



Visual stylistics of futurism: the case of the "Meowfront" project

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Abstract. The relevance of the study was determined by the growing interest in indie games and the need to develop a distinctive futuristic visual style for characters in the action-RPG genre. In contemporary game design, visual imagery played a crucial role in shaping recognizability and emotional immersion, which was particularly important for small studios competing for audience attention through innovation and original concepts. The aim of the study was to identify the principles of forming a coherent futuristic character style for an indie game and to determine effective approaches to combining technological and artistic aesthetics in visual design.

The research employed methods of visual and comparative analysis, authorial experimentation, silhouette and proportion studies, colour solution selection, and the use of digital tools (Adobe Photoshop, Procreate, MidJourney, Stable Diffusion) for creating sketches and basic models. The analysis was conducted with consideration of the characteristic features of indie games and current trends in futuristic and neopunk design.

The results demonstrated that analysing contemporary indie games – specifically *Transistor*, *Hyper Light Drifter*, *Journey*, *Hollow Knight*, *Hades*, *Cyberpunk 2077*, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, *Ori and the Blind Forest*, *Pseudoregalia*, *Ravenlok*, *Battle Cats*, and *Cat Quest* – made it possible to identify key trends in the visual stylistics of anthropomorphic and technologically oriented characters. Based on this analysis and the generalisation of collected materials, two authorial moodboards were developed and ten characters for the game *Meowfront* were created, combining structural and chromatic solutions typical of the futuristic aesthetic of indie projects. The findings also showed that combining rounded and dynamic forms, neon accents, and technological detailing together with classical silhouette design principles and modern digital tools ensured the formation of a coherent style and high recognizability of combat roles. This combination enabled the creation of characters with expressive archetypal imagery and stable visual identity.

The practical value of the study lies in the fact that the proposed methodology may be applied to the development of character concept design in other indie projects seeking to integrate futuristic aesthetics with innovative design solutions.

Keywords: graphic design; concept art; character; game design; color scheme; style; indie game; digital development tools.

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary video game industry was one of the most dynamic segments of the creative economy, where the visual component played a key role in shaping a unique user experience. For indie games created by small studios or independent developers, visual stylistics functioned not only as a means of artistic expression but also as a defining element of identity that influenced the perception, recognizability, and competitiveness of a project within a saturated market. The growing interest in lightweight development technologies, the spread of self-publishing, and the need to optimize production processes highlighted the question of how the choice of visual stylistics affected the overall attractiveness of indie projects and which solutions proved most effective from both artistic and technical perspectives.

After 2021, academic discourse increasingly shifted toward digital aesthetics, procedural graphics, and the influence of stylization on cognitive perception and player interaction. Nikolayeva and Guo (2021) emphasized that artistic stylistics in digital media had become a system of signs that determined how an image was interpreted by users. According to their findings, the visual language of video games not only represented a fictional world but also shaped behavioral patterns and emotional reactions. This approach aligned with the conclusions of Čerépinko et al. (2025), who examined stylization as a tool for reducing cognitive load in interactive environments: simplified or abstracted graphics could increase readability and perception speed, which was particularly relevant for projects with limited production resources.

In the context of interfaces and the readability of visual signals, the study by Sarver (2021) was significant, highlighting the importance of color structure, contrast, and palette coherence. The author noted that deliberate color design could compensate for technical limitations while forming emotional accents. This corresponded with the work of Chen and Zhuang (2023), who demonstrated that managing player attention through color, light-shadow dynamics, and composition improved navigation and reduced visual clutter.

Particular attention in recent research was devoted to the role of stylization in creating game atmosphere. Jef Bernaers (2023) showed that stylistic decisions could establish a stable emotional background that reinforced immersion regardless of the level of graphical detail. A similar approach was advanced by Kai lin Yu and Tsao (2022), who analyzed the interaction between stylization and narrative and found that visual abstraction enabled clearer articulation of artistic intention and enhanced the symbolic function of objects.

After 2023, an increasing number of studies focused on the use of machine learning and generative graphics. Shahzad and Abdullah (2024) examined the impact of automated tools for creating visual content

on indie developers' production processes and noted that generative models accelerated content preparation yet required careful artistic oversight to avoid stylistic fragmentation. Comparable findings were presented by Song and Gabija (2025), who analyzed the integration of generative algorithms with manual vector and raster drawing. Liu et al. (2025) presented a generative approach to bamboo furniture design that integrates Game Theory, Kansei Engineering, and AI-Generated Content. Zhou et al. (2025) examined how Midjourney can function as an auxiliary tool in interface design, outlining an AI-assisted workflow that compares traditional and AIGC-based processes, and demonstrates practical applications of generative tools in real design scenarios.

