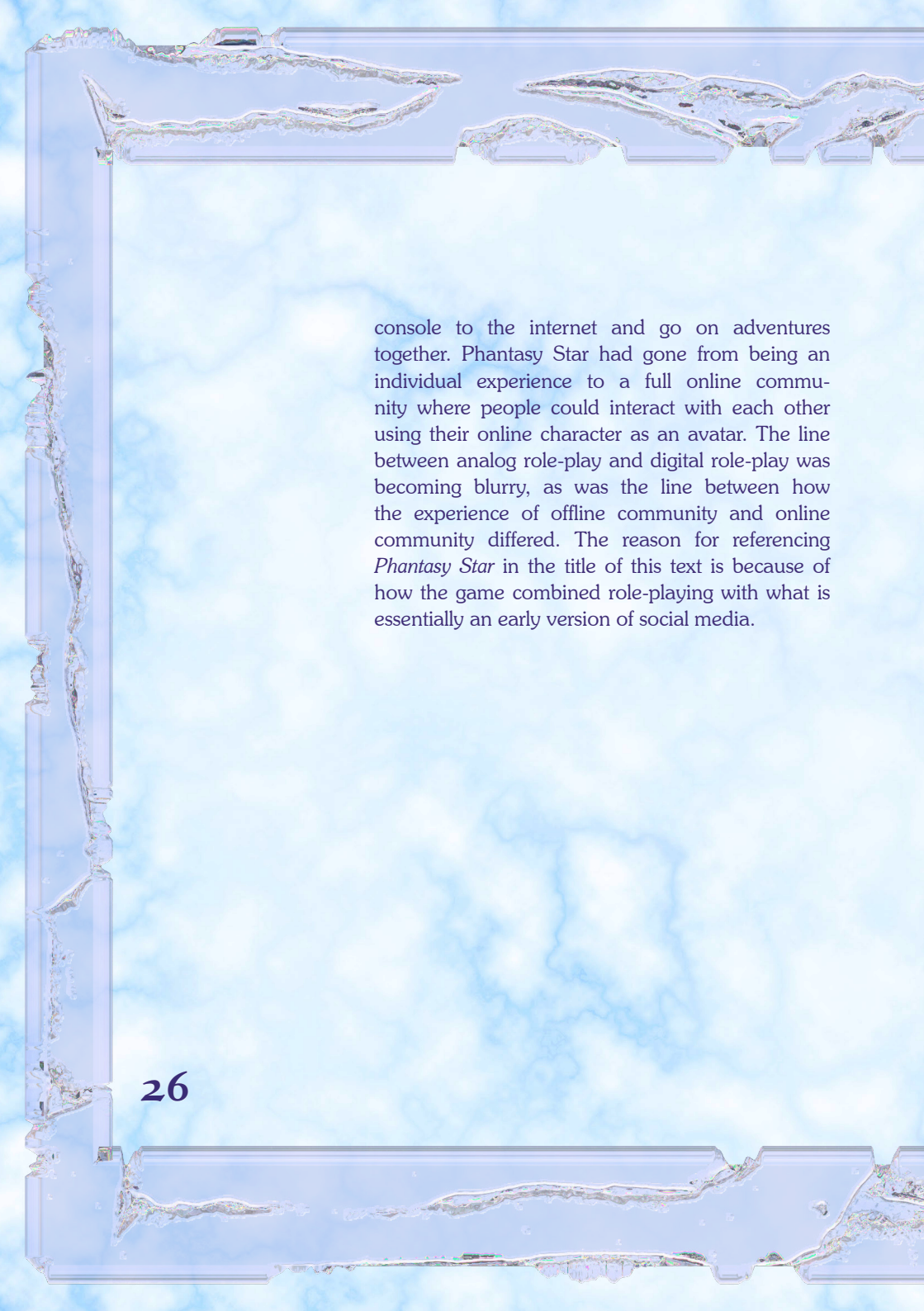
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The RPG/TRPG is based on the participants performing structured decision-making regarding the actions taken by their characters. The actions then fail or succeed based on probability through the roll of one or several dice. Will the character be able to pick a lock? Roll the dice and find out.

One of the most common TRPGs is *Dungeons & Dragons*[8], (hereafter refered to as 'D&D') released in 1974 ,created by Gary Gygax and

Dave Arneson. The core gameplay of D&D is storytelling. One teams up with their friends and acts out a story through the roles of fantasy character archetypes like Elves, Dwarves, Wizards, etc. After D&D was released, several unlicensed computer versions of the game were created on university mainframe systems, thus birthing the RPG video game genre, which has evolved from simple text based adventures into fully fledge 3D worlds damp with systems. One of them being the globally renowned video game *Phantasy Star* (1987)[9]. I've chosen to target this specific RPG due to its history having a clear transition from single player video game adventure to an online multiplayer experience.

In the original *Phantasy Star*,the player would traverse maze-like dungeons fighting an array of enemies in first person mode as if the player themself were in the shoes of the character. With the introduction of accessible internet, the creators behind *Phantasy Star* saw the opportunity to take the game to a new level. They thought: What if people could interact through these fictional characters and go on adventures together. In 2000 the game *Phantasy Star Online* was released. Players could now hook up their video game

Author's note: The reason for the word 'ice' in the title is to make a reference to both jewellery and subculture. Due to their superior conductivity, diamonds feel cold when applied to skin,hence the nickname: Ice[10]. Jewellery is also frequently referenced as Ice in hip hop lyrics. *"Just left my jeweler, so much ice on my neck got pneumonia"* - Takeoff, Migos

console to the internet and go on adventures together. Phantasy Star had gone from being an individual experience to a full online community where people could interact with each other using their online character as an avatar. The line between analog role-play and digital role-play was becoming blurry, as was the line between how the experience of offline community and online community differed. The reason for referencing *Phantasy Star* in the title of this text is because of how the game combined role-playing with what is essentially an early version of social media.

What About the World Today?

# Where I watch anime on Netflix and justify it ;)

I look at social media as a stage where our semi-fictional characters present themselves. My persona uses online platforms like Instagram in order to to satisfy their desire for immediate feedback. As curator of my online persona I can distort the self to emphasise selected parts of my selfschema. The audience of the online platform will look at you through the lens that is your online persona. You now have an alternated schema. Below follows some examples were I found traces of the combination of social media and roleplaying games.

OMSK:

Today there is a massive amount of online RPGs as well as TRPGs. One alternative form of a roleplaying game is created by OMSK, a Berlin-based collective. OMSK provide their participating players with speculative scenarios or as they call it "unlived realities"[11]. The player then acts as both creator and actor in an unpredictable game scenario.

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One of the things OMSK is busy with is creating Cryptoraves[12]. They are called 'crypto' because the only way for participants to gain access to their character, the location, and instructions to the game is to mine crypto currency.
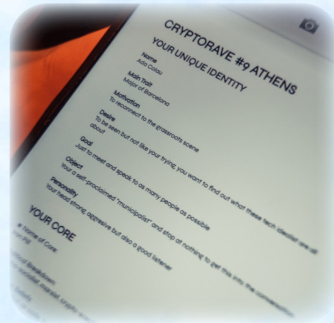
The way you, as a potential player go about it is: you sacrifice 11 hours of your computers CPU as payment then you receive a character as seen in the picture. OMSK then arranges a six to eight hour workshop for you to participate in before the rave to get into the role of your character.

The idea of having a specific time and place for taking the role of a fictional character is

something I found reoccurring in D&D as well as in online games to a certain extent. The possibility of pretending to be someone else for a moment relieves us from our self-schema. I did not consider before going into this subject that maybe the point of creating a fictional character was not so much the character itself but rather a form of escapism, avoiding the boring, banal or scary parts of everyday life.

I was wondering if people really followed the instructions given by OMSK when going to a rave or if it was all just an excuse to party. When asked in a recent interview[13] about how strictly visitors are instructed to proactively play their given character throughout the whole rave, one of the things OMSK replied was: "Inside a rave, you know you can be anyone, but you can never get away from who you are completely. You will always let something bleed into your experience from what you left behind and vice versa". They explain how obtaining the character is as important as playing the game. Whether to go fully into the character or not is something OMSK leave up to their visitors.

Sword Art Online

An example that talks about both the positive and the negative aspects of role-playing games and fictional characters is the animated show *Sword Art Online*. The series revolves around people being trapped inside their fictional characters. Their only way out is to beat the game, if their character dies in the game it also kills them in the real world.

As of this moment, I am the only person able to control this world.

The villain keeping them hostage in this virtual world provides the players with a magic item. The object is a mirror that turns the in-game appearance of their character into a copy of their body in the real world, exposing the people behind

the characters. The players are now trapped in a fictional world while still resembling their real life self. Some players manage to find joy in this new semi-fictional version of themselves, while others become filled with anxiety and decide to end their life.

When the players entered the game they did so through a headpiece called *NerveGear*. This object acts like a link between the real and the fictional world. Our phones work in a similar fashion to this, they're tools we use to control a semi-fictional version of ourselves online.

We can question how attached we become to the distorted version of ourselves and that

is something this series does very well. If I can live in a fictional world where it is possible to emphasise the aspects of my appearance I prefer, why would I want to go back to the real world where I have flaws?

So that's what happened...

Furthermore *Sword Art Online* is filled with magical objects which all give the characters special powers like teleportation or protection from magic. It was these objects which kept me interested in the show, and I was already starting the process of incorporating elements from the animated show into my own practice. *Sword Art Online* mixes a futuristic setting with fantasy-based elements. This clash of genres tends to generate objects that

feel new but with traces of their origin, somewhat similar to what I was trying to do when mixing different sources into my own subculture.

My First
Attempt

2.

or as I'd like to call it: to break the rules, I must learn them first

To develop my own characters I decided to start off with the traditional method of character creation found in *Dungeons and Dragons*, the role-playing game I mentioned earlier. One part of the character creation is based on rolling dice and putting numbers in boxes which decide how good your character performs in certain situations. This is based around different attributes such as strength, dexterity, charisma, and so on. This also depends on what fictional race you decide to play with such as elf, gnome, etc.

