

# How to Saiian

## Make an Inspirational

### A Guide of Influences and Inspirations



#### Shadow of the Colossus

*Shadow of the Colossus* is striking to me in the sense that it's a powerful thing in a simple package. A friend of mine can testify to that, having endured me rambling on for half an hour about how beautiful this game is after a night of heavy drinking. It's an incredibly uncomplicated and straight-forward game, and yet there are few other games I've played that feel nearly as grandiose. Half of the game is spent traversing the beautiful and spacious landscapes, and the other half is spent slaying sixteen gigantic beasts (there are no other enemies in the game) by climbing on them and stabbing them repeatedly... which, in writing, sounds incredibly barbaric (and the game does a pretty good job of making you feel pretty bad about it, too). The few bits of dialogue are delivered in a made-up language and translated through subtitles, though the story would honestly be just as poignant without any dialogue at all. It's a game about companionship, desperation, and faith, and it evokes those themes quite powerfully simply through its presentation and gameplay. It's a great example of communicating much without showing everything, and instead encouraging a sort of dialogue between a work and its audience that I find to be very inspiring.

#### Seinfeld

Early exposure to this show helped to define not only my palette for humor, but would also contribute to my exponentially-developing social awkwardness (both of which would later be revisited and refined by Larry David's more recent series, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*). In the show about nothing, *Seinfeld* celebrated the comedic scrutinization of the mundane. It showed us that, when you deconstruct social courtesies to their essential forms and strip away ideological euphemisms, practically every aspect of our lives is ridiculous—simply existing as a human in society is hilarious if you take a hard look at it. This is a lesson which I reflect upon often as I try to find something humorous to pull out of almost any situation.

#### Dragon Ball Z

I couldn't possibly compile a list of television programs that helped define my life without including *Dragon Ball Z*. Not only did I watch a whole lot of it, but it was also something that inspired me to draw a bunch when I was little. Whether they were my own characters or the ones from the show, I think that my collection of DBZ-inspired art was second only to *Sonic* (which, to be fair, was essentially what I drew exclusively for many years). And while I realize now that it probably wasn't the best place to start, it was where I began to focus on understanding proportions and the anatomy of the human figure. So in that respect, I'll defend my fanboyism by saying it was as educational as it was entertaining. But come on, who doesn't love watching karate wizards fly around and beat up on evil aliens?

#### Michael Keehan

An English teacher that I had for two years of my high school experience, Mr. Keehan has ended up being one of the most influential people in my life. He helped me to find joy in writing and has served to encourage the refinement of my technical skill in it as well. He was probably the first person to make me intrigued about deconstructing a piece of work to seek out content beyond the surface. At the same time, whether intentionally or not, he also made me realize that the things we find during those searches are often framed by the notions that we conduct them with—which I believe to be an invaluable lesson in critical thinking in regard not only to literature, but pretty much everything. During a period in my life when I was generally growing lethargic, he sparked something like a new sense of interest and awareness within me that has been vital in my development as a person. And of course, his endless supply of playful cynicism always filled my heart with laughter.

#### Arthur Pontynen

I would be remiss to not include Arthur Pontynen in this list, as few instructors I've come across have challenged me in the ways that he has. As someone who has much interest in philosophy, it didn't take long for me to appreciate his more philosophical approach to teaching art history. His focus on meaning rather than materials, and ideas rather than dates, was refreshing. Even so, it took me quite some time to figure out whether or not I enjoyed his method or the content of the classes; more often than not, I would go home feeling irked about one thing or another. But because of that, I spent more time thinking about things that had been discussed in his classes than I had for most other classes I've ever been in, and I have little doubt that I've talked to people about things from Pontynen's courses more than I have about things from any other class. I began to realize that he made me stop and think about things that I otherwise probably wouldn't, and usually in a different light than I normally would. He encouraged critical thinking toward art and culture, even if debating him was often a fruitless endeavor—I imagine that years of teaching have prepared him to face several of the more predictable and recurring objections anyone could throw at him. But if there has been any single lesson that I will have taken away from my experience with him, it's that just because you disagree with something doesn't mean it isn't worth understanding.

#### Super Metroid

Even though *Super Metroid* is over twenty years old now, I feel that it does a better job of encapsulating its audience than many games today do. Every aspect of its design—from the music to its color palette—bring the world of the game to life while injecting a chilling sense of isolation, mystery, and adventure as you explore. It's an inspiring display of creating a work with an atmosphere that resonates so deeply with the tone it aims to portray. That it introduced me to one of my favorite video game genres is just icing on the cake.

