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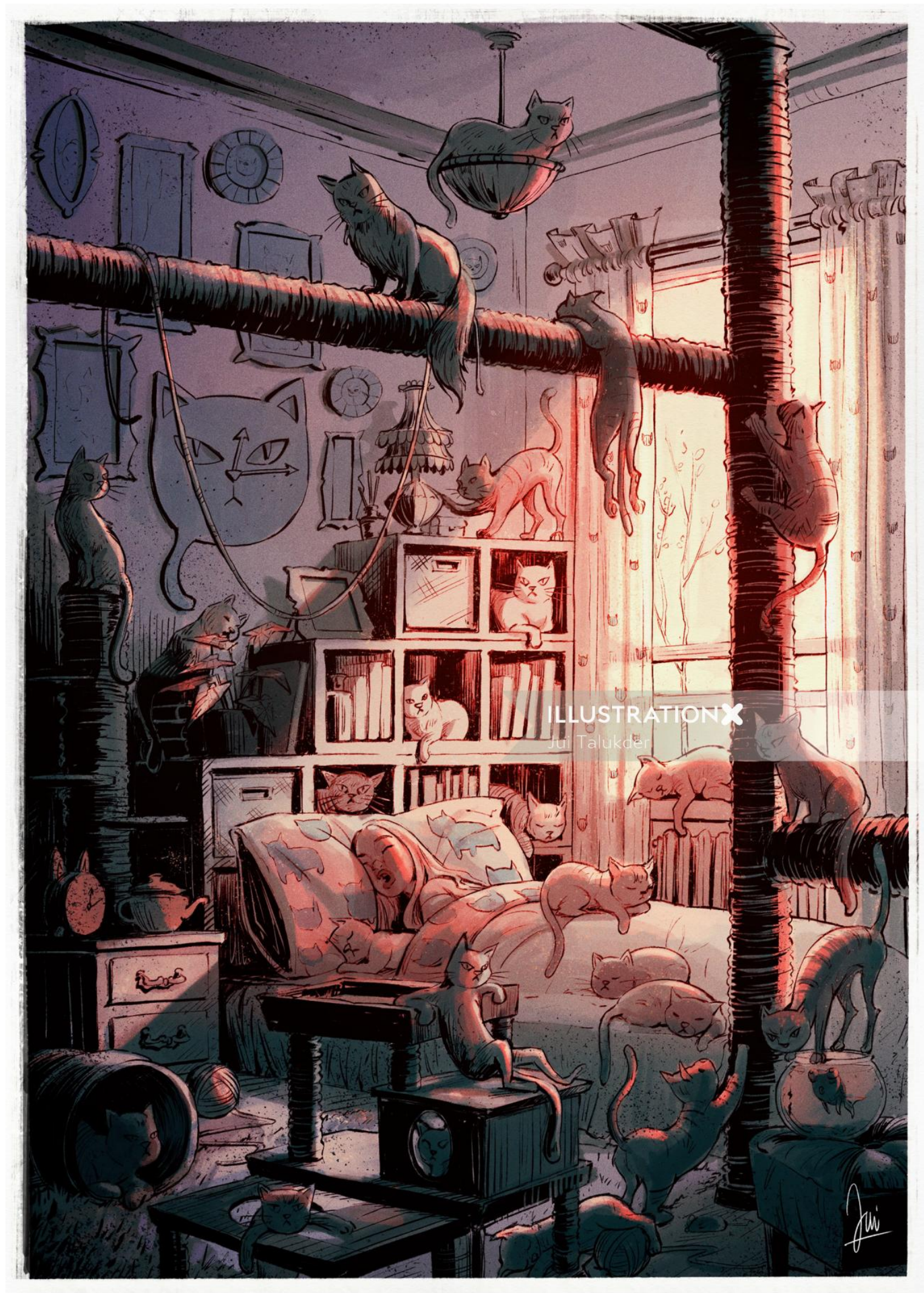
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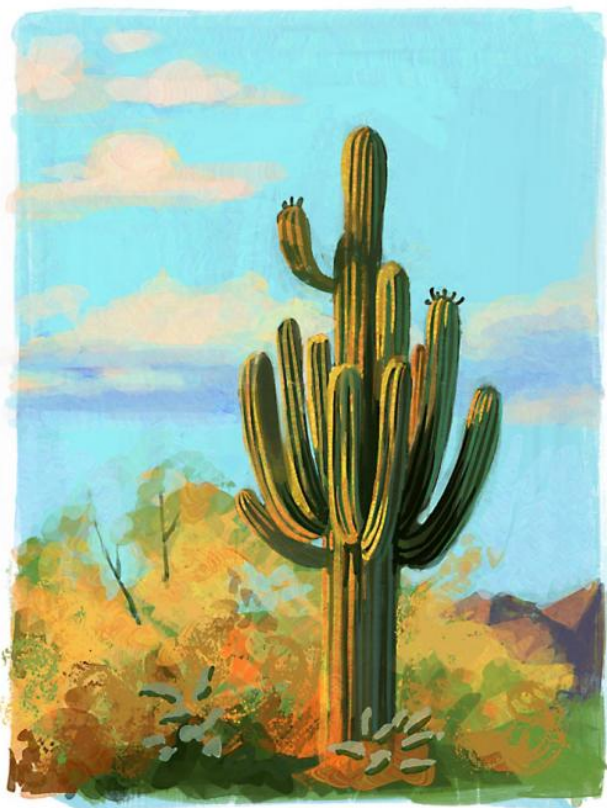