I figured that the most thorough way to go about this was to join an actual role-playing game group in Amsterdam and see where it would take me. After participating in a meeting and a few online discussions I felt that I had enough knowledge to try and build a character and participate in an adventure. In the adventure I tried to base my decision-making as closely as possible around the self-schema of the character I had created.

I started by creating a wood elf which is a sub

race of elf often referred to as wild elf. They are good with camouflage and nature. I decided to give my character the classification Rogue, meaning that he would have characteristics such as sneakiness, acrobatic ability and stealth. I created a background story for him about being a hunter with thievish tendencies. To further develop the character's visual aspect I gave him moon elf like features such as blueish-white skin but with the dark hair of a wood elf. I used his odd features to create a scenario where the character was unsure about his origin. The wood elf now had a reason for leaving his village to discover the story of his origin. When the adventure begins he has found a temporary home in a nameless city where he now recovers stolen objects to their rightful owners.

Troll Trouble in the Town of Two Tavernas:

When the story began our group had ended up in a village that had two tavernas. We were part of a delegation on the way to an important meeting. Our core mission in this village was to talk to the people in the village. We also got an instruction to keep an eye out for magical objects. When we entered one of the tavernas there was a card game going on at a table. There was a lot of gold coins

on the table and some of the characters became very interested. A few of us were interested in taking part in the game to try and win some coins while others had their focus on what was available from the menu of food and drinks.

Suddenly a massive troll bursted through the wall and the whole taverna stood in shock. We all had to collaborate and use our different strengths and roles to battle it. The troll was wearing a big silver collar. On the collar there was some kind of magic stone shining with a blue light. It seemed that there was a spell keeping the collar locked around the neck of the troll. Several times the troll tried to rip off the necklace without success. It seemed as if the spell or curse put on the necklace was so strong that it was making it impossible to remove. After some players had taken some damage, but without any casualties (other than some innocent bystanders in the bar), the troll was taken down. When the whole situation had calmed down we inspected the necklace. The rest of the party distracted the innkeeper while I sneakily lifted fifty gold coins from the table into my backpack.

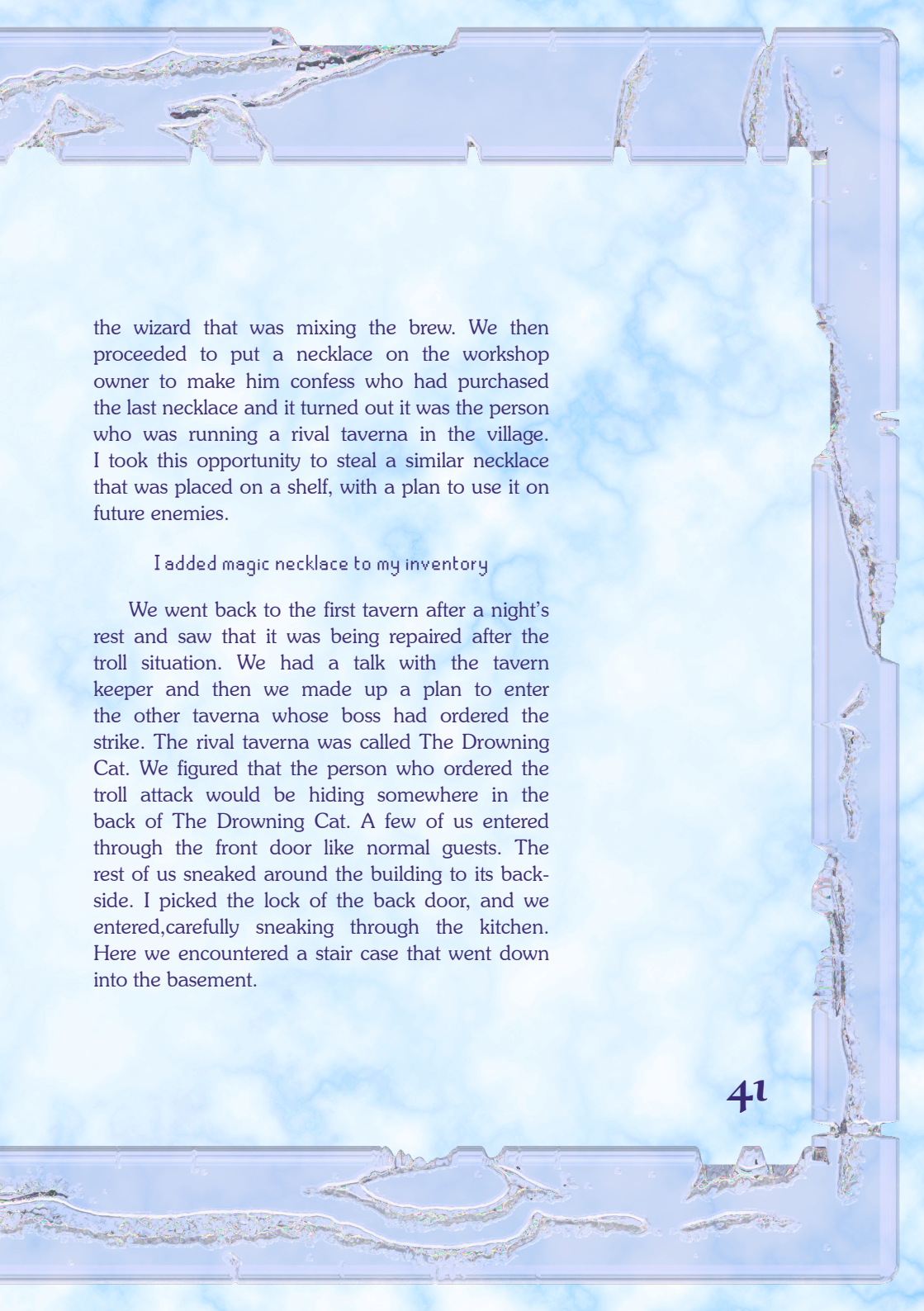I added 50 gold coins to my inventory

We were told (by a talking cat) that the necklace held a controlling power and that whoever you put it on would follow your command. If we followed the tracks of the troll we would find the creator of this devilish object. So we followed the tracks and arrived at a grim tower. There were a lot of signs outside the tower telling us to go away. One of our group members kicked down the door in without further notice. We had entered some kind of workshop for spells and magic objects. A similar necklace to the one we saw on the troll was wrapped around the neck of a wizard who was mixing a red brew in a big cauldron.

We tried to convince the workshop owner and his wife to tell us who had ordered the troll to attack the taverna but we failed miserably. It quickly evolved into a hostile situation. We then tried to keep the owner hostage but the only thing that happened was that I managed to slap his work-goggles off of his head.
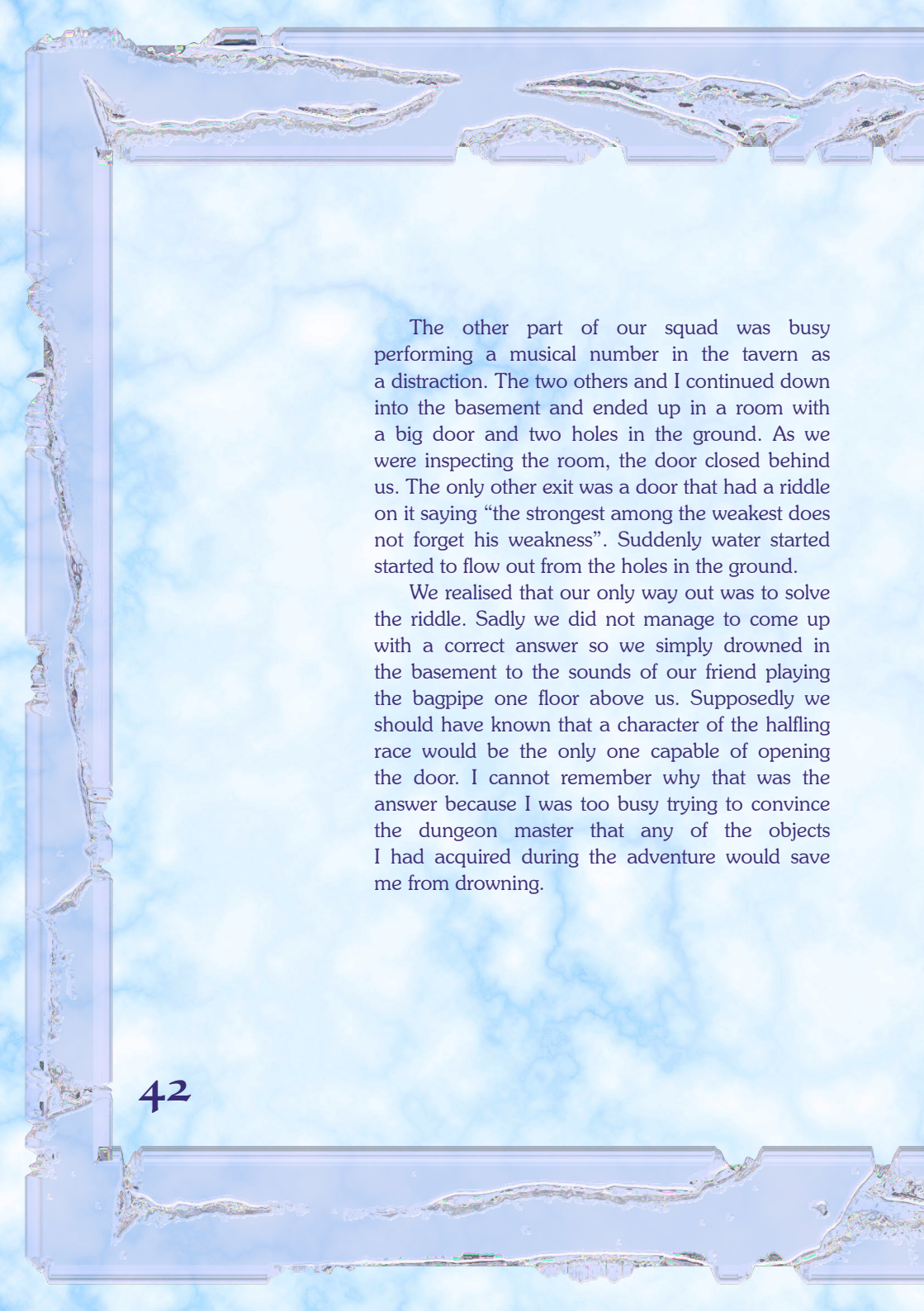
I added goggles to my inventory

After refusing to tell us who ordered the necklace to be made we proceeded with threatening his family as well as removing the necklace from

the wizard that was mixing the brew. We then proceeded to put a necklace on the workshop owner to make him confess who had purchased the last necklace and it turned out it was the person who was running a rival taverna in the village. I took this opportunity to steal a similar necklace that was placed on a shelf, with a plan to use it on future enemies.