The theoretical segment of recent studies also included research on the interaction between stylization and the technical parameters of a game engine. Yongcheng Liu (2023) pointed out the importance of optimization and adaptive selection of graphical techniques for independent developers, as complex rendering solutions were not always proportional to increases in aesthetic appeal. Additionally, Okur, Kızıl, and Atamaz (2024) demonstrated that stylization could reduce the need for resource-intensive shader solutions while preserving opportunities for artistic expression under constrained technical conditions.

The perception of stylized graphics in indie games became the focus of some of the newest studies. Shiyan (2025) analyzed user responses to simplified and abstract forms and concluded that stylized graphics could evoke higher levels of trust and emotional engagement when supporting the overall concept of the game world. Similar results were presented by Bozhko and Slyusarenko (2025), who emphasized the importance of cohesive and consistent visual style for conveying emotional and narrative meanings.

Within the academic discourse of 2024–2025, a distinct body of research emerged addressing the artistic positioning of indie projects. Tereshchuk (2025) examined stylization as a tool for market differentiation, noting that a unique artistic language became a competitive advantage for small studios. Titov (2023) analyzed the relationship between stylistic decisions and audience expectations and argued that stylistic choice influenced the formation of expected genre experience, which was particularly important for the indie segment.

In the technological domain, the work of Teng et al. (2024) was notable for emphasizing the importance of optimizing graphical pipelines for different platforms and devices. The study highlighted that stylized graphics significantly facilitated multi-platform adaptation, which was critical for independent studios working with limited resources.

The collected research demonstrated that after 2021, a stable interdisciplinary approach had formed in the academic field regarding the interpretation of

visual stylistics in indie games: it was examined simultaneously as an artistic choice, a technical solution, and a tool of cognitive interaction. Accordingly, the conducted study was aimed at identifying the patterns underlying the formation of visual stylistics in indie games and determining the factors that influenced their perceptual clarity and expressive potential.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To achieve the stated research objective, a set of interrelated methods was applied, ensuring the scientific validity and practical implementation of the authorial concept. The foundation of the research was the method of visual modeling, which made it possible to develop the concept of characters in cyberpunk and futuristic medieval styles, refine their external characteristics, proportions, and attributes, as well as determine harmonious combinations of colors and textures. An important element of the methodology was the method of comparative analysis, which enabled the identification of stylistic differences between the images of cats and rats, thus emphasizing the contrast of their personalities within the chosen visual concept. Additionally, the method of synthesis was employed, ensuring the integration of artistic and technical elements into a unified composition, combining traditional illustration techniques with modern digital technologies, along with elements of stylistic analysis used to determine the compositional logic of object arrangement and enhance the artistic and emotional impact on the viewer.

To develop the character concept, a case-study method was used based on the analysis of existing games, which served as a source of stylistic inspiration and helped determine optimal solutions for *Meowfront*. A total of 12 analogous games were selected according to the criteria of stylistic expressiveness, silhouette clarity, use of technogenic motifs, presence of a consistent visual style, and adaptability of stylistic solutions for an indie project. The analysis included both indie titles and major commercial projects: *Transistor*, *Hyper Light Drifter*, *Journey*, *Hollow Knight*, *Hades*, *Cyberpunk 2077*, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, *Ori and the Blind Forest*, *Pseudoregalia*, *Ravenlok*, *Battle Cats*, and *Cat Quest*. The analysis criteria encompassed character silhouette and readability, color palette and contrast, types of materials and textures, the balance between detail and stylization, as well as the character's ability to convey personality and emotion through form and composition. The results of the case study made it possible to determine optimal approaches to hybridizing styles, combining futuristic, cyberpunk, and medieval motifs, and creating expressive, easily recognizable character silhouettes.

The *Meowfront* case study represented an indie project at the stage of visual concept development and the formation of character identity, featuring anthropomorphic cats as protagonists and rats as antagonists. The game belonged to the genre of tactical

combat action with elements of fantasy and cyberpunk and was being developed primarily for PC, with potential future adaptation for consoles. Several stages were carried out within the research. At the initial stage, a reference matrix of more than 250 images from various stylistic directions was compiled, including cyberpunk, retrofuturism, minimalism, art deco, and highly stylized artistic projects. Subsequently, an analysis of analogous games was conducted according to the criteria of silhouette quality, color solutions, techno-elements, and artistic expressiveness, which served as the basis for establishing principles of character contrast and individuality. The next stage involved the creation of initial silhouettes and design variations for cats and rats, including the determination of proportions, movement plasticity, and characteristic attributes. Another stage consisted of defining color solutions and creating a moodboard that reflected the emotional and stylistic character of the world.