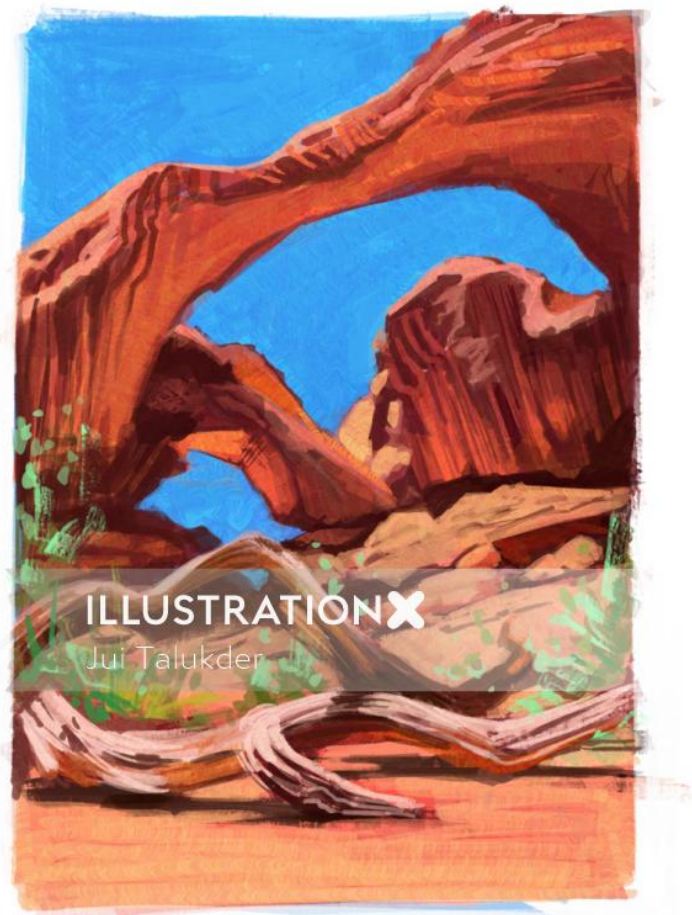
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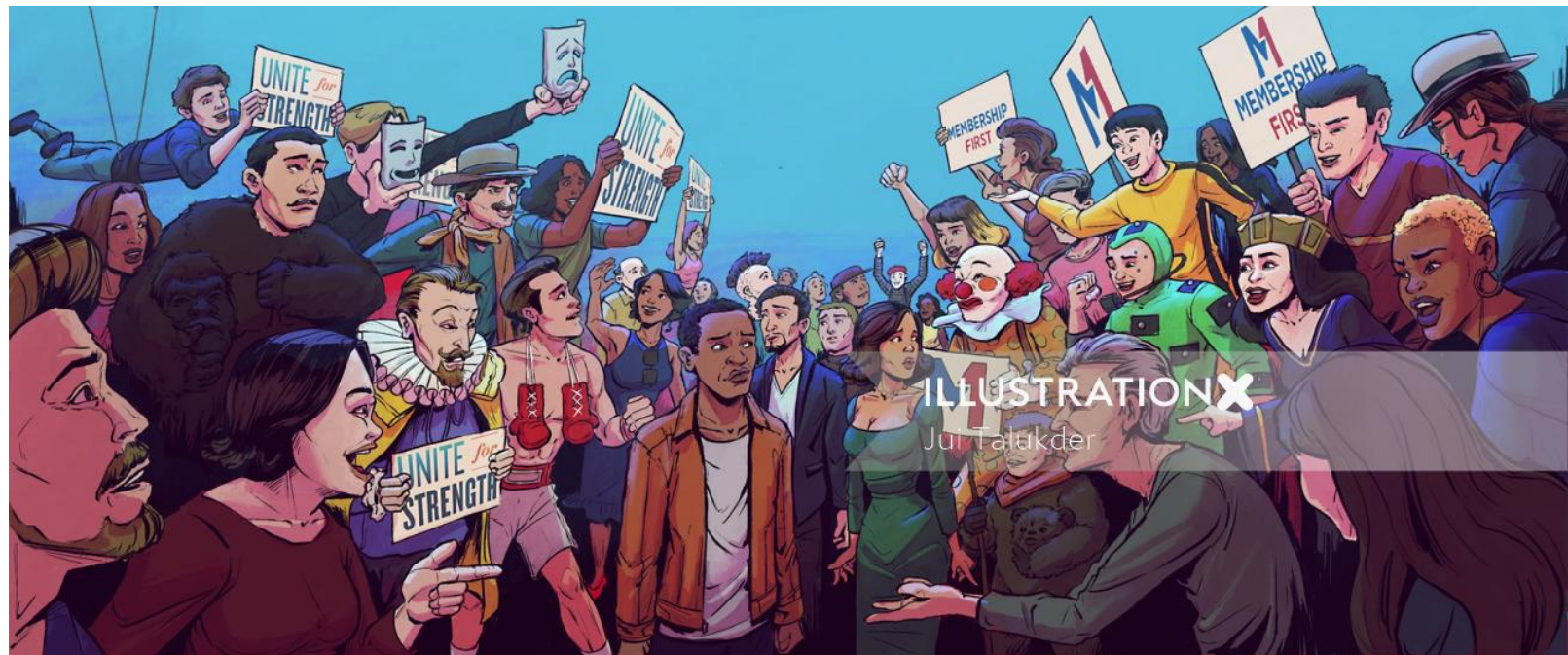
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