I added magic necklace to my inventory

We went back to the first tavern after a night's rest and saw that it was being repaired after the troll situation. We had a talk with the tavern keeper and then we made up a plan to enter the other taverna whose boss had ordered the strike. The rival taverna was called The Drowning Cat. We figured that the person who ordered the troll attack would be hiding somewhere in the back of The Drowning Cat. A few of us entered through the front door like normal guests. The rest of us sneaked around the building to its back-side. I picked the lock of the back door, and we entered,carefully sneaking through the kitchen. Here we encountered a stair case that went down into the basement.

The other part of our squad was busy performing a musical number in the tavern as a distraction. The two others and I continued down into the basement and ended up in a room with a big door and two holes in the ground. As we were inspecting the room, the door closed behind us. The only other exit was a door that had a riddle on it saying "the strongest among the weakest does not forget his weakness". Suddenly water started started to flow out from the holes in the ground.

We realised that our only way out was to solve the riddle. Sadly we did not manage to come up with a correct answer so we simply drowned in the basement to the sounds of our friend playing the bagpipe one floor above us. Supposedly we should have known that a character of the halfling race would be the only one capable of opening the door. I cannot remember why that was the answer because I was too busy trying to convince the dungeon master that any of the objects I had acquired during the adventure would save me from drowning.

Reflections

I felt like it was possible to transport myself into the imaginative world. I could see the scenes take place in the tavern and the troll coming through the wall. I could almost feel the magic necklace in my hands the way it was described. The size of this thing was also decided by a troll wearing it, so it must have been a heavy and quite sizeable object. The further the story went the more alive I felt my character become. The object's description really helped with my visualisation of it, and I could imagine my character struggling with his bag, now containing a massive necklace. I figured that if it was possible for me to imagine my character in an adventure that was created by another person I might as well try to create a completely freestanding character and then start to build an adventure around it. I was also considering the thought that maybe I needed to use input from other people when creating characters to avoid slipping back into my own self-schema.

Giving Birth to a Character

Where we jump off the cliff and try to actually make something

Since I'm not experienced in creating fully fleshed out characters I receded to my favourite time-waster, Youtube, for help and guidance. Here I came across a video talking about what makes a character interesting. The user *The Closer Look* referred in their video[14] to three aspects that would increase your chances of creating a great character. Likeability: can the audience appreciate the acts and behaviour of this character? Competency: How good is the character at what they do? Activity: How does the character persevere, in other words, does the character affect the plot and is it developing during the story? What I got from this quick character crash course was that weakness is key to create a dynamic character. It's harder to relate to a character that is perfect in *every* way than it is to connect with one that has flaws.

I figured I could use these tools as a base to make my character relatable. I still needed ways to guide me on how to go about the writing process.

In the recommended section of the first video I found an account of one *Belinda Ray* giving basic classes in creative writing.[15] So I scrolled down the list until I found an episode about character creation. There was three simple methods of how to go about the problem I'd like to refer to as "Where do I start?"

12th November 2019: Character cluster (10 min)
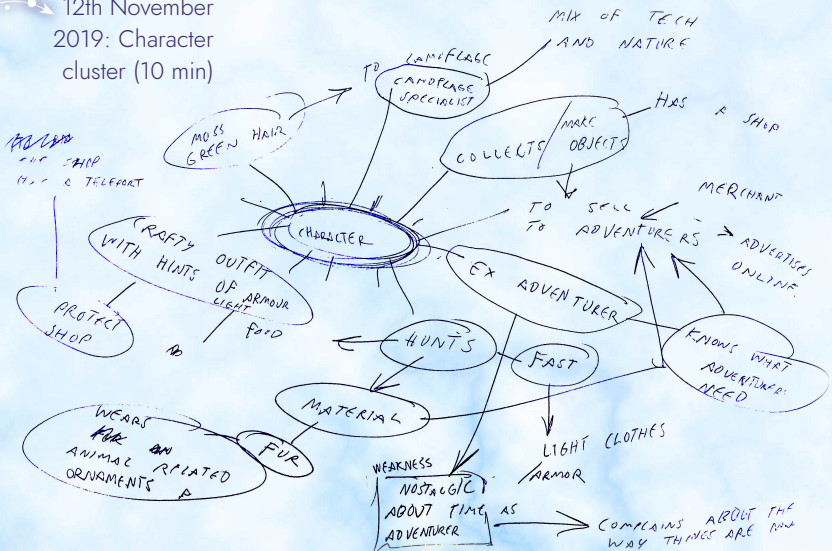
1. Character Cluster

This alternative suggests using mind maps. The key is to try and combine the different bubbles with valid arguments. Let's say that my character is a store owner that can never find the objects their customers request. What would be the argument for people to still come to the shop? Maybe it is because the character has been a respected adventurer and the customers know that they might stumble upon a rare object from one of their adventures.

Reflection

This process of making a character restricted me from incorporating surprise elements. I got stuck in a classic fantasy setting and it was hard to get out. A fictional character can be anything you want them to be. By putting the character in the central bubble, it made everything else depend on the character to be able to develop. Instead I would like to work with the object or environment as centre of attention to let those factors shape the character. There is no natural way for the object to relate to the environment if its connection to the character is in focus.

2. Free Writing

As I understand it this is the "like hitting your head against a brick wall" technique. In this alternative I'm supposed to set a time limit for myself and, no matter what happens, I'm not allowed   to stop writing during this period. Everything that comes across my mind related to my character has to go in the document, no excuses here. Aside from that, I also cannot edit the text until the time is up.

12th November 2019: Free Writing Session (10 min)

The sun hit the blue tinted visor on Rena's helmet. The forest was cold and the morning sun had just arrived through the leaves. The ground was wet. Rena's boots were not really intended for a trail-blazing adventure but the sun was already drying the fabric. For Rena, morning was the best time of the day. Due to her job as a guide, first on the to-do list was scanning her surroundings.

The rest of the crew were still sleeping lazily in the grass which made Rena grumpy. Suddenly, Rena spotted something curious on the other side of the grove which was reflecting the morning sun back towards her. After having inspected the source of the reflection it turned out to be some sort of amulet

lying in the wet grass. Even though it seemed to be a man-made object, it showed some kind of activity, as if it was alive. Rena carefully picked it up. The bright orange object, which showed the silhouette of a bug or insect, had short limbs around its body as if its legs had been torn off. It glistened in contrast to the pale purple skin of her hand.

Rena put the bug-like amulet in the carrying pouch that was on the side of her massive belt. The belt had been inherited from an elder in the city. This belt was special due to its ability to turn into a hooded cloak. It had proven itself to be a useful garment for adventures in cold weather. Just when Rena was about to return to wake up the crew and continue traveling through the forest another glare appeared in the far distance, similar to that of the bug amulet…

Reflections

I somehow felt it was easier to start with building an environment and then imagining the character exploring the scene. Visualising the character was made easier through describing what it was surrounded by. Objects started to act as tools for developing the scene. I did not feel that it was important for my character to be defined by gender or age since I figured those aspects are limitations

to a free flowing imagination. I realised in hind-sight that I had given my character a double set of headpieces, both the helmet with the ice blue visor, and the massive belt capable of turning into a hooded cloak. This created an entertaining image of the character having a helmet wrapped with some sort of massive belt. Some personal traits such as curiosity and morale emerged as the story developed. An idea that crossed my mind during the free-writing session was to ask people to contribute with characters created in this way and then either make an object for that character or to continue their story.

3. The list

The final suggestion for working around the "where do I start" problem from this video was to make a list. The trick here is to answer the question "what do I know about my character?" Supposedly with the help of a few made up questions, traits, or scenarios. To increase the odds of this tech-nique succeeding I glanced over to the *Dungeons & Dragons* handbook and tweaked a sentence belonging to the personal traits and bonds section. I used the following statement to start the list: "My objects are symbols of my past life, and I carry them so that I will never forget my roots."

For the third alternative I decided in advance to stay away from classic fantasy elements and see where it would take me. I decided to not include the pre-made question from the example but rather give myself ten minutes to put down sentences on a list as if I was making a presentation about the character for an audience.

12th November 2019: The List (10 min)

- Runs an online cult.
- Carries a creature around for attention.
- Is secretive about their past.
- Does not need specific setting.
- Wears military related clothes mixed with cute things.
- Structured and decisive.
- Obsessed with power.
- Has attention to detail.
- Considers the purpose of the cult to be that of gaining power of the online.
- Has a tendency to make impulsive decisions.
- Uses cult for good and bad.
- Does not take into consideration other people's interests.
- Has created a false legend about themself.
- Feeds on fear and jealousy.

- Has a split persona between online and real life.
- Shows schizophrenic tendencies.