Afterward, generative artificial intelligence tools were applied, specifically the neural networks Stable Diffusion (versions 1.5 and SDXL) and MidJourney, to obtain a wide range of character variations. These variations underwent subsequent selection and manual refinement using Adobe Photoshop and Procreate. The use of these digital tools did not imply a direct transfer of generated results into the final design; rather, they served as a basis for comparative analysis of artistic approaches and contributed to the expansion of compositional and color solutions. The combined application of these methods ensured the coherence of the authorial approach, the accuracy of visual analysis, and the formation of a consistent futuristic identity for the *Meowfront* characters.

During the image development process, AI prompts were used to describe character appearance, materials, color palette, lighting, and emotional characteristics, for example: «cyberpunk feline warrior, anthropomorphic cat, futuristic medieval armor, neon accents, elegant silhouette, gold-purple palette, high-tech visor, ornate details, dynamic lighting, highly detailed, concept art» for cats and «post-industrial rat soldier, grimy metal implants, asymmetrical armor plates, toxic green neon, rough textures, aggressive silhouette, dystopian mood, dark sci-fi concept art» for rats. Prompts such as «silhouette exploration sheet, anthropomorphic animals, cyberpunk armor shapes, dynamic poses, high contrast, black on grey» were employed to refine silhouettes and dynamic poses.

The final character development involved creating highly detailed renders, combining silhouette, color palette, and armament.

The integrated application of these methods ensured stylistic unity, depth of artistic content, and high-quality visual execution, while simultaneously maintaining character readability in dynamic scenes, emphasizing character traits, and integrating techno-aesthetic elements into the artistic composition. This approach was key to creating a unique identity for the *Meowfront* project.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Case study of the game *Meowfront*: world structure and combat roles. In *Meowfront*, world-building and character roles functioned as a contextual foundation necessary for understanding the design decisions presented in subsequent results. The overall narrative was based on the conflict between the faction of anthropomorphic cats «K.A.T.I.» (armed unit of the Kitlantis people) and the technocratic empire of the Rats. This narrative framework defined the logic of visual and functional character stylistics, as each faction possessed its own technologies, aesthetics, and tactical approaches, which formed the basis for character design.

The game space was organized as a multi-layered futuristic metropolis combining high-tech zones, decayed territories, and post-apocalyptic urban environments. This environment necessitated clear combat differentiation among characters: architectural complexity, verticality of locations, and the mixture of technological and abandoned sectors dictated the presence of different combat functions, which subsequently influenced the design of each character.

The cat and rat factions were represented as two opposing systems – an organized defensive force and an aggressive expansionist regime. This opposition determined the spectrum of combat roles developed during the design stage: cats performed as snipers, assault units, melee maneuver fighters, heavy destructive units, and stealth agents; rats had analogous classes adapted to their techno-medieval aesthetic. Weapons, equipment, and technological modifications not only fulfilled gameplay functions but also justified stylistic decisions in character design, analyzed in the following sections.

Thus, the world structure and role systems in *Meowfront* served as a methodological background for result analysis: they established the logic of visual identity, factional stylistic polarization, and defined criteria for the formation of silhouettes, armament, color schemes, and character traits. This context enabled consideration of the results not in isolation but within the framework of a coherent conceptual system of the game.

Visual stylistics of video games: trends and adaptation in *Meowfront*. The *Meowfront* project developed within the tactical combat action genre, where cats and rats represented two conflicting factions. Cats were characterized by high agility, flexibility, and tactical versatility, whereas rats exhibited more massive silhouettes and aggressive design, emphasizing strength and threat. This visual dichotomy established an evident conflict and enhanced the dramatic tension of the game world. The structure of combat roles included division into classes – snipers, assault units, tanks, and assassins – allowing rapid identification of a character's function in battle. Character and armament descriptions provided a context for the subsequent analysis of stylistic decisions and design principles.

For comparison and selection of stylistic solutions, twelve representative indie and AAA games were analyzed (*Transistor*, *Hyper Light Drifter*, *Journey*, *Hollow Knight*, *Hades*, *Cyberpunk 2077*, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, *Ori and the Blind Forest*, *Pseudoregalia*, *Ravenlok*, *Battle Cats*, *Cat Quest*). The results of the analysis were structured in Table 1, presenting the main visual style of each project, key elements, and practical significance for forming the graphic language of the *Meowfront* project.