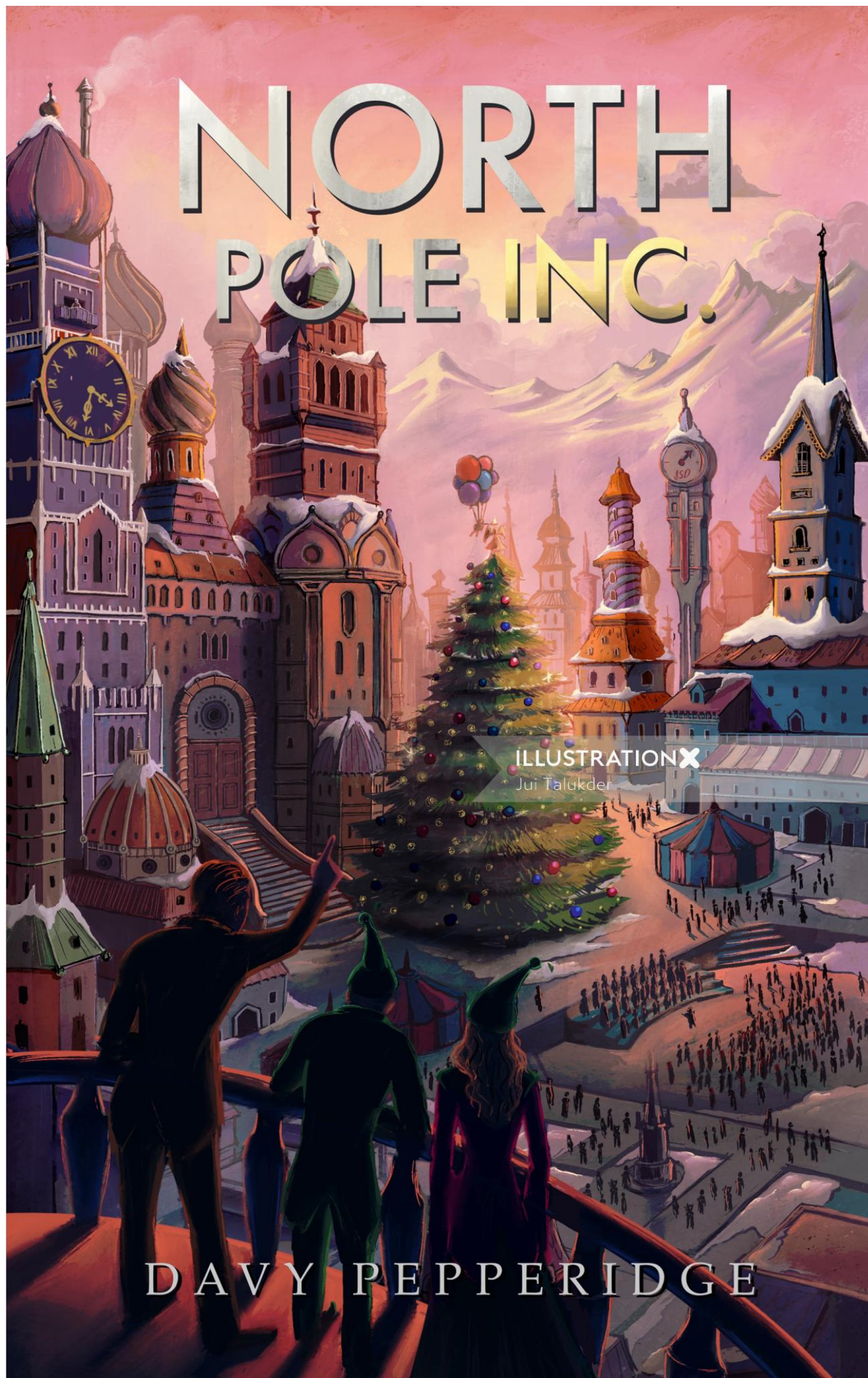
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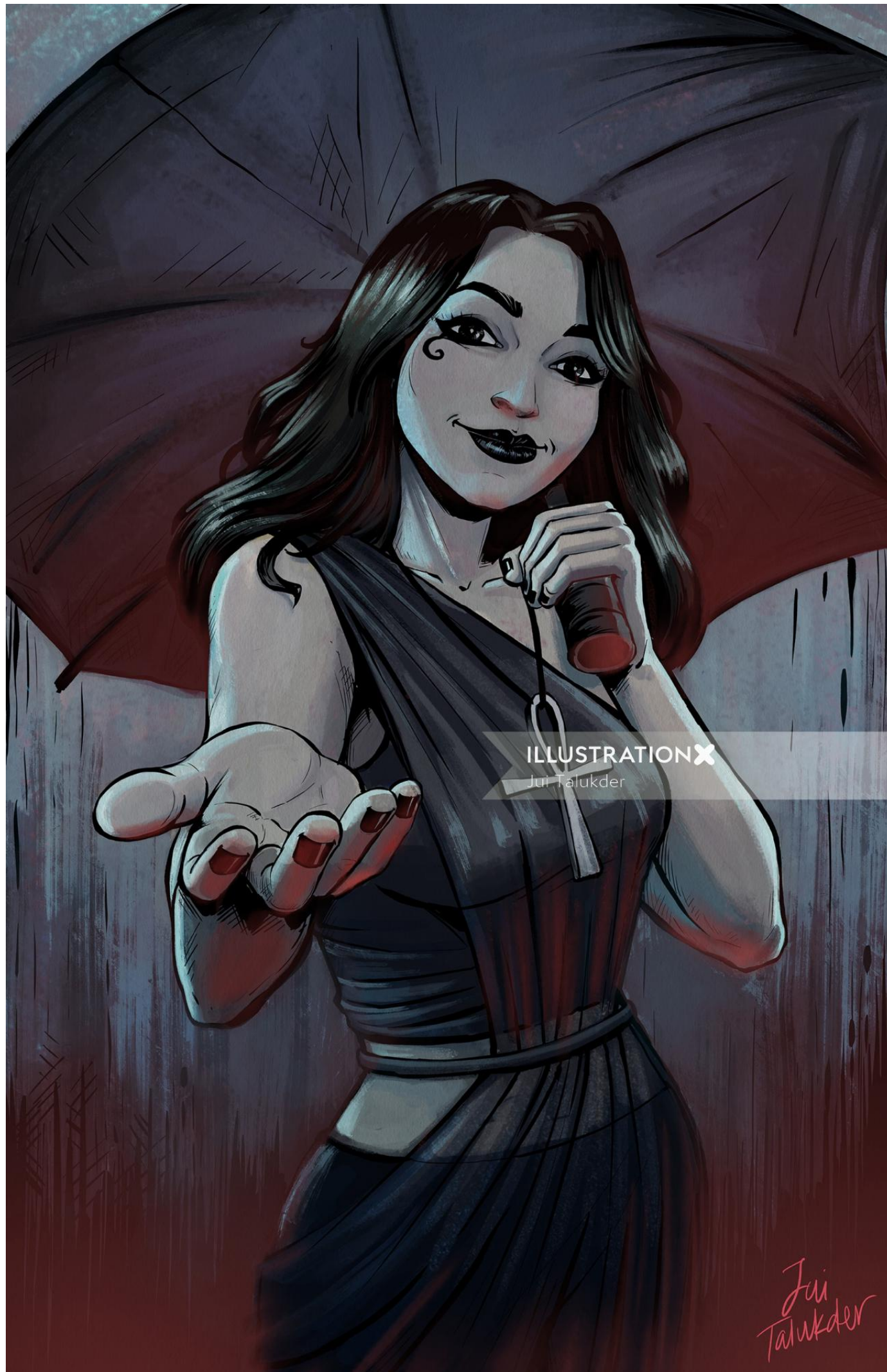
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