Reflections

This way of sketching a character did not help me to imagine the character's appearance. It was almost as if I described a new character for every sentence I wrote down. This procedure felt more like I was on a stage presenting the character to an audience which just made me rush through the task to get it over with, rather than letting it create or inform a story. I also lacked a sense of what objects to implement into this, as it did not feel like I got to know the individual, but rather felt like I was describing them from a static outside perspective.

Conclusion of writing exercises

Using a free writing session format proved itself to be the most successful for me in the sense of creating a character that felt genuine and relatable. I will try to continue using this method while keeping the aspects of likability, competency, and activity in the back of my mind. I will also ask people to make characters for me. It will

Author's note: Let's be honest, I did the free writing exercise first and then the other alternatives felt really boring.

be interesting to see if a free writing session with another person's character in mind could be to my advantage, since it could send me in another direction than that of my own chain of thought.
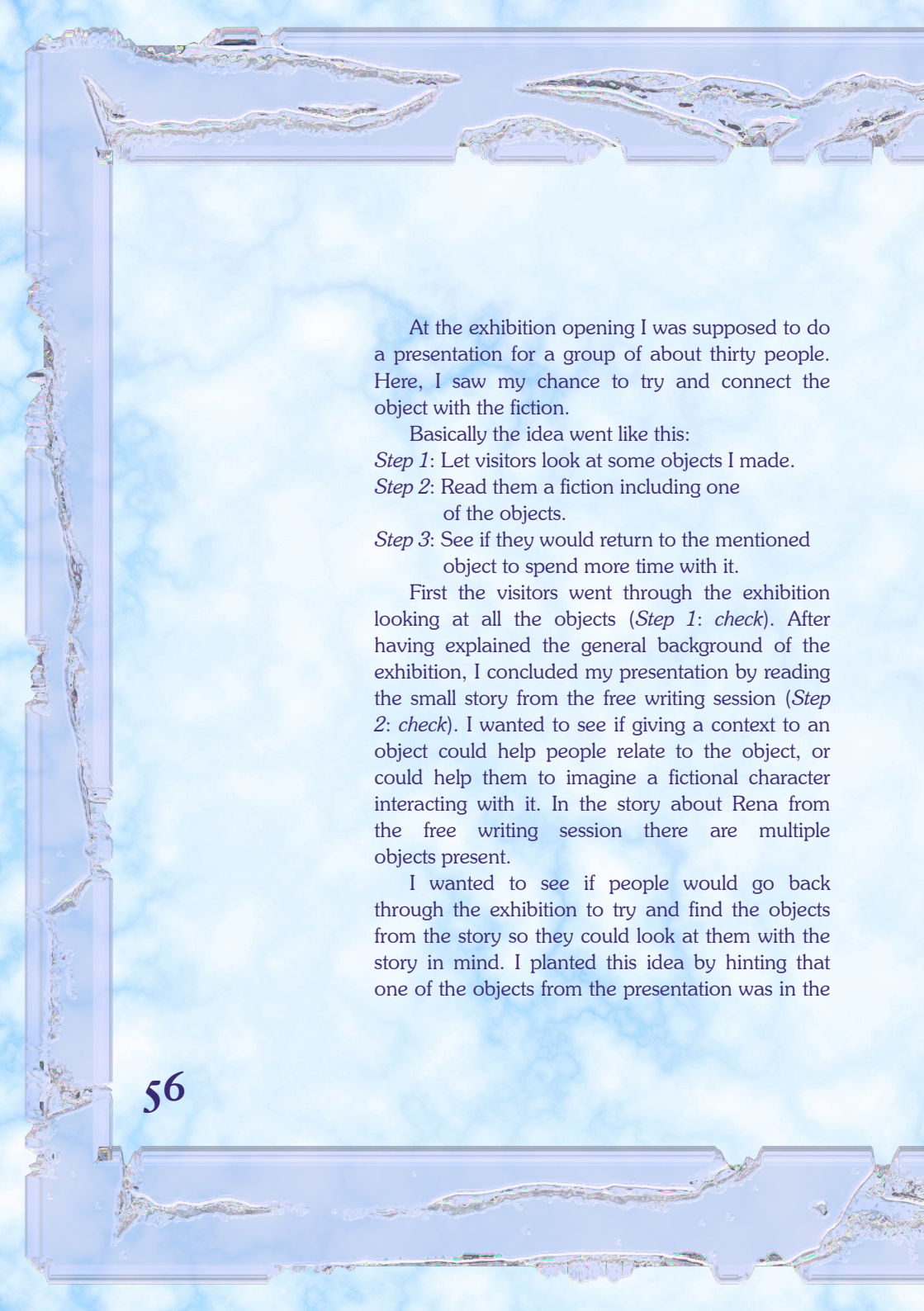
Displaying the Character
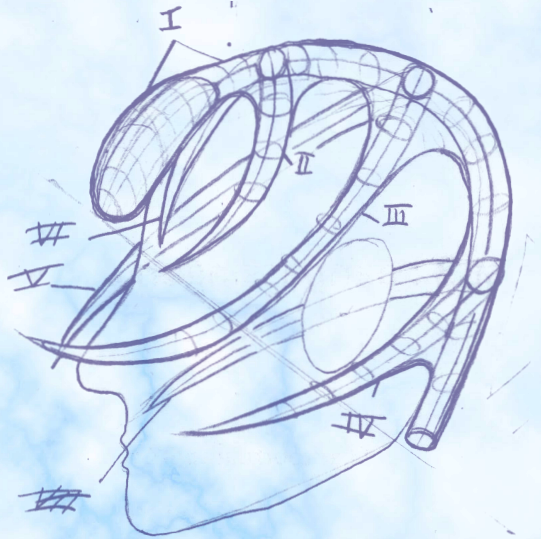
Is this information actually valuable for other people, or is it all in my head?

If I display an object based on a fictional story, then why don't I also present the story itself? Maybe reading a story would invite people into the process of how I make things. It could also give my work another dimension if people can relate the objects to a narrative.

I felt like I needed to try out this theory. After the free writing session I created an object based on the fiction about Rena in the forest:the bright orange amulet. I then included the amulet in an exhibition of mine.

The amulet I made after the free writing session about Rena.

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At the exhibition opening I was supposed to do a presentation for a group of about thirty people. Here, I saw my chance to try and connect the object with the fiction.

Basically the idea went like this:

Step 1: Let visitors look at some objects I made.

Step 2: Read them a fiction including one of the objects.

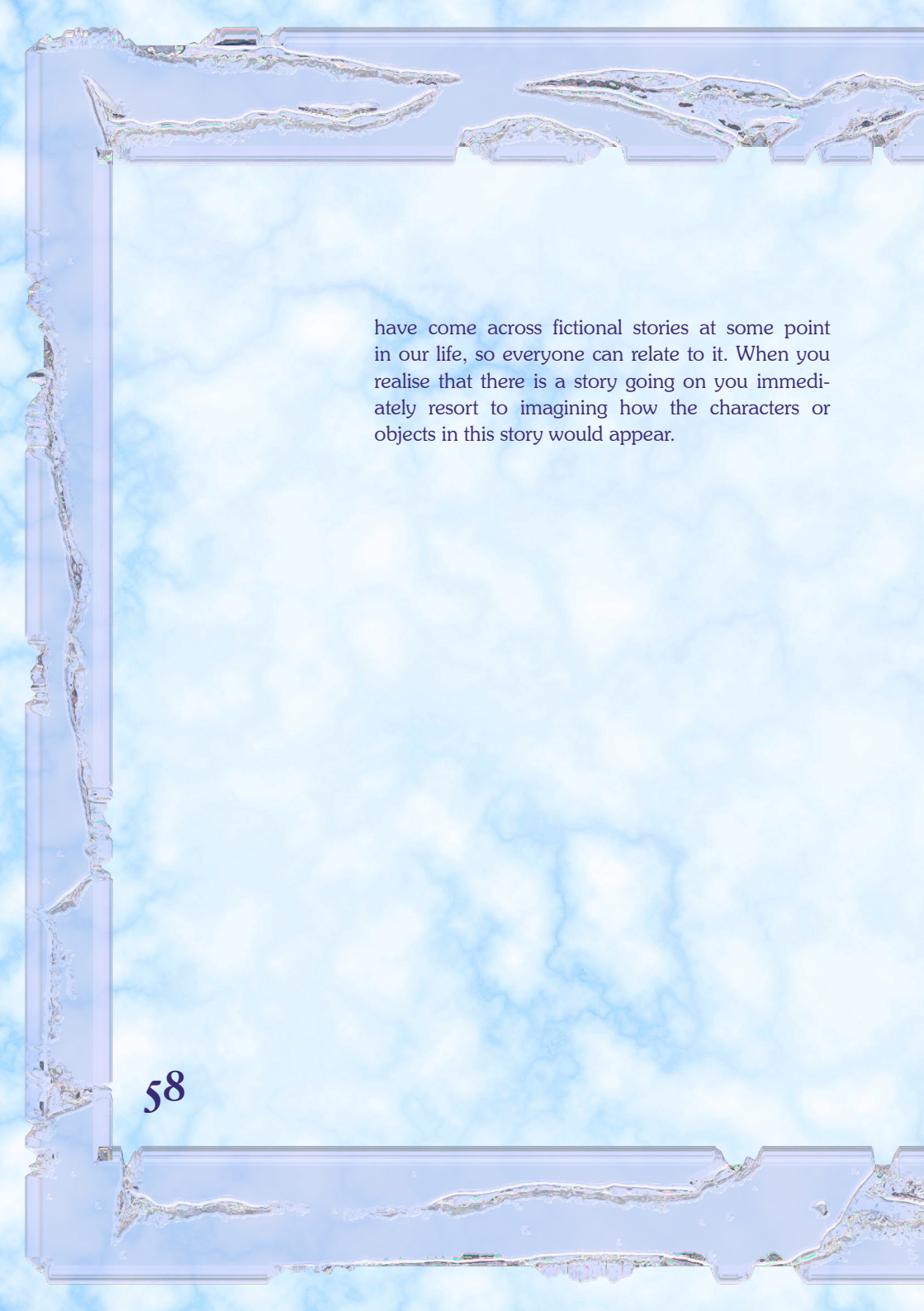*Step 3*: See if they would return to the mentioned object to spend more time with it.