Table 1. Analysis of reference games and their significance for *Meowfront*

Game Title	Visual Style	Key Elements	Practical Significance for <i>Meowfront</i>
<i>Transistor</i>	Narrative Art Deco with Futuristic Motifs	Clear geometric lines, decorative patterns, lighting accents	Example of hybridization of historical style and techno-aesthetics
<i>Hyper Light Drifter</i>	Pixel Art, Retro-Futurism	Bright neon palette, abstract geometry	Formation of palette and graphic language
<i>Journey</i>	Minimalism	Concise forms, limited palette, light-color design	Balance of detail and readability, creation of atmosphere
<i>Hollow Knight</i>	Silhouette readability	Minimalist contours, color economy	Clear recognition of characters in dynamic scenes
<i>Hades</i>	Authorial stylization	Distinctive silhouettes, decorative details, color accents	Formation of character traits and emotional appeal of characters
<i>Cyberpunk 2077</i>	Cyberpunk, futurism	Detailing, lighting, large-scale worldbuilding	Guidelines for scaling technological aesthetics
<i>Deus Ex: Human Revolution</i>	Technological cyber-visual	Augmentations, neon, metallic textures	Inspiration for character "tech-detailing"
<i>Ori and the Blind Forest</i>	Artistic hand-crafted execution	Hand-painted environments, work with light and color	Conveying atmosphere and emotions, ecological design
<i>Pseudoregalia</i>	Medieval fantasy with indie aesthetics	Minimalist silhouettes, fabric and metal textures	Examples of organic stylization for fantasy characters
<i>Ravenlok</i>	Contemporary fairy-tale aesthetics	Contrasting silhouettes, vibrant palettes	Balance of silhouette clarity and colorfulness for a children's audience
<i>Battle Cats</i>	Cartoonish, comedic style	Simplified forms, bright colors	Clear readability and recognizability in mass gameplay
<i>Cat Quest</i>	Indie fantasy	Concise contours, fairy-tale palette	Character stylization under limited resources

Source: developed by the authors

Of particular Analysis of visual and stylistic solutions allowed several patterns defining contemporary approaches to character design to be identified: the integration of futuristic and technological motifs with historical or genre traditions, the deliberate use of color as a semiotic and emotional marker, the prioritization of character silhouette clarity for rapid recognition in dynamic scenes, the emphasis on materiality and textural detail in accordance with the project's conceptual-stylistic framework, and the balance between character detail and background elements determined by genre features and gameplay requirements. Additionally, functional stylization of decorative elements enabled simultaneous fulfillment of aesthetic and narrative objectives.

Within *Meowfront*, these principles were implemented through the transformation of traditional fantasy stylization toward a neo-punk aesthetic. Cats were assigned cyberpunk traits, including bionic prosthetics, modular tactical suits, and holographic accessories, while rats were equipped with futuristic-medieval armor with technological augmentations. Character silhouettes established contrast and immediate recognizability: cats were elongated and agile, while rats were massive and imposing. The arrangement of classes and combat roles (sniper, tank, assassin) was aligned with the silhouette structure, enhancing both aesthetic and functional significance of the design.

Thus, the combination of analysis of existing cases and authorial solutions facilitated the formation of a comprehensive methodology for character stylistic design in *Meowfront*, reflecting contemporary trends, genre-specific features, and gameplay functional requirements.

Coloristics and its role in identity formation.

Color in *Meowfront* functioned as both an identity marker and a tool for emotional influence. The cat faction utilized a cyberpunk neon palette (purple, turquoise, and electric blue accents) combined with dark base tones to emphasize the urban and technological qualities of the characters. In contrast, the rat faction employed deep metallic shades, dark reds, and olive tones with interspersed light accents, reminiscent of heavy equipment and weaponry. Such contrast highlighted the antagonism between factions and established a unique color code for each side of the conflict (Praveen Toppo & Sahabuddin Ahamed, 2024).

Traditional fantasy archetypes, such as warriors or mages, were reinterpreted within *Meowfront*. Magical attributes were fully replaced with technological devices and weaponry: crossbows were equipped with energy modules, swords received nitro modes and protective shields, and high-tech armaments substituted for spells. For instance, the character Clawpaw, serving as an assassin analog, was armed with dual claws and a silenced revolver, whereas Stonepaw assumed the role of a heavy assault unit with a bazooka and a supercharged strike mode. This approach not only provided the game with uniqueness

but also established a new concept of fantasy without magic, where technology served as the driving force of the game world.