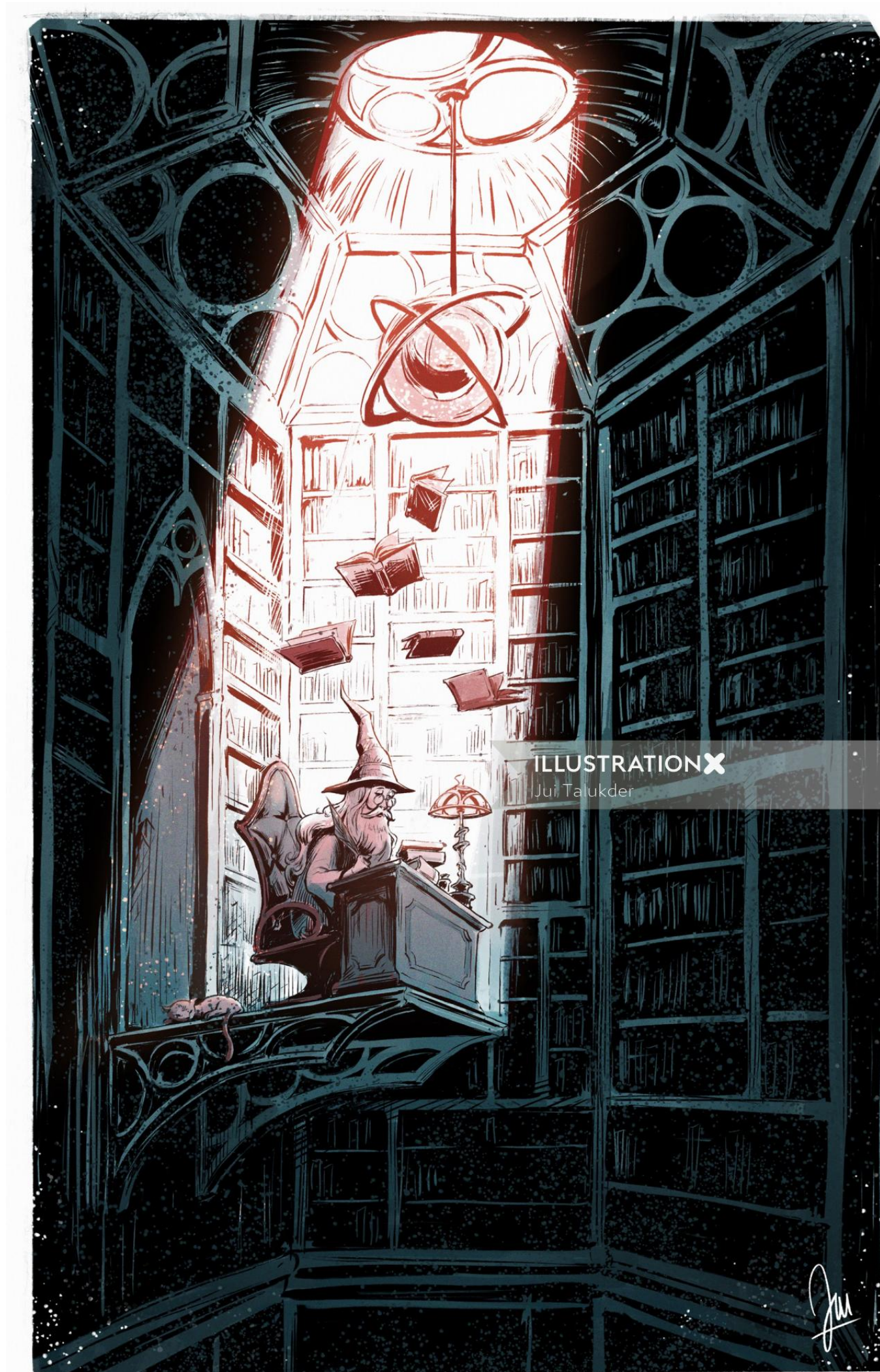
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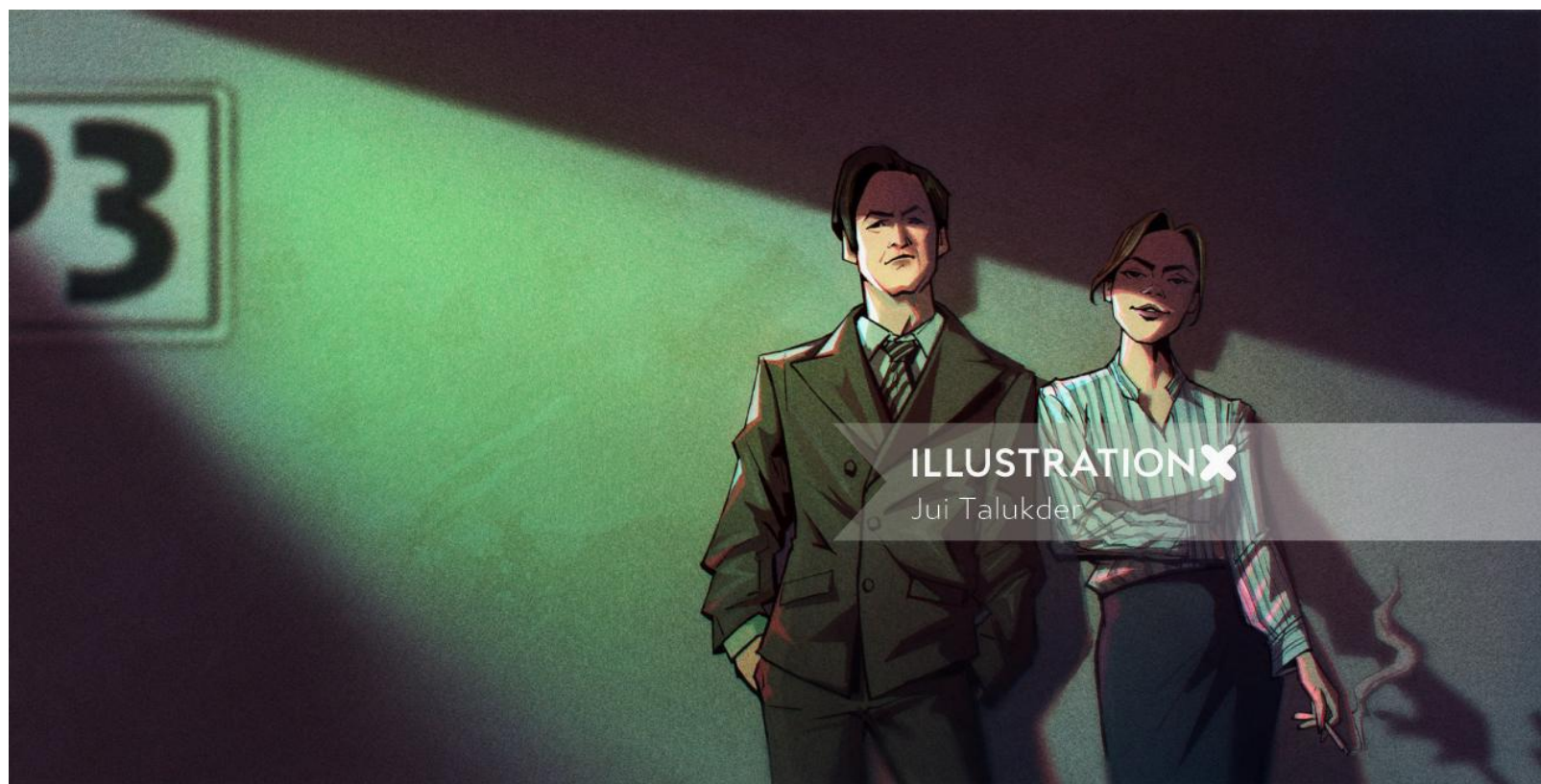
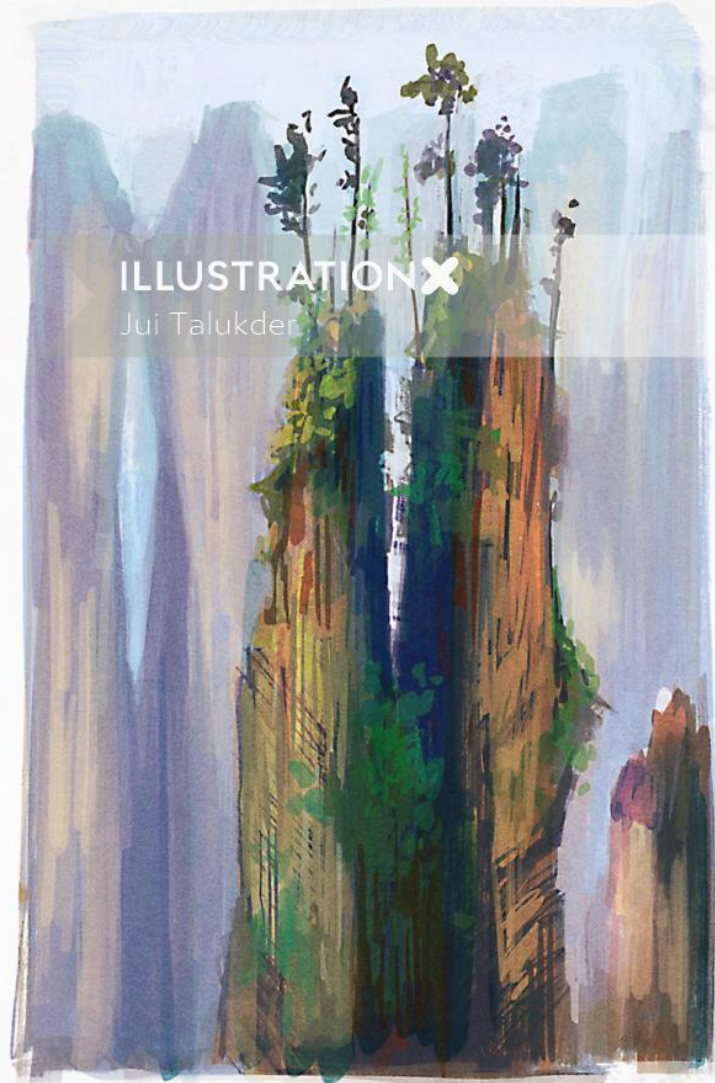