#### Earthbound

There is nothing about *Earthbound* that isn't quirky, which makes it hard not to love. It's an incredibly post-modern take of a traditional genre in a contemporary setting, the likes of which I've really only seen elsewhere in games from the same series. Armed with baseball bats, yo-yos, frying pans, and psychic powers, a rag-tag bunch of kids adventure through hordes of wild animals, disgruntled businessmen, cultists, zombies, and aliens in order to save the world from a disembodied force of pure evil. From the visuals to the audio to the writing, every aspect of the game is exceptionally fantastic, vivid, and memorable. The game has a great control of its atmosphere and showcases a variety of moods, but even when things get somber or scary, it never seems as though it's trying to take itself too seriously. Its stylization and self-aware humor are never far from my thoughts.

#### The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle

Probably one of the most interesting books I've ever read, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is a delightfully outlandish story of a man struggling with a losing battle to stay in control of his life. Despite being a very slice-of-life type story in that it simply follows the day-to-day activities of its protagonist, it's one that's filled with colorful characters, intriguing plot points, and profound ideas. Interestingly enough, the first time I had heard of this book was from an insightful article I found online that someone had written in defense of *Metal Gear Solid 2*, the second entry to a game series written about elsewhere in my list. In the article, the author writes on the post-modernity of *MGS2*'s story and compares it to *Wind-Up Bird*, saying that the novel "started with one idea: a guy in his kitchen, cooking spaghetti. Where it went in the following 607 pages, well, [Haruki Murakami] didn't know until he started writing." While I'll say that this description may or may not be fair to what *MGS2* set out to accomplish, *Wind-Up Bird* has proven to be inspirational in its approach to storytelling and its illuminations of human nature, particularly concerning the relationships we build with each other and the way we cope with the various troubles that we endure. Even if it's just sitting in the bottom of a deep well for a few days, or cooking spaghetti.

#### A Complicated Kindness

As I consider this book, I'm beginning to realize that there are a lot of thematic similarities amongst many of the items throughout this guide. *A Complicated Kindness* follows the day-to-day life of a small-town teenage girl whose life in a religiously dogmatic community has slowly been deteriorating ever since her mother and sister each left the town a few years prior to the beginning of the novel. It's a story about growing up, loyalty and betrayal, love and sacrifice, and finding your place in the world around you—particularly when you don't feel very compatible with the place that you're currently in. It's a sort-of-optimistic social commentary that encourages you to take control of your life and hold yourself to your own standards and expectations rather than someone else's.

#### Richard Masters

Throughout the course of my college career, I was fortunate enough to enroll in several design and illustration courses offered by Richard Masters, whose work has been a huge inspiration to me. Between the precision displayed from his technical illustrations to the attention to detail in the other remarkable pieces of his that I've seen, he has continuously showcased a level of talent that I've aspired to achieve for much of my life. His ability to render illustrations with such lifelike quality has presented itself as a distant goalpost in my endeavor to become a better artist. While tales of his experiences have made it clear that an intimidating degree of effort and work were required to get to where he is, his encouragement and guidance have been invaluable experiences as I develop my own skills as an illustrator.



This booklet is a guide to various things that have influenced, inspired, or just generally had an impact on how I've developed into the person I've become today. This is, of course, not a comprehensive list, but one that's been compiled of a few things from various categories. Each category includes only a handful of sources from that respective field, accompanied with a small blurb to elaborate on that source and a little on how it has left its mark on me. Obviously there has been more going on behind the scenes than what is being presented here. It takes more than, like, twenty things to make a person. Unless you're just really, really into those twenty things.

The items listed throughout this guide are shown in no particular order; their placement and arrangement are not at all indicative of their significance relative to each other. Generally speaking, there is no one specific way in which any particular source of influence has affected me. Most of those included in this list have impacted my artistic style and motivations, approach to writing, storytelling aspirations, sense of humor, or even just my general outlook on life—with many sources fitting several of these descriptions.

As I wrote out the blurbs for each item, it occurred to me more and more that several of these sources are similar, whether it's the themes of the work or what I've taken away from it. I suppose it shouldn't be very surprising that multiple things would have interested or affected me in similar ways, and it is a little interesting to see things bleed together. If anything, it goes to show that these influences serve to strengthen each other. Also that everything is connected, man.



# Key

## Picture Radio

As a child of electronic media, I spent a lot of time in front of the television as a kid, gleefully letting my brain cells rot away. It's only natural that a lot of the influences that have impacted me over the years have come from the feed of images from that magical box.