The visual identity of *Meowfront* was based on the combination of three conceptual layers: anthropomorphic character design, technological aesthetics, and the contrast between two stylistic worlds. Each character reflected not only functional gameplay roles but also individuality through species, personality, and equipment choices. The name of the cat unit, "K.A.T.I.," reinforced the concept of an organized faction with its own symbols and internal structure.

The authorial approach to style formation involved synthesizing cyberpunk and futuristic-medieval elements, complemented by science fiction motifs. This combination achieved a balance between recognizable gameplay archetypes (sniper, tank, assassin) and innovative character designs, rendering the visual language of the game competitive within the action-RPG genre.

Stages of character creation: from concept to final design. The character development process for *Meowfront* was conducted using a systematic approach that combined scientific principles of visual communication with experimental authorial methods. The initial stage involved the creation of basic silhouettes, as shape determined recognizability and readability of characters in dynamic gameplay scenes (Aziret Tumenbaev, 2024). For both cat and rat factions, a series of sketches were produced, demonstrating variations in proportions, anthropomorphic traits, ear and tail silhouettes, as well as preliminary weapon designs. Each combat role received a clearly defined form that emphasized character and tactical function: snipers, assault units, tanks, and assassins were differentiated through volume, linework, and pose dynamics. At this stage, primary attention was given to silhouette readability and expressiveness, enabling immediate identification of a character's role in combat.

For cat characters of the "K.A.T.I." faction, a bright cyberpunk neon palette was applied, including purple, turquoise, and electric blue shades, which emphasized the dynamism and technological nature of combat roles. Rat characters were assigned a darker, more aggressive coloration with metallic and deep accents to enhance the perception of threat. The palette was selected considering color perception psychology, contrast, and associative influence on the player (Yichen Gu, 2023), allowing instant conveyance of faction affiliation and combat specialization.

Each character was provided with individual decorative details and accessories reflecting combat functions: the sniper Clawpaw was equipped with a cybernetic crossbow and a quiver containing various types of arrows; the tank Stonepaw carried a "Javelin" bazooka with a supercharged fire mode and prosthetic arm and eye; the assault unit Murgans employed Macedonian-style dual-wielding with Micro-Uzi

submachine guns and grenades of varying effectiveness; the berserker Murloc wielded a plasma sword with nitro mode and shield; the assassin Clawtail used daggers and a silenced revolver. Rat characters were assigned corresponding combat sets: the sniper Spike wielded a modern bow with a calimotor, quiver with three arrow types, and a prosthetic eye; the tank Rottenfang operated a multi-barrel Minigun with supercharged mode; the assault unit Ratembo used an AK-47 with a GP-25 underbarrel grenade launcher; the berserker Stormpaw employed a chainsaw with nitro mode for close combat; the assassin Shorttail conducted attacks with Wolverine-style claws and a silenced Glock.

Special attention was given to detailing and symbolic elements of equipment. Weapons and costumes were integrated with character silhouettes and color-coded systems, highlighting combat roles and faction traits. Neon inserts and holographic components signaled the technological level of cats, while metallic and dark elements emphasized the aggression of rats. This combination ensured the integration of emotional depth, aesthetic appeal, and functional clarity within the gameplay system (Wenbo Zhao & Yuanyuan Sun, 2024). After defining the overall concept, a mood board was created to reflect the style and colour scheme of the characters (Fig. 1).

The sequential combination of sketches, moodboards, and highly detailed renders, taking into account combat roles and weaponry, enabled the formation of a cohesive system of character designs. This system was recognizable, functionally clear, and consistent with the overall visual and narrative context of *Meowfront*. Each character was endowed with a distinct individuality, reflecting role, combat abilities, and faction affiliation, thus forming a unique game identity.

Visual features of combat roles in *Meowfront*: silhouette, weaponry, and color palette. In *Meowfront*, each combat role possessed a clearly defined visual identity, ensuring immediate

recognizability in dynamic scenes and establishing an emotional connection with the player. Character visual design was developed considering tactical functions, combat abilities, and the psychological perception of shapes, colors, and details. Visual solutions for combat roles in *Meowfront* were formed based on principles of silhouette readability, color psychology, and correspondence between character form and tactical function. For snipers of both factions, emphasis was placed on visual cues of precision and technological sophistication.