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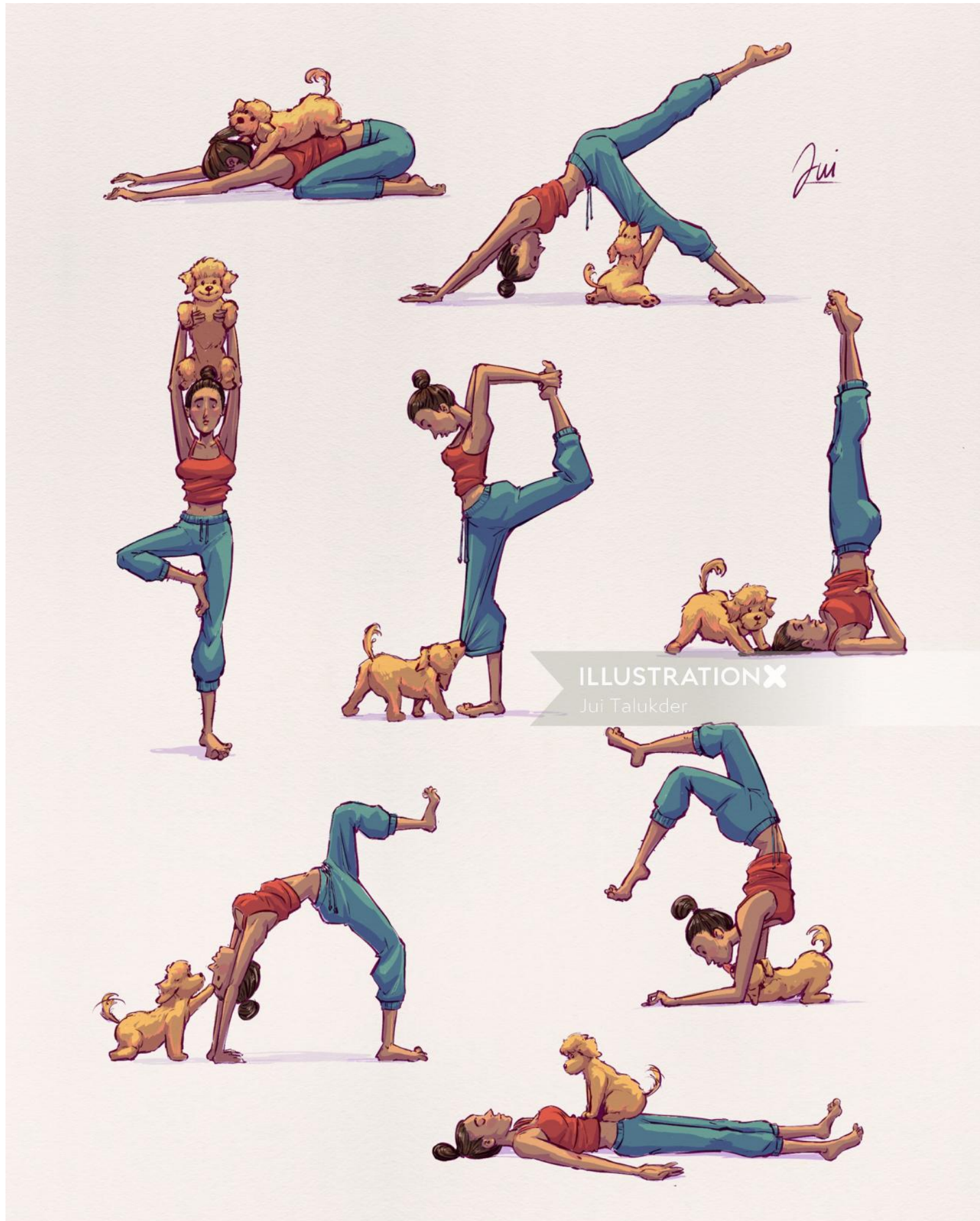
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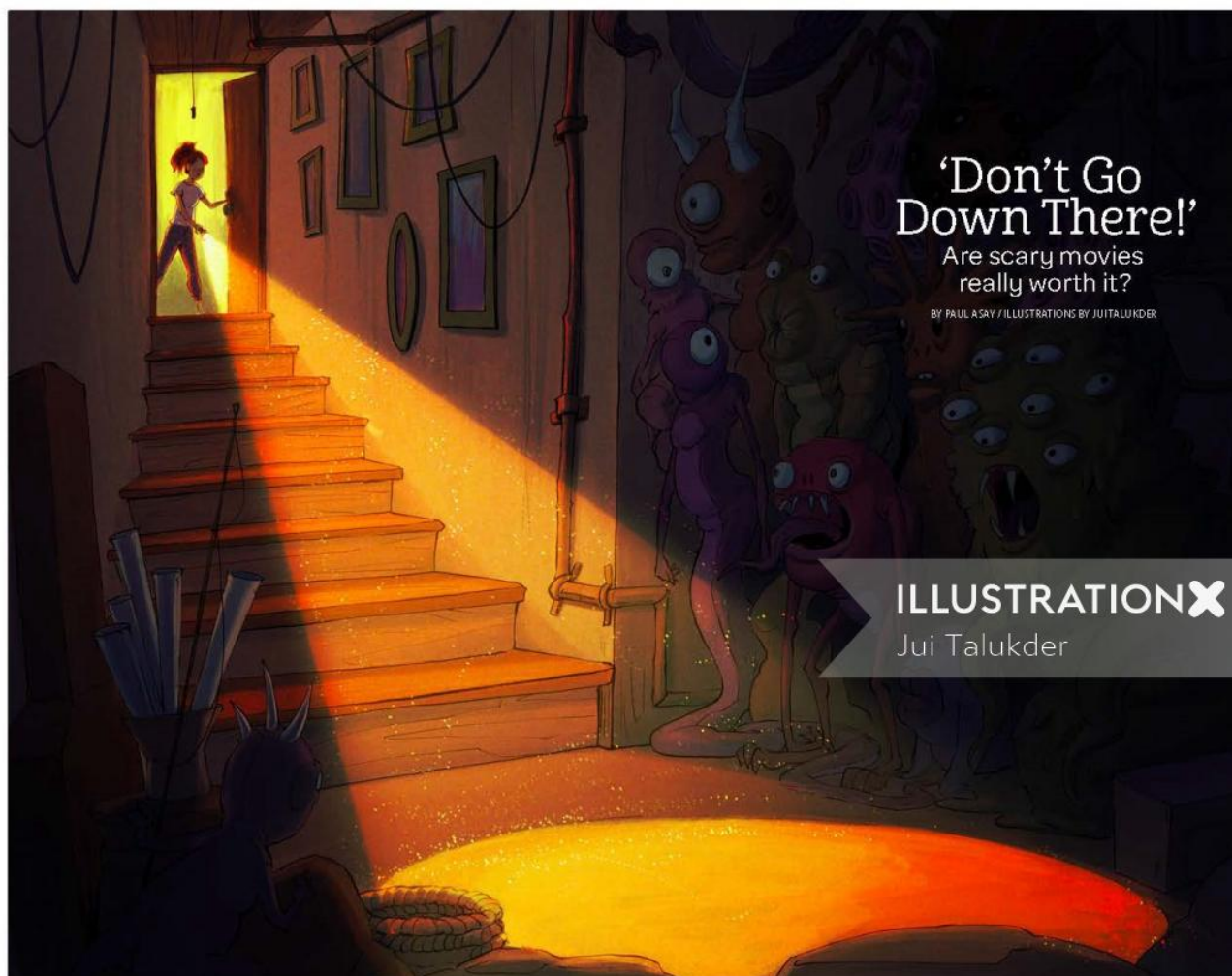
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'Don't Go Down There!'