First the visitors went through the exhibition looking at all the objects (*Step 1*: *check*). After having explained the general background of the exhibition, I concluded my presentation by reading the small story from the free writing session (*Step 2*: *check*). I wanted to see if giving a context to an object could help people relate to the object, or could help them to imagine a fictional character interacting with it. In the story about Rena from the free writing session there are multiple objects present.

I wanted to see if people would go back through the exhibition to try and find the objects from the story so they could look at them with the story in mind. I planted this idea by hinting that one of the objects from the presentation was in the

exhibition. After I had finished the story It became like a small treasure hunt for the visitors to find the fabled object. After one of them had located the object and pointed it out, more visitors gathered around and spent some more time looking at it (*Step 3*: *check*).

Reflections:

The hint that an object from the fiction was present in the exhibition made the visitors return for a second look. Since there was more than one object in the story it became like a game in itself to find out which of the objects was in the exhibition. When the object was found, I saw some people staying there to look at it for a while longer even though they already seen it. It seemed that because the object was presented alongside a fictional context it suddenly became more important than the objects which lacked one. My conclusion for this try-out was as follows: Making fiction a part of the concept gives depth to the object. It does not matter if you come into contact with the story or the object first, since the concept is a work of its own. When the objects are exhibited as part of a concept that includes a fictional context the work becomes more relatable or understandable. We all
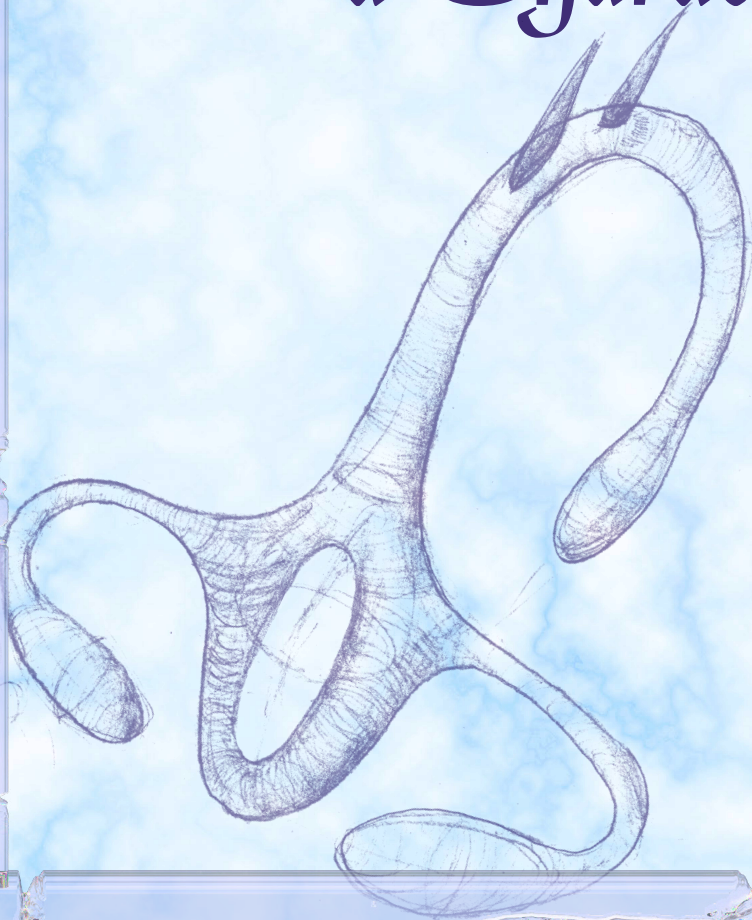
have come across fictional stories at some point in our life, so everyone can relate to it. When you realise that there is a story going on you immediately resort to imagining how the characters or objects in this story would appear.

Adopting a Character

Where I outsource the practice to create a bottomless well

My initial idea was to expand the starting point of my own creative process, but If I stayed as the sole creator of the fiction, I would sooner or later come to a point where I would be repeating characters. It would also be possible that a sense of nostalgia could occur where I try to recreate earliers characters that I felt strongly about. To avoid repetition or nostalgic events I decided to include fictional characters created by other people. If I could manage to create an object for an adopted character I could indeed expand the starting point for my process. I would also try and take the role of the character that has been supplied by another person. This way I could create objects through the narratives of characters that don't carry a single trace of my self-schema.

In order to try to generate fiction from other people that I could later incorporate into my own process, I created a fiction writing assignment. I emailed it to people I considered had an interesting style.

Author's note: Reminder! Self-schema is the box we use to define ourselves.

Fiction Writing Participation Request

I'm doing research on fictional characters and creative practice.

To have external input I would like you to participate. Here is what I ask you to do:

- Put a timer on ten minutes.
- Write a fiction including at least one character and/or object.
- It can take place anywhere, in any time and space. The important thing is to not stop writing during these ten minutes.
- Word count does not matter.
- Send me the text.

If I include your text in the project I will send you a preview of how and why.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

I'm eternally thankful for your participation.
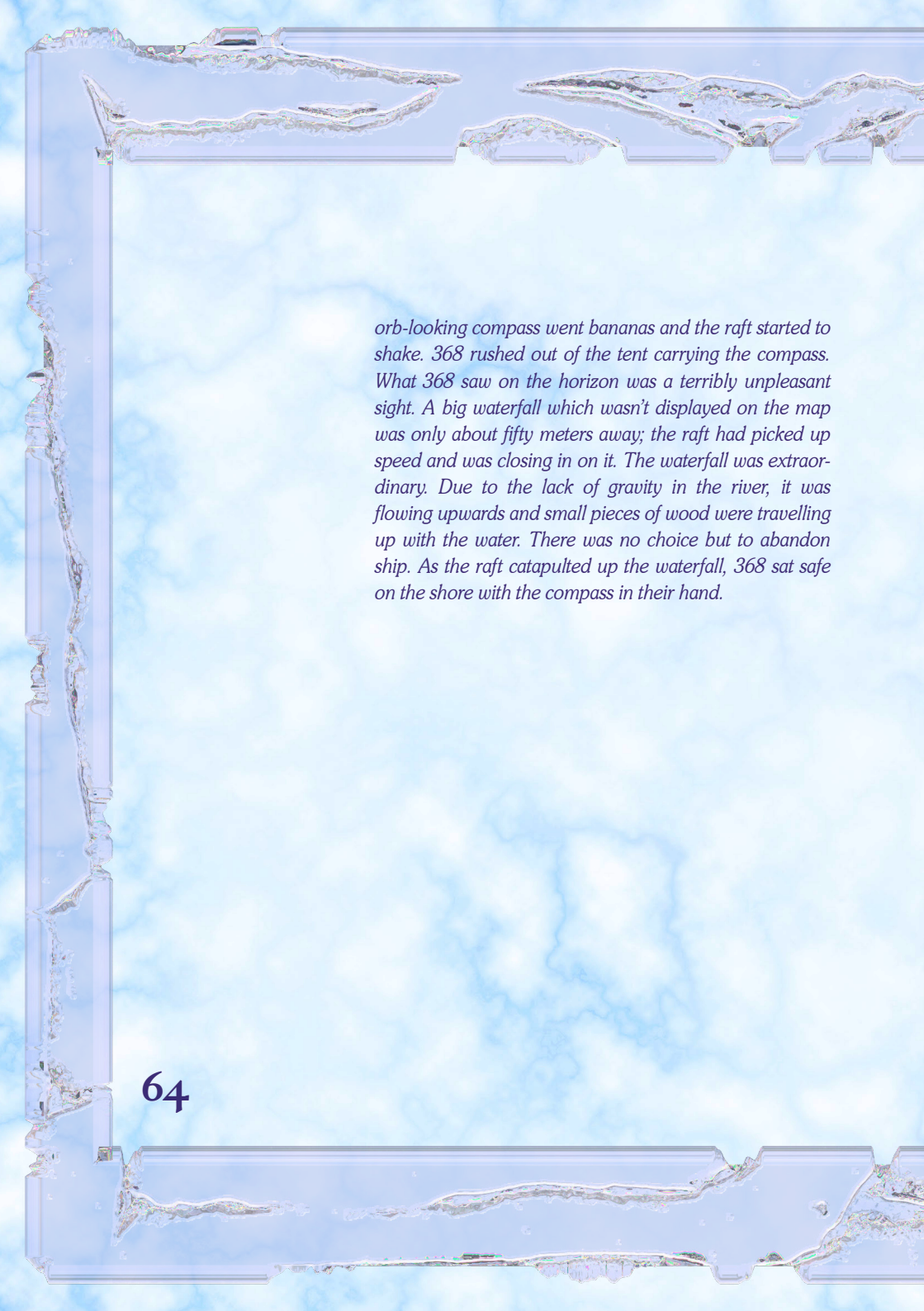
Best Regards,

Simon Marsiglia

Example

It was windy on the roof. No fence was surrounding the edge of the building, but there were orange cones all throughout. One of them fell off the ceiling into the water below and slowly but steadily floated down the river. 368 picked up the floating cone and placed it on the raft. Perfect leg for the table, they thought. The raft had a small tent on it which held 368's sleeping bag and a small table that now had three wooden legs, the last of which would be made from the orange cone that was just acquired. On the table 368 had a map of the river and a compass to make sure they were going the right direction. The compass was not only pointing north, south, or west, but also up or down, since the river of this place was not so big on the whole gravity thing. Suddenly the

Author's note: I had a backup example of a fiction I made in case the participants needed a helping hand, but nobody requested it so I just put it here

Non-Gravity Compass I made after fiction session about the character 368.

orb-looking compass went bananas and the raft started to shake. 368 rushed out of the tent carrying the compass. What 368 saw on the horizon was a terribly unpleasant sight. A big waterfall which wasn't displayed on the map was only about fifty meters away; the raft had picked up speed and was closing in on it. The waterfall was extraordinary. Due to the lack of gravity in the river, it was flowing upwards and small pieces of wood were travelling up with the water. There was no choice but to abandon ship. As the raft catapulted up the waterfall, 368 sat safe on the shore with the compass in their hand.