## Fleshy Things

If there's something that the world is in no short supply of, it's human beings—many of whom are very talented and influential individuals. Whether they're people I know, or people I wish I knew, this is a list of a few of them.

## Widya Games

A combination of the narrative power of books and film, the problem-solving capacity of puzzles, and the interactive decision-making aspects of choose-your-own-adventures, video games are a medium not quite like anything else. Over the years I've had the pleasure to play several games that have provided fun and enlightening experiences.

## Word Compendiums

Growing up with a steady stream of bright lights and sounds bombarding my face hasn't done me any many favors in regards to books being able to keep a firm grasp of my attention or interest, but here are some that I've particularly enjoyed.



## Catch-22

A captivating story of the ineffectiveness of war, *Catch-22* approaches the absurdity of the subject in almost two distinct ways. The first half of the book is a rather silly perspective of the lives of a squadron of men who fly planes in World War II. Despite being trapped in a war he has absolutely no interest in participating in, the main character's daily activities and constant slacking-off are portrayed in a considerably light-hearted manner. The second half, however, is a much darker take on the situation, as the character begins having to deal with things in the war going awry, and several of his friends dying. The book is an interesting commentary of how much control we actually have over our lives, how easily things can be framed by those with power for those without, how willing people can be to simply accept those things, and how difficult it can be to resist or even attempt to change them. In conjunction with these themes, Joseph Heller's writing is one of the things that kept me turning the pages, and his narrative voice has probably influenced me more than any other writer.

## FLCL

Among the things that I've probably watched too many times, this is up there—an easy task considering that the entire series is only six half-hour episodes long. Not surprising from the same studio that produced *Evangelion*, this is another show that ends up being more than what it seems... even though you're not even entirely sure what it seems like during your first viewing. The absolute mayhem that makes up the show's plot (which includes aliens, robots, and interdimensional brain portals) does an excellent job of veiling the fact that it's a story about growing up. It's offered much for me to digest, considering that I've been in a perpetual state of growing up for the majority of my life. Aside from this, the show has also affected me in regards to its art direction. It's jam-packed with some of the most beautiful, energetic, and dynamic animation that I've seen in a production of its kind, and serves as a constant source of inspiration.

## Patrick Spaziant

This man—whose name I admit I had to look up online for the purpose of writing this entry about him—served as one of the largest contributors to my artistic motivation when I was a kid. I've only really known his work from the covers he drew for the *Sonic the Hedgehog* comic books published by Archie, but they were some of the most beautiful illustrations I'd ever seen, even though that was probably framed by the fact that, as a child, like ninety percent of the things I drew were Sonic-related. I recall one particular cover that I thought was so fantastic that I actually practiced copying it until I had committed that specific drawing of Sonic to memory and would reproduce it in various notebooks in school. His work was the highlight of getting those comics every other week, and the art inspired me to keep drawing and made me realize that if I worked at it enough, I'd be able to render illustrations that would even amaze myself. I still don't think I'm quite there yet, though... but I'm a lot further along than I was back then. Kids kind of suck at drawing.

## A Song of Ice and Fire

Though I was originally introduced to this series through the *Game of Thrones* show on HBO that's based on the books, I've since read through all of the currently-available novels. Though I'm generally not one who gets into the fantasy genre, George R. R. Martin showcases it in a light that proves to be immensely gripping. His construction of character relationships and depiction of intricate medieval politics makes for an enchanting narrative that keeps his audience on the edge of their seats at all times—particularly when he has no qualms about disposing characters that readers root for and become emotionally invested in. He has an approach to storytelling that doesn't underestimate his readers' capacity to follow complex plots that span across a huge cast of characters, and is bold in that he knows that while the direction his story is going may not be the one that a reader might want, it is the direction that is necessary not only in its practicality but also in the spirit of keeping the story interesting. Keep slaying those characters, George. It hurts, but I trust you.

## Psychonauts

Aside from being very humorous, *Psychonauts* is one of the most aesthetically-pleasing games I've had the joy to experience. The character designs are playful and varied, and the same can be said for the locations within the game—yet it all seems cohesive in the sense that it all belongs together despite the stark variance because there's a very colorful and whimsical vibe to everything. With most sections of the game taking place within the minds of different characters, the levels have some of the most unique and imaginative designs that I've ever seen, ranging from a twisted suburban neighborhood with winding paths floating in the sky to a town that looks like a black velvet painting with fluorescent colors seemingly illuminated by a black light. It serves to show the diversity of artistic direction and the limitless possibility not only in game design, but in creation in general.