Are scary movies really worth it?

BY PAUL ASAY / ILLUSTRATIONS BY JUI TALUKDER

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It's a horror-movie cliché: In the middle of the night a girl hears a noise in the basement. She opens the basement door, flips the light switch and discovers it's not working. *Strange*, she thinks to herself. *It was working just a few hours ago.*

Does she grab a flashlight? A baseball bat? *Dial 911?* Of course not. This is a horror movie, and characters don't make great decisions in horror movies. So she starts down the rickety basement stairs, alone. In the dark.

If you're watching this scene in a movie theater, someone might shout, "What are you doing?! Don't go down there!" And they'd be right. Nothing good comes from walking into dark, creepy basements alone. Not in the movies, anyway.

And no good comes from *watching* those sorts of scenes either.

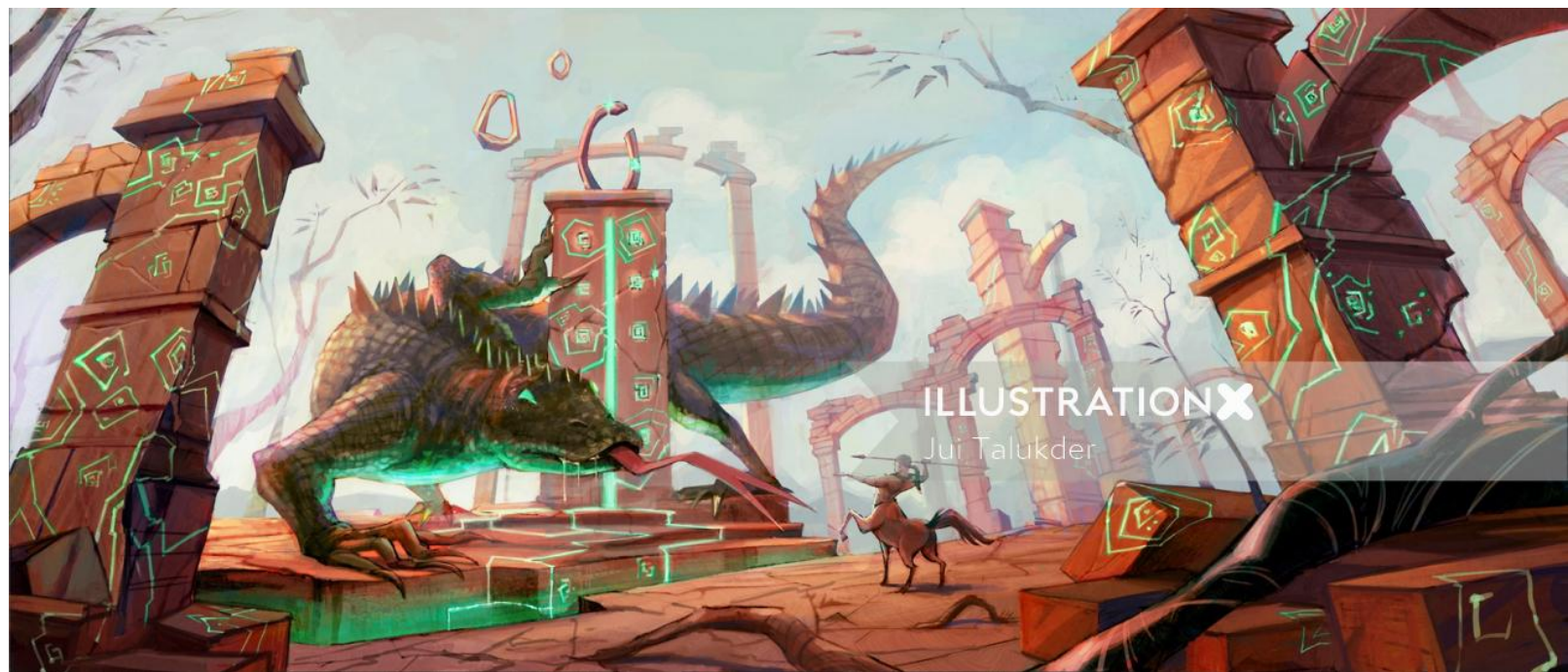
I'm not going to say the every scary movie is straight-up bad for you. Horror movies can deal with important issues like good and evil or life and death. A few can even embrace spiritual truths in their own creepy way.