The sniper Clawpaw, a member of the K.A.T.I. unit, featured an elongated and dynamic silhouette, emphasizing agility and long-range role (Fig. 2). The cybernetic crossbow was integrated into the upper body composition, making the weapon an extension of the silhouette. The contrast of cool neon tones with soft light-gray fur created a sense of high technology and speed. The sniper of the Rat Empire, Spike, exhibited an elongated yet more rigid form, reinforced by technological prosthetics, symbolizing mechanical precision and the aggressive nature of the faction. A dark palette with metallic and red accents established a visual atmosphere of threat.

The further development of the combat roles concept was reflected in the design of tanks, where massiveness, stability, and associations with physical power predominated (Fig. 3). Stonepaw, the tank of Kitlantis, was characterized by broad proportions, an expanded shoulder girdle, and pronounced muscular structure, emphasizing the role of a durable frontline fighter. Visual dominance was achieved not only through volume but also through technological prosthetics and heavy weaponry. Its counterpart, Rottenfang, exhibited a slightly different massiveness: more “armored,” with emphasis on mechanical strength. Coarse body shapes, a wide stance, and dark metallic tones conveyed the image of an almost industrial fighter, where the weapon functioned as an extension of the technocratic body.

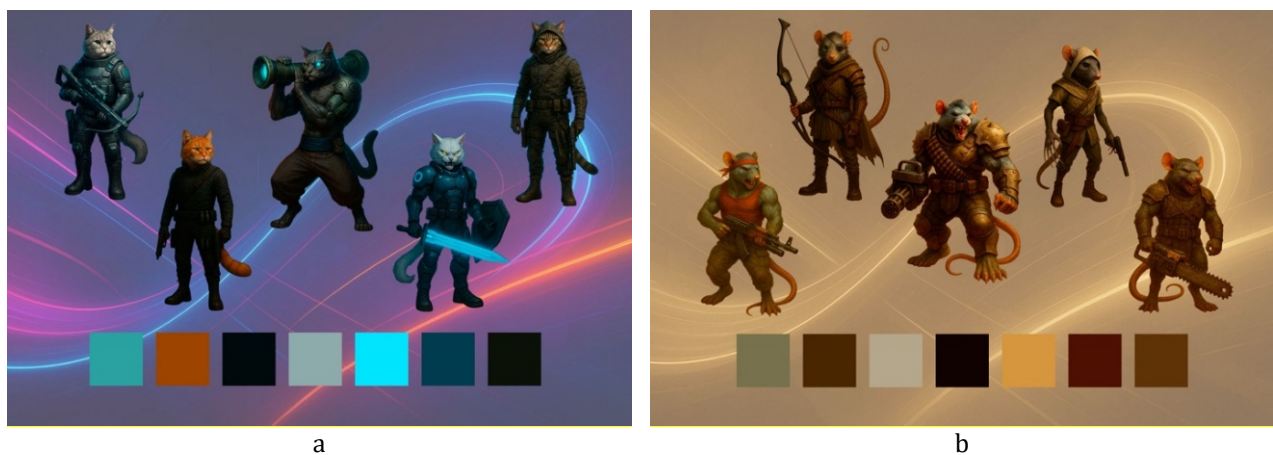


Figure 1. Moodboard for creating game characters

Note: a – cat faction; b – rat faction

Source: own development, generated with Stable Diffusion.



a



b

Figure 2. Visual solutions for snipers

Note: a – Clawpaw; b – Spike

Source: own development, generated in Stable Diffusion



a



b

Figure 3. Visual solutions for tanks

Note: a – Stonepaw; b – Rottenfang

Source: own development, generated in Stable Diffusion

In the berserker class, the primary objective was to convey destructive power and high close-combat agility (Fig. 5). Murlok, representing the feline faction, combined metallic protective elements with a neon plasma sword, creating the image of a technological barbarian. The silhouette was balanced between massiveness and swiftness. The rat faction's berserker,

Shturmich, was characterized by a more robust and “mechanical” form. It was perceived as an explosive force due to the combination of massive shapes and a chainsaw with a nitro mode. Yellow technical accents emphasized the danger and uncontrollability of its power.



a



b

Figure 4. Visual solutions for assault units

Note: a – Murgans; b – Shchurembo

Source: original development, generated in Stable Diffusion

In the assassin class, the emphasis was placed on agility, precision, and stealth (Fig. 6). Kightiar exhibited a flexible and refined silhouette, allowing immediate recognition as a shadow-type character. The contrast of cool tones and defined lines in the equipment reinforced the image of technological

invisibility. The counterpart, Korotkokhivist, representing the Rats' faction, was rendered in dark tones with sharpened silhouette accents on claws and weaponry. Its form demonstrated a more aggressive posture with sharp angles, creating a visual impression of a fast and lethal killer.



a



b

Figure 5. Visual solutions for Berserkers

Note: a – Murlok; b – Shturmich

Source: own development, generated in Stable Diffusion



a



b

Figure 6. Visual solutions for assassins

Note: a – Kightiar; b – Korotkikhvst

Source: authors' development, generated in Stable Diffusion

Careful elaboration of silhouettes and color schemes ensured unambiguous perception of the combat role of each character. The use of neon and metallic accents reinforced the technological and futuristic aesthetics of the cats, whereas the rats were distinguished by darker and more aggressive visual cues. This approach allowed not only the creation of recognizable character designs but also their integration into the gameplay logic, where form, color, and armament immediately conveyed tactical information to the player.