## Mike Krahuik

As the illustrator of *Penny Arcade*, one of the first popular webcomics on the internet, Mike Krahuik has influenced my approach to drawing comics and cartoons probably more than anyone else. His character designs are unique while being considerably simple and easy to emulate. As an impressionable teenager, I began to draw my own characters in a style heavily inspired by Krahuik's until I began to find additional sources of inspiration in other artists. While my approach to drawing cartoons has evolved since then as I find my own voice as a cartoonist and illustrator, I would still say that Krahuik's influence is largely responsible for the comics that I make today.

## Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Even though it's a relatively old story for children (arguably), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (and, subsequently, its sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*), has always struck me as being an intriguing, colorful, and mysterious story. The surreal characters and setting mixed with the various pseudo-philosophical quips peppered throughout the books combine wonderfully to create a delightful story for readers of all ages. Despite being silly and at times incomprehensible, there's still a sense of thoughtful intelligence at play, and the marriage of those elements—playfulness and profundity—have stuck with me throughout the years, and is something I always appreciate finding.

## Various 90's Cartoons

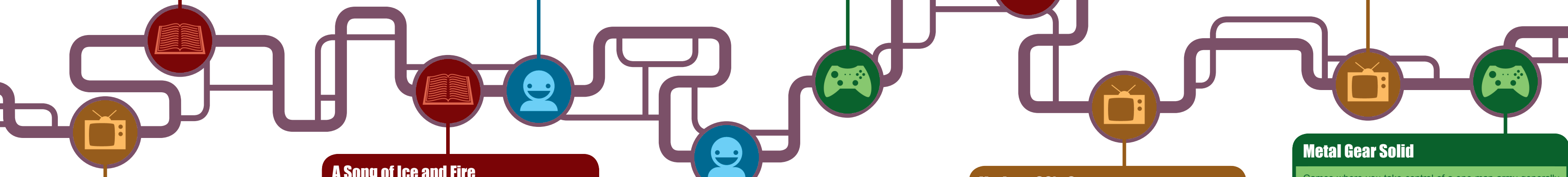
I (like to) imagine that most kids my age grew up with exposure to the array of animated programming that the 90's offered. And while I'd like to list my favorites individually to pay my respects, there are just too many for that to be a realistic thing to do (though I will make honorable mentions to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *X-Men*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, and *Darkwing Duck*). Even so, I owe those shows a lot—maybe too much for a person my age to admit. They filled my childhood with color and flavor, and provided a cast of heroes for an impressionable mind. I attribute the foundations of my lawful-good alignment to these sources; while their production values may be questionable (except, perhaps, in the minds of those that they were aimed at), there's little doubt that underneath any disputable layers of construction, they offered strong ethical building blocks and encouraged their viewers to develop into decent people. Well, except for *Tom & Jerry*. That mostly just taught me how to fend off ornery cats.

## Neon Genesis Evangelion

I went into this show under the guise that it was going to be an animated series about adolescent teenagers who pilot giant robots to save the world from destruction wrought by the hands of powerful aliens. What I got was essentially that with the addition of some of the weightiest, sobering storytelling I've come across, complete with nuanced themes and a cast of almost exclusively psychologically tormented characters. While it ranks high on the list of the most depressing things I've ever seen (I once made the mistake of marathoning the series and concluding movie over the span of two days, which sent me into a month-long bout of depression), it is also undoubtedly one of my favorite things I've seen. I feel that to some degree it's an important analysis on human nature in its assessment on how we develop emotionally, the unseen struggles of those we surround ourselves with, and how we choose to cope with those things when they happen to us. Few things of any form have come into my life that have caused me to undergo such a profound state of introspection quite like this series has.

## Metal Gear Solid

Games where you take control of a one-man army generally tasked with infiltrating and shutting down an enemy base that houses a weapon built to launch nuclear warheads (seriously, that's pretty much every single one of these games in a nutshell) are probably the last kind of games that you'd expect to find messages about the futility and absurdity of war and aggression. But the *Metal Gear Solid* series, though often peppered with tongue-in-cheek humor, offers a surprisingly profound glimpse of just that, and also emphasizes the importance of cultivating a peaceful world that can be sustained for generations to come. Particularly the second game in the series, *Sons of Liberty*, which ultimately aims to convey the message that the actions of today can have drastic consequences for the people of tomorrow, and encourages us to share the things we love so that they can live on long after we're gone. It's the sort of message that you don't usually see from video games, particularly from this genre, but it's one that I think is worth taking to heart, and I've found to be quite influential on my outlook in general. It also taught me that cardboard boxes are infallible hiding tools.



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ns exkSM  
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