But a lot of horror movies are flat-out splatterfests, filled with serial killers, screaming victims and blood. And even if a horror movie takes the gore or includes a few important themes, that doesn't mean it's OK. It depends on a lot of factors. And often—just like the girl walking down those basement stairs—it's just better not to go there.

Here are three things you can consider when deciding whether to watch a horror movie: >

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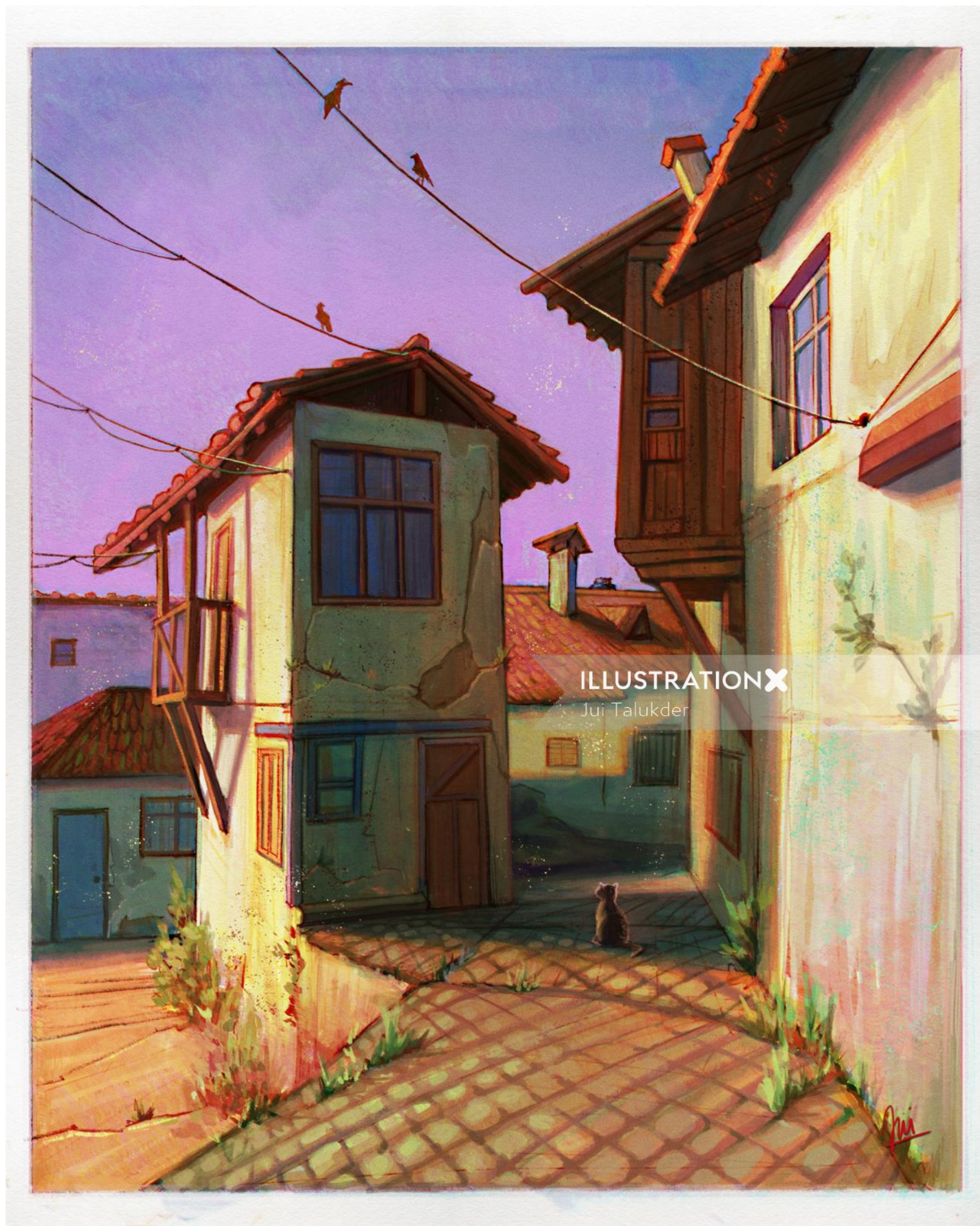
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Its impact on you

When I was 13, I watched a scary movie with a friend. Well, at least the first half hour. After that, I pretended to doze off. I knew if I kept watching, I'd be too scared to sleep that night.

But it didn't help. I might not have seen much, but I heard plenty, and my imagination filled in the gaps. I still didn't sleep that night because what I'd heard and imagined terrified me.

That's the thing about horror movies. It's not just about what you see and hear but what you feel. Scary movies put you in the shoes of that girl heading into the basement. Directors want you to feel her terror as she discovers what's hiding in the shadows. And they don't stop there: They want you to imagine those shadows in your own house, your own bedroom, and think about what, or who, could be hiding there.

In other words, sometimes horror movies don't end when the credits roll. Sometimes what you see and hear stick with you.

Horror movies pose another danger too. They can push viewers in dangerous directions. While some people are repulsed by what they see on the screen, others might be intrigued. In 2014, for example, after the release of a movie called *Ouija*, sales for Hasbro's *Ouija* "game" shot up by 300%.

And if you think no one would want a creepy, haunted doll like *Annabelle* from the *Conjuring* movies, you'd be wrong. You can buy "haunted dolls" on eBay. Sometimes the asking price runs in the thousands.

The power of peer pressure

Even if you would never watch a horror movie on your own, sometimes—especially this time of year—your friends can talk you into it. Maybe they suggest going to the movie theater or binge-watching the latest scary Netflix show at a sleepover.

Another horror movie cliché is when friends dare someone to do something scary or dangerous, like walk through a graveyard or say "magic words" in front of a mirror. Moviegoers know it's a bad idea to give in to peer pressure in a horror flick. And guess what? It can be a bad idea in real life too.

If you're at a sleepover and someone pushes to watch something you know isn't great for you (or anyone else), push back gently. Suggest alternatives. Encourage other activities. If there are a lot of girls there, chances are you're not the only one who doesn't want to watch. And if your friends insist, it's OK to find something else to do.

The goal of the movie industry

As I said, not all horror movies are horrible. But without a little guidance from, say, a site like *Plugged In*, it can be hard to know which is which. And

sometimes, in the world of horror, the "best" movies are the worst because they're the most effective—and potentially the most damaging.

Remember, horror movies are designed to make you feel discomfort, anxiety, terror or disgust. And to get you there, directors put their characters in situations where those characters don't think much.

Don't follow in their shoes.

As you consider whether to watch a horror flick, *think*. Think about how it might impact you. Think about the power of peer pressure. Think about what the movie itself has to offer: Does it have something worthwhile to say? Or is it just going to keep you up all night clutching a teddy bear?