Discussion of the futuristic style and combat roles of the characters in *Meowfront*

The results of the study on visual stylistics and combat roles of the *Meowfront* characters generally corresponded with findings reported in contemporary works on concept design, anthropomorphism, and visual identification in video games. As noted by Bozhko & Slyusarenko (2025), stylistic coherence of characters was determined primarily by the consistency of silhouettes, color accents, and embedded functionality, which directly influenced the legibility of character designs in dynamic scenes. In *Meowfront*, this principle was confirmed by the construction of each class and faction design based on stable silhouette contours and recognizable shape motifs, allowing rapid identification of threat type or character role regardless of model detail.

A similar logic was emphasized in studies addressing the impact of color on player cognition. Gu (2023) and Toppo & Ahamed (2024) demonstrated that color in video games performed not only a decorative but also a semiotic function – structuring

visual information and accelerating recognition of game objects. Within *Meowfront*, this trend was confirmed through the allocation of factions with clear color codes: neon cool shades for cat characters and deep metallic palettes for rats created two contrasting visual fields, which reinforced the overall cyberpunk and techno-medieval aesthetics and facilitated rapid interpretation of combat roles. Consequently, the results aligned with previous conclusions regarding the significance of color for effective communication in game design while extending them by demonstrating the integration of color archetypes with technological class markers.

Anthropomorphic representations in *Meowfront* also corresponded with trends described in studies of emotional expressiveness in characters. Chen & Zhunag (2023), as well as Song & Gabija (2025), emphasized that head proportions, eye size, and pose dynamics significantly affected player emotional engagement. In this study, cat characters were designed with enhanced “approachability” features – large eyes, rounded silhouettes, and active pose dynamics – forming a friendlier and more dynamic emotional impression. In contrast, rat characters, constructed with segmented forms, sharp angles, and restrained facial expressions, conveyed threat and tension. This structure confirmed prior findings while extending them by demonstrating the possibility of combining anthropomorphism with futuristic technological components without loss of emotional legibility.

Research on character design methods, particularly in Kai lin Yu & Tsao (2022), indicated that combat roles in the action-RPG genre should be readable by players

before exposure to character abilities. Silhouettes were required to convey tactical messages – tanks needed to appear massive, snipers restrained and agile, and assault classes dynamic. Characters developed for *Meowfront* fully confirmed this pattern, as proportions, technological elements, and stylistic accents were subordinated to functional roles. This approach also corresponded with principles outlined by Schell (2020) and Sarver (2021), emphasizing that visual form should function as an integrated element of gameplay logic.

Comparison of the results with studies on futuristic and cyberpunk stylizations demonstrated that *Meowfront* organically fit into the established aesthetic tradition of indie projects. Nikolayeva & Guo (2021) and Gintere (2019) emphasized that futuristic stylistics could generate a unique artistic code for a game through the combination of technological motifs and expressive silhouette solutions. The present study confirmed this thesis, showing that technological details in *Meowfront* did not overload characters but instead enhanced their legibility and role differentiation.

Correlation of the results with analytical materials on visual styles from Supergiant Games (*Transistor*, *Hades*), Team Cherry (*Hollow Knight*), Heart Machine (*Hyper Light Drifter*), Moon Studios (*Ori and the Blind Forest*), Thatgamecompany (*Journey*) and other analogues further confirmed that the key factors for effective identity were stylistic consistency, silhouette expressiveness, and tactical design logic. Materials from 80 Level, ArtStation, and the official sites of these projects demonstrated that the combination of clear shape-making solutions and controlled detailing created a visual language comparable in principles to that applied in *Meowfront*.

Summarizing these results showed that *Meowfront* not only conformed to the fundamental patterns of contemporary concept design but also extended them to some degree, demonstrating the possibility of integrating anthropomorphic forms, technological accents, and structured combat roles within a futuristic indie aesthetic. These findings could be considered a contribution to the further development of visual identity theory in low-budget action-RPGs.