Somebody Actually Replied!

Where we are really thankful

"I opened my chest to drink the last drop of his blood. His scales scattered everywhere in the control room. I can hear the explosions and the last screams of more Kenkelinns coming from the nearest chamber of this deck.
The ship is disintegrating, not much time left.
I opened my wings and closed my chest. Thousands of antennas from my chest unclenched this corpse. Time to return to the mothership."
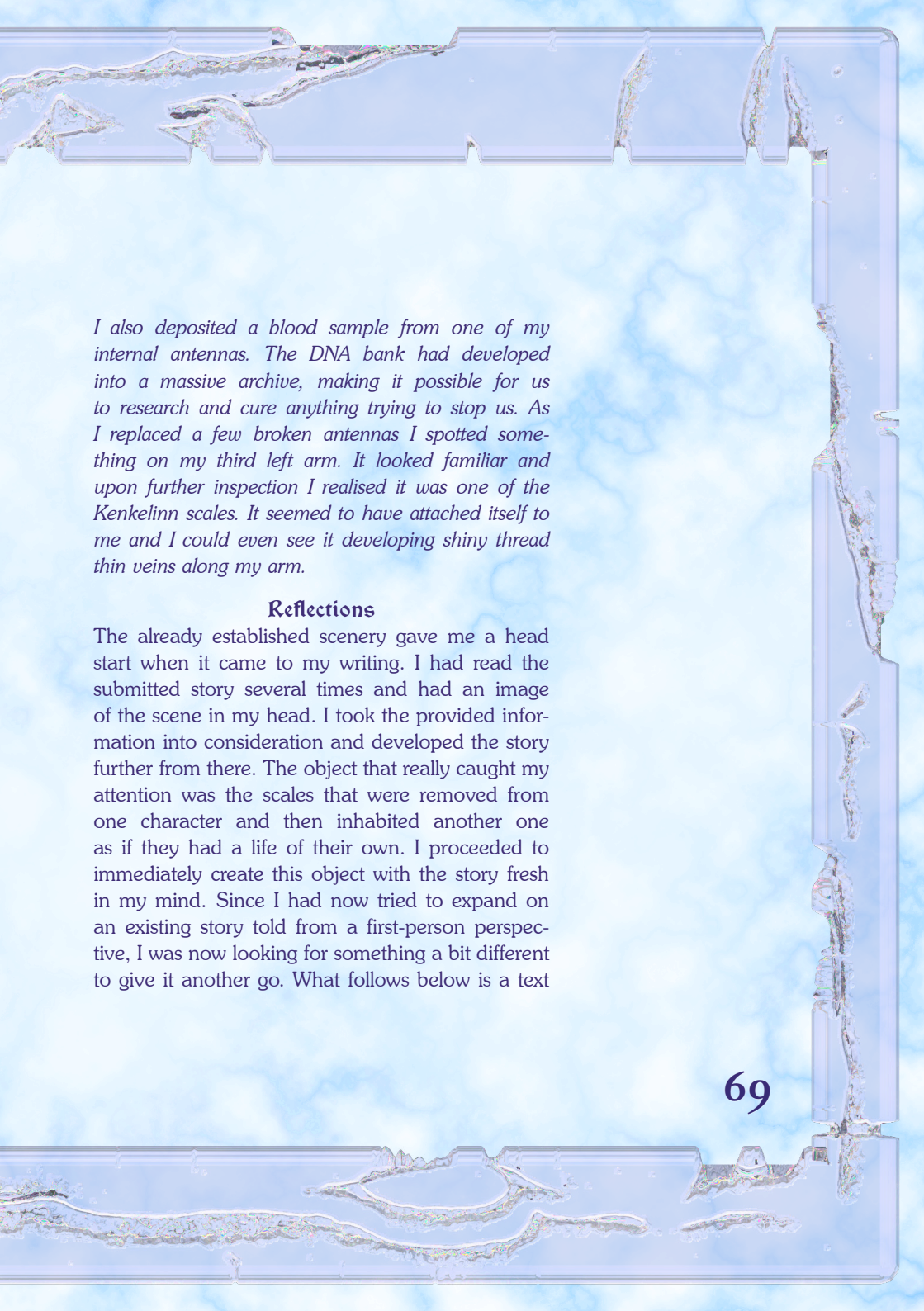*– Hansel Tai*

Reflections

There was both objects and characters in the fiction I received. I decided to try and continue this story to see where it would take me. If I managed to expand on Hansel's ten minute fiction with a ten minute fiction of my own I could keep the chain going and clash our styles. As mentioned before, my way of dealing with the submissions would be to either expand on the story or put myself in the role of a character from it. With this text being written as a first hand experience it helped me to try out both. Below follows my ten minute writing session that tries to expand on the fiction above.

…time to return to the mothership. Just before leaving, I noticed something clenched hard in his hand. A transparent capsule with some kind of purple liquid. I figured It must be of great value since he protected it so well. I decided to take it with me. Now that I had replenished my energy

Object I made after having expanded on Hansels fiction, here displayed on mannequins hand for size reference.
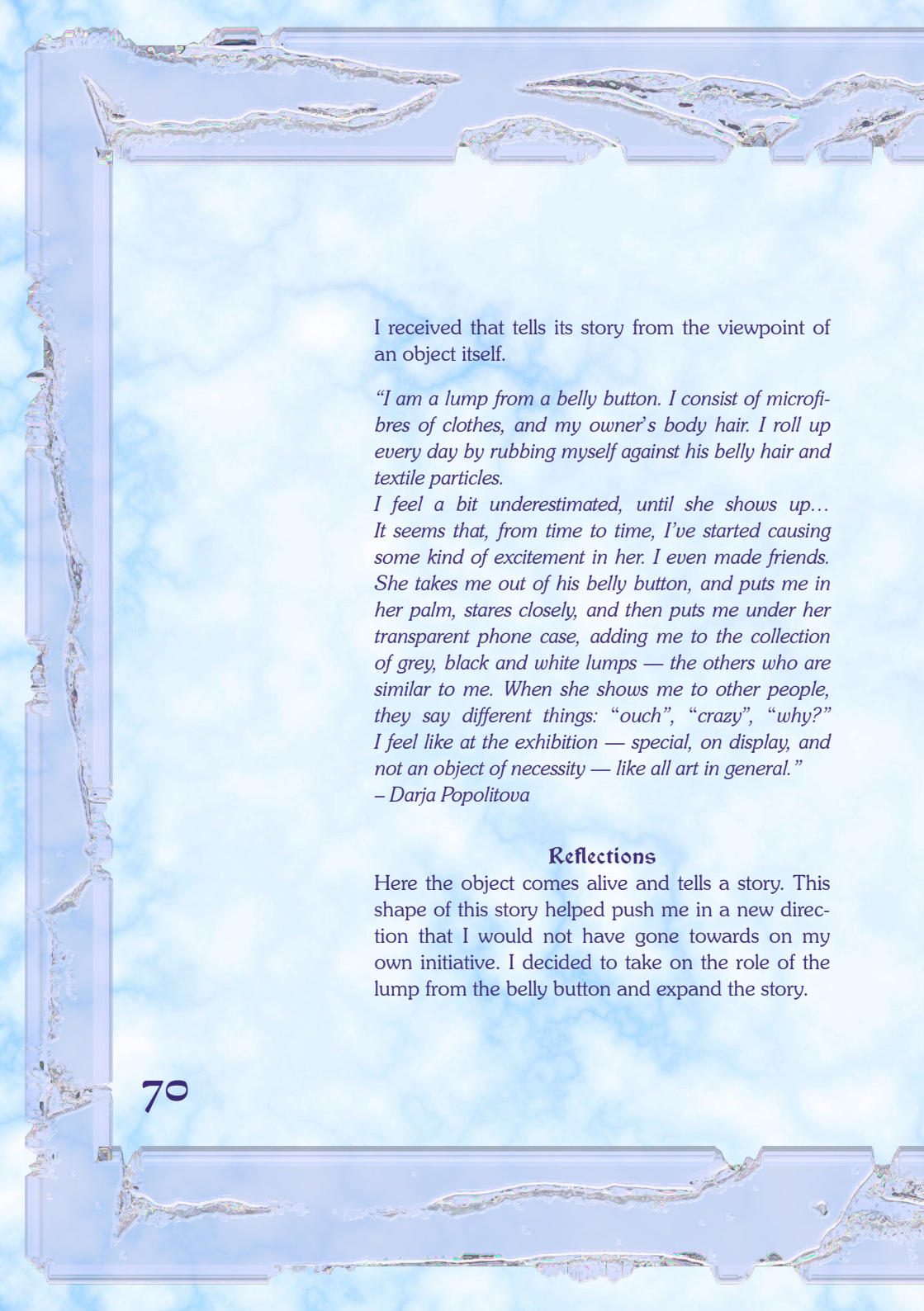

with this body I could once again warp through the closed section of the tunnel system. Just as the backup arrived to the control room I disappeared in a tornado of particles, and some of the scales from my last victim accidentally slipped into the massive spinning orb I created around me. I had managed to avoid another disaster. Back on the ship I put the capsule with the purple liquid into the treasury.