And if you're still not sure, think about the girl getting ready to descend into the creepy basement. Then follow the advice we'd all love to give her: "You really don't want to go there!"

Paul Asay has been part of the Plugged In staff since 2007, watching and reviewing roughly 1.5 quintillion movies and television shows. He's written for a number of other publications too, including Time, The Washington Post and Christianity Today.

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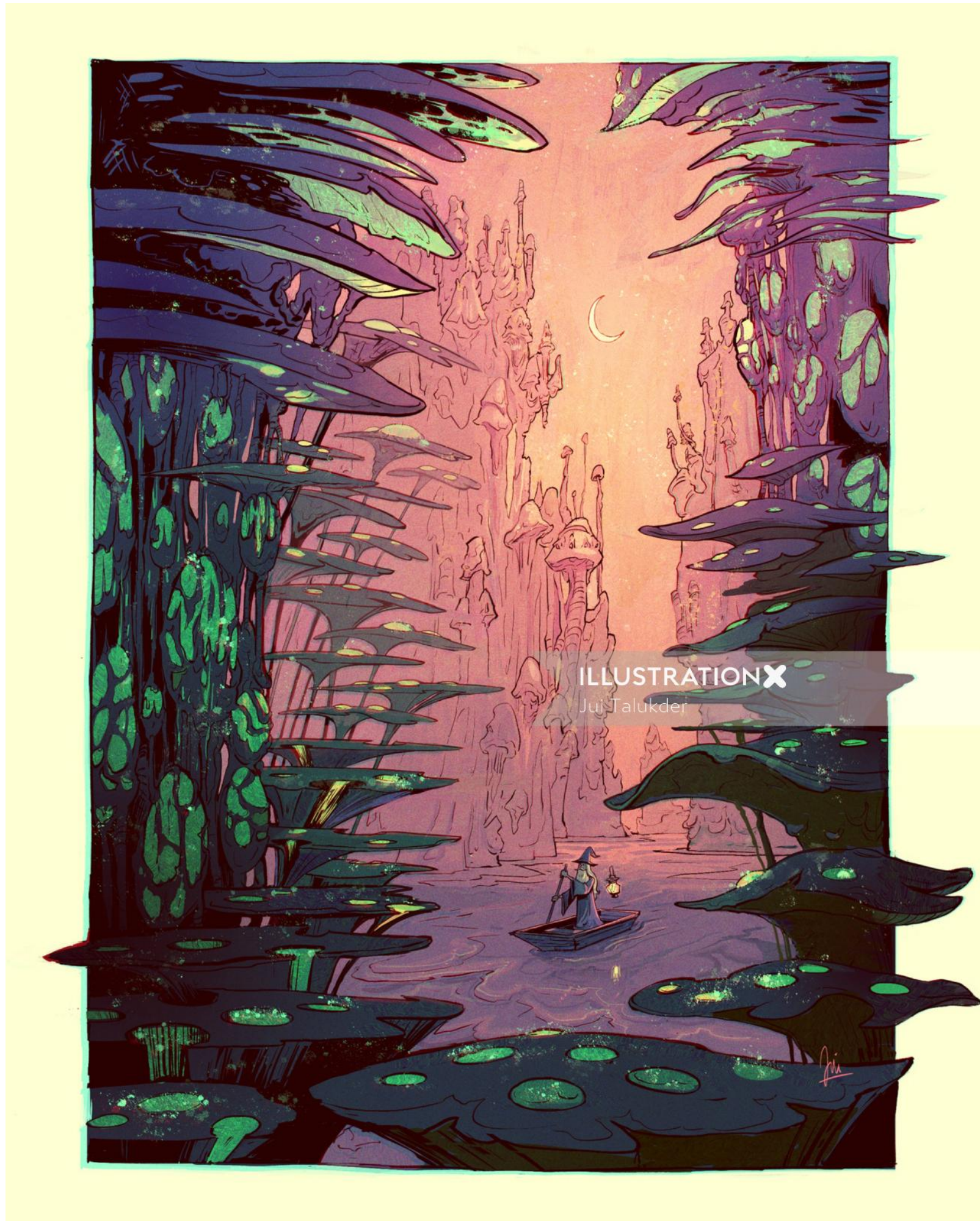


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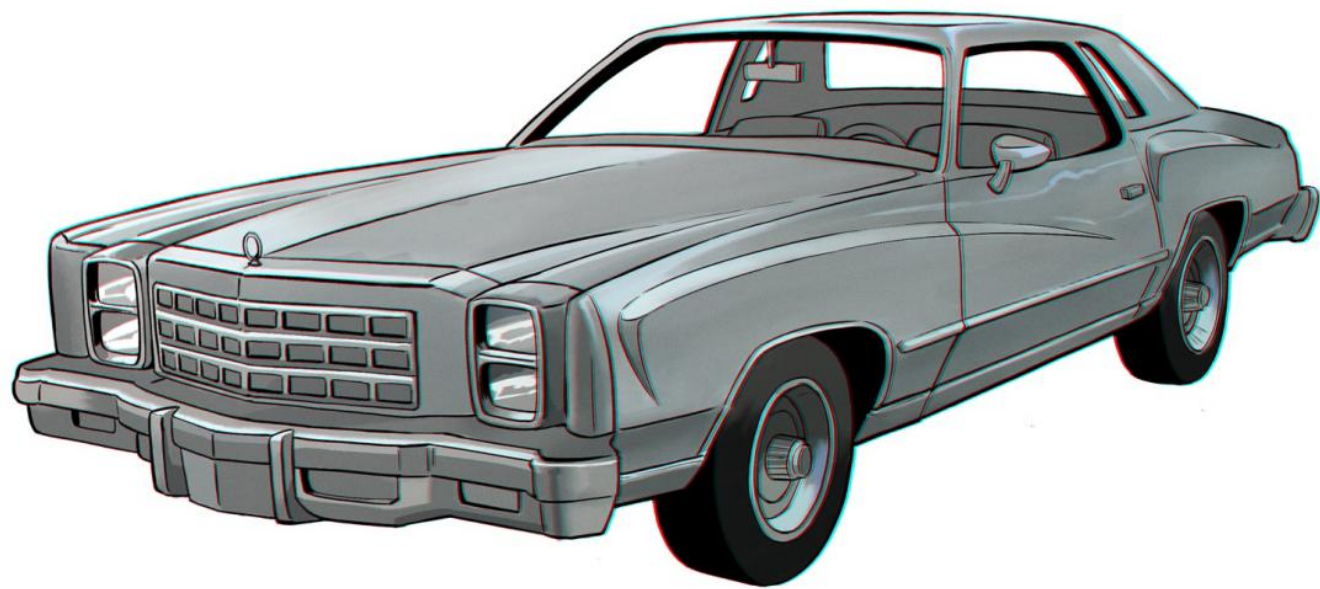
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