CONCLUSIONS

The conducted study confirmed that futuristic stylistics could serve as an effective foundation for the formation of visual identity of characters in indie action-RPG games. On the basis of the authorial project *Meowfront*, a comprehensive approach to character creation was developed, which combined anthropomorphic representations, technological aesthetics, and

differentiated combat roles. Comparison of these results with analyses of selected reference projects (*Transistor*, *Hyper Light Drifter*, *Journey*, *Hollow Knight*, *Hades*, *Cyberpunk 2077*, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, *Ori and the Blind Forest*, *Pseudoregalia*, *Ravenlok*, *Battle Cats*, *Cat Quest*) identified key parameters influencing the expressiveness of character designs and their perceptual clarity for players.

Characters developed within the study demonstrated that the combination of clear silhouettes, considered proportions, and technological details ensured recognizability even under conditions of high combat dynamics. Comparison with other indie projects showed that a balanced combination of stylization and detailing reduced the risk of visual overload while maintaining individual character traits. This was confirmed by the results of the authorial experiment, in which the design of the cat faction with cyberpunk features and the rat faction with futuristic-medieval stylistics demonstrated the effectiveness of a contrasting approach to visual structure and combat identity.

Summarizing the results, it could be stated that concept design based on the integration of technological motifs, color differentiation, and functional character archetypes formed a coherent artistic code for the game and could serve as a tool for its branding. The developed *Meowfront* characters confirmed that futuristic stylistics enhanced both emotional engagement of players and gameplay legibility, providing clear communicative signals regarding the role and capabilities of each hero.

The obtained conclusions provided a foundation for further research into the interaction between visual stylistics and players' psychological perception. Promising directions included analysis of how varying levels of detail, selection of color accents, and typology of combat roles influenced decision-making speed in dynamic scenes. A separate avenue of research could involve the study of interactive AI tools for generating and optimizing concept designs in independent game projects.

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Візуальна стилістика футуризму: на прикладі проєкту «Meowfront»

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Анотація. Актуальність дослідження обумовлена зростанням інтересу до інді-ігор та необхідністю створення виразної футуристичної візуальної стилістики персонажів у жанрі action-RPG. У сучасному геймдизайні художній образ відіграє ключову роль у формуванні впізнаваності та емоційного занурення гравця, що є особливо важливим для невеликих студій, які конкурують за увагу аудиторії інноваційністю та оригінальним концептом.

Метою роботи є визначення принципів формування цілісної футуристичної стилістики персонажів інді-ігри та виявлення ефективних підходів до поєднання технологічної та художньої естетики у візуальному проєктуванні.

У дослідженні застосовувалися методи візуального та порівняльного аналізу, авторського експерименту, дослідження силуетів і пропорцій, підбору кольорових рішень та використання цифрових інструментів (Adobe Photoshop, Procreate, MidJourney, Stable Diffusion) для створення ескізів і базових моделей. Аналіз

проводився з урахуванням характерних рис інді-ігор та актуальних тенденцій футуристичного й неопанк-дизайну.

Результати дослідження продемонстрували, що аналіз сучасних інді-ігор – зокрема *Transistor, Hyper Light Drifter, Journey, Hollow Knight, Hades, Cyberpunk 2077, Deus Ex: Human Revolution, Ori and the Blind Forest, Pseudoregalia, Ravenlok, Battle Cats* та *Cat Quest* – дозволив виокремити ключові тенденції у візуальній стилістиці антропоморфних та технологічно орієнтованих персонажів. На основі проведеного аналізу й узагальнення матеріалів було розроблено два авторські moodboard'и та створено десять персонажів для гри *Meowfront*, у яких поєднано структурні та кольорові рішення, типові для футуристичної естетики інді-проектів. Результати також засвідчили, що комбінування округлих і динамічних форм, неонових акцентів і технологічних деталей у поєднанні з класичними принципами дизайну силуетів та можливостями сучасних цифрових інструментів забезпечує формування цілісного стилю та високої впізнаваності бойових ролей. Таке поєднання дозволило створити персонажів з виразними образними архетипами та стійкою візуальною айденітикою.

Практична цінність роботи полягає в тому, що запропонований підхід може бути використаний для розробки концепт-дизайну персонажів інших інді-проектів, які прагнуть поєднати футуристичну естетику та інноваційні дизайнерські рішення.

Ключові слова: графічний дизайн; концепт-арт; персонаж; геймдизайн; кольорове рішення; стиль; інді-гра; цифрові інструменти розробки