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I also deposited a blood sample from one of my internal antennas. The DNA bank had developed into a massive archive, making it possible for us to research and cure anything trying to stop us. As I replaced a few broken antennas I spotted something on my third left arm. It looked familiar and upon further inspection I realised it was one of the Kenkelinn scales. It seemed to have attached itself to me and I could even see it developing shiny thread thin veins along my arm.

Reflections

The already established scenery gave me a head start when it came to my writing. I had read the submitted story several times and had an image of the scene in my head. I took the provided information into consideration and developed the story further from there. The object that really caught my attention was the scales that were removed from one character and then inhabited another one as if they had a life of their own. I proceeded to immediately create this object with the story fresh in my mind. Since I had now tried to expand on an existing story told from a first-person perspective, I was now looking for something a bit different to give it another go. What follows below is a text

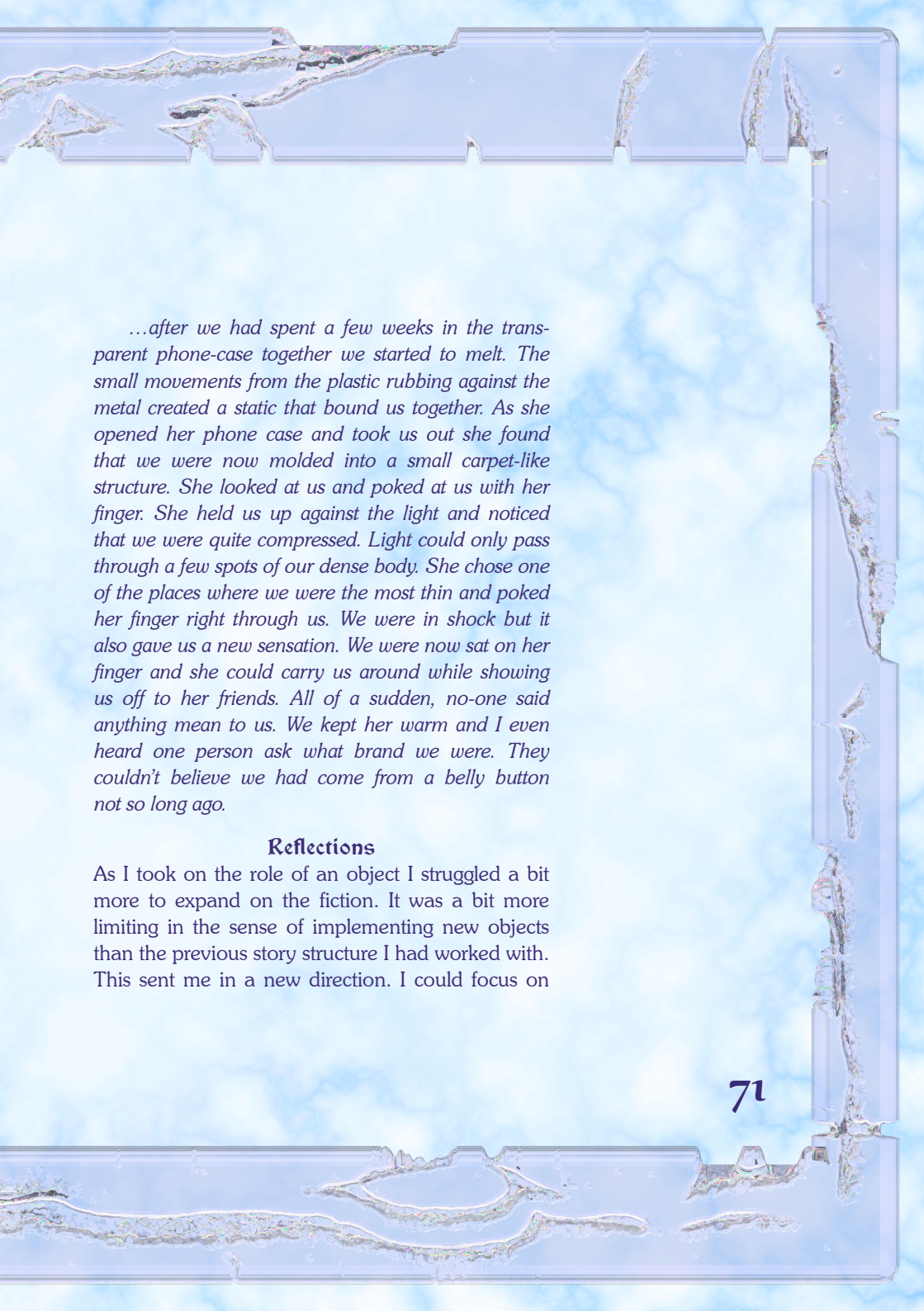I received that tells its story from the viewpoint of an object itself.

"I am a lump from a belly button. I consist of microfibres of clothes, and my owner's body hair. I roll up every day by rubbing myself against his belly hair and textile particles.
I feel a bit underestimated, until she shows up... It seems that, from time to time, I've started causing some kind of excitement in her. I even made friends. She takes me out of his belly button, and puts me in her palm, stares closely, and then puts me under her transparent phone case, adding me to the collection of grey, black and white lumps — the others who are similar to me. When she shows me to other people, they say different things: "ouch", "crazy", "why?" I feel like at the exhibition — special, on display, and not an object of necessity — like all art in general."
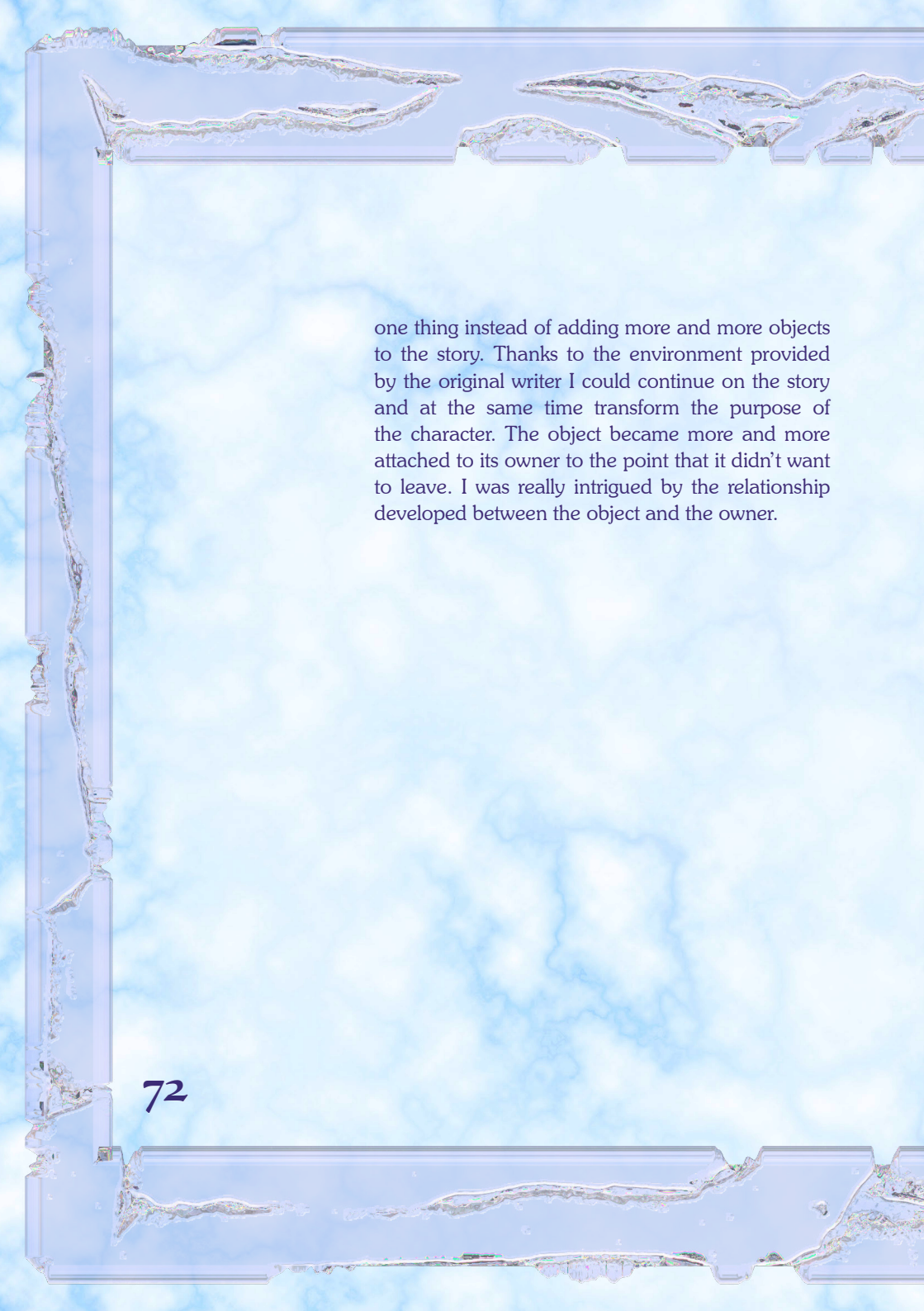*– Darja Popolitova*

Reflections

Here the object comes alive and tells a story. This shape of this story helped push me in a new direction that I would not have gone towards on my own initiative. I decided to take on the role of the lump from the belly button and expand the story.

...after we had spent a few weeks in the transparent phone-case together we started to melt. The small movements from the plastic rubbing against the metal created a static that bound us together. As she opened her phone case and took us out she found that we were now molded into a small carpet-like structure. She looked at us and poked at us with her finger. She held us up against the light and noticed that we were quite compressed. Light could only pass through a few spots of our dense body. She chose one of the places where we were the most thin and poked her finger right through us. We were in shock but it also gave us a new sensation. We were now sat on her finger and she could carry us around while showing us off to her friends. All of a sudden, no-one said anything mean to us. We kept her warm and I even heard one person ask what brand we were. They couldn't believe we had come from a belly button not so long ago.

Reflections

As I took on the role of an object I struggled a bit more to expand on the fiction. It was a bit more limiting in the sense of implementing new objects than the previous story structure I had worked with. This sent me in a new direction. I could focus on

one thing instead of adding more and more objects to the story. Thanks to the environment provided by the original writer I could continue on the story and at the same time transform the purpose of the character. The object became more and more attached to its owner to the point that it didn't want to leave. I was really intrigued by the relationship developed between the object and the owner.

Concluding the Adventure

Where I consider if The journey through phantasy ice online helped me level up

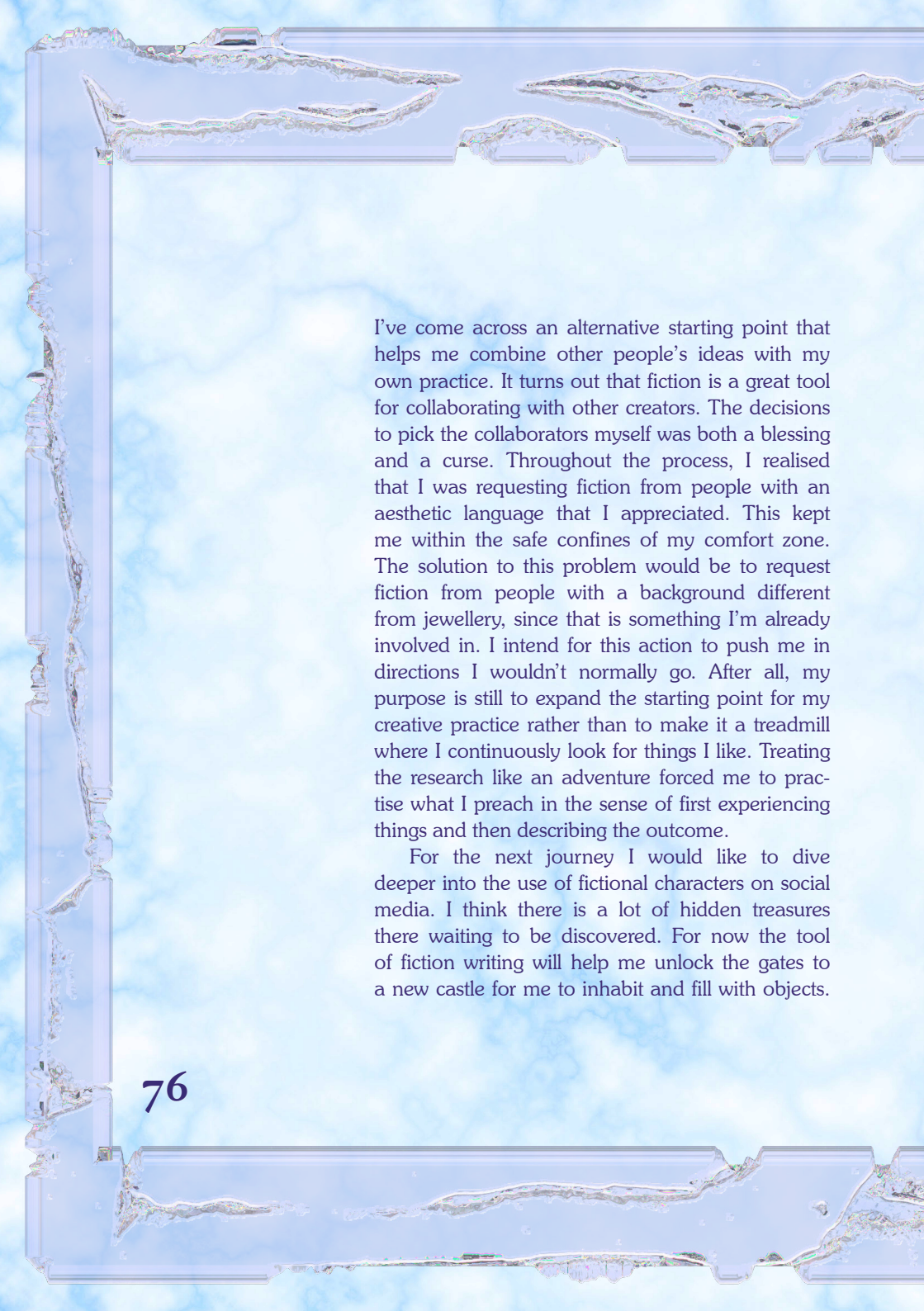In the introduction of this research I posed the following question:

Can the creative practice be expanded through role-playing, and if so, how?

I also had the working tagline:

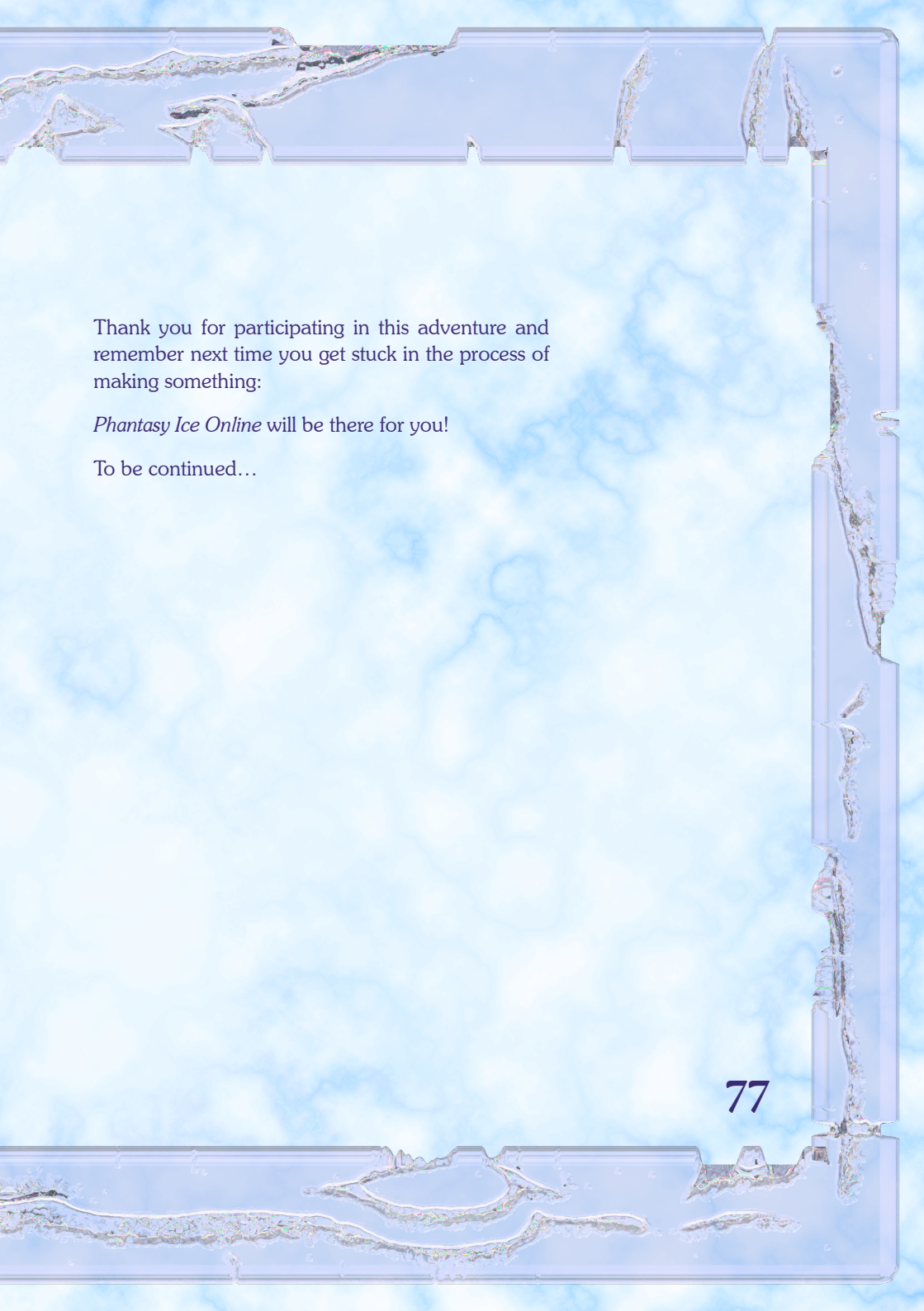*Expanding the starting point for creative process through the use of fiction.*

I realise now that what I have done is not really role-playing, but rather fiction writing. On the other hand I have taken the role of a fictional character within the fiction writing, so I'd still like to call it role-playing in some sense. I have not written fiction this way before and it has become a really valuable tool for me during this research. The tool of fiction writing will be implemented in my creative practice as a core part of the conceptual framework. Writing these short stories made me eager to create whatever object I conjured throughout them.

Author's note: This tagline appeared halfway through the writing process, I guess hindsight is always 20/20.

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I've come across an alternative starting point that helps me combine other people's ideas with my own practice. It turns out that fiction is a great tool for collaborating with other creators. The decisions to pick the collaborators myself was both a blessing and a curse. Throughout the process, I realised that I was requesting fiction from people with an aesthetic language that I appreciated. This kept me within the safe confines of my comfort zone. The solution to this problem would be to request fiction from people with a background different from jewellery, since that is something I'm already involved in. I intend for this action to push me in directions I wouldn't normally go. After all, my purpose is still to expand the starting point for my creative practice rather than to make it a treadmill where I continuously look for things I like. Treating the research like an adventure forced me to practise what I preach in the sense of first experiencing things and then describing the outcome.

For the next journey I would like to dive deeper into the use of fictional characters on social media. I think there is a lot of hidden treasures there waiting to be discovered. For now the tool of fiction writing will help me unlock the gates to a new castle for me to inhabit and fill with objects.

Thank you for participating in this adventure and remember next time you get stuck in the process of making something:

Phantasy Ice Online will be there for you!

To be continued…

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