DEVELOPER

Kendal Gapinski

**all monsters done by Stefan G. Bucher and are from his website, Dailymonster.com, with an exception made for the photo on this page, which is from AIGA.

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# MONSTER OF APPS

AN INTERVIEW WITH STEFAN G. BUCHER

Everyone has their personal demons, and now they can have even more with the help of Stefan Bucher's Monster Maker app for iPhone and iPad. The app is the latest evolution in Bucher's Daily Monster enterprise that began nearly five years ago (November 19th is the anniversary) with the first inkblots he filmed, in time-lapse, while transforming them from amorphous splotches into bulbous creatures brimming with personality. By posting them on his blog, he drew many thousands of followers who brought their own narratives to his creations, and the rest is history. Hundreds of monsters later, Bucher and his app developer, Dominik Wei-Fieg, have released the character-creating tools into the wild. As Halloween approaches, the monster-mind himself answered a few questions about the challenges of making an app and why he's against offering it for free.

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So, what can you do with the Monster Maker app?

Bucher: The Monster Maker app lets people use their iPhones and iPads to create their own Daily Monsters from a treasure trove of inkblots and Monster parts created exclusively for the app. Not only that, but they can have the monster deliver messages with customizable speech bubbles, pose for photos with their monsters, post the results to Facebook or Twitter, or put it on mugs and T-shirts with the new Zazzle button.

What was your goal for the app and were there any challenges?

Bucher: Our goal is to let everybody have as much fun making monsters on their iPhones and iPads as I do making them on paper. To that end Dominik and I spent hours and hours working out the most intuitive interface we could cook up. One of the challenges working with iOS is to balance lots of fun features with simplicity and elegance, and to keep the whole thing reasonably stable in the process. It's an ongoing project. We just made a lot of changes in Version 1.1, and we're already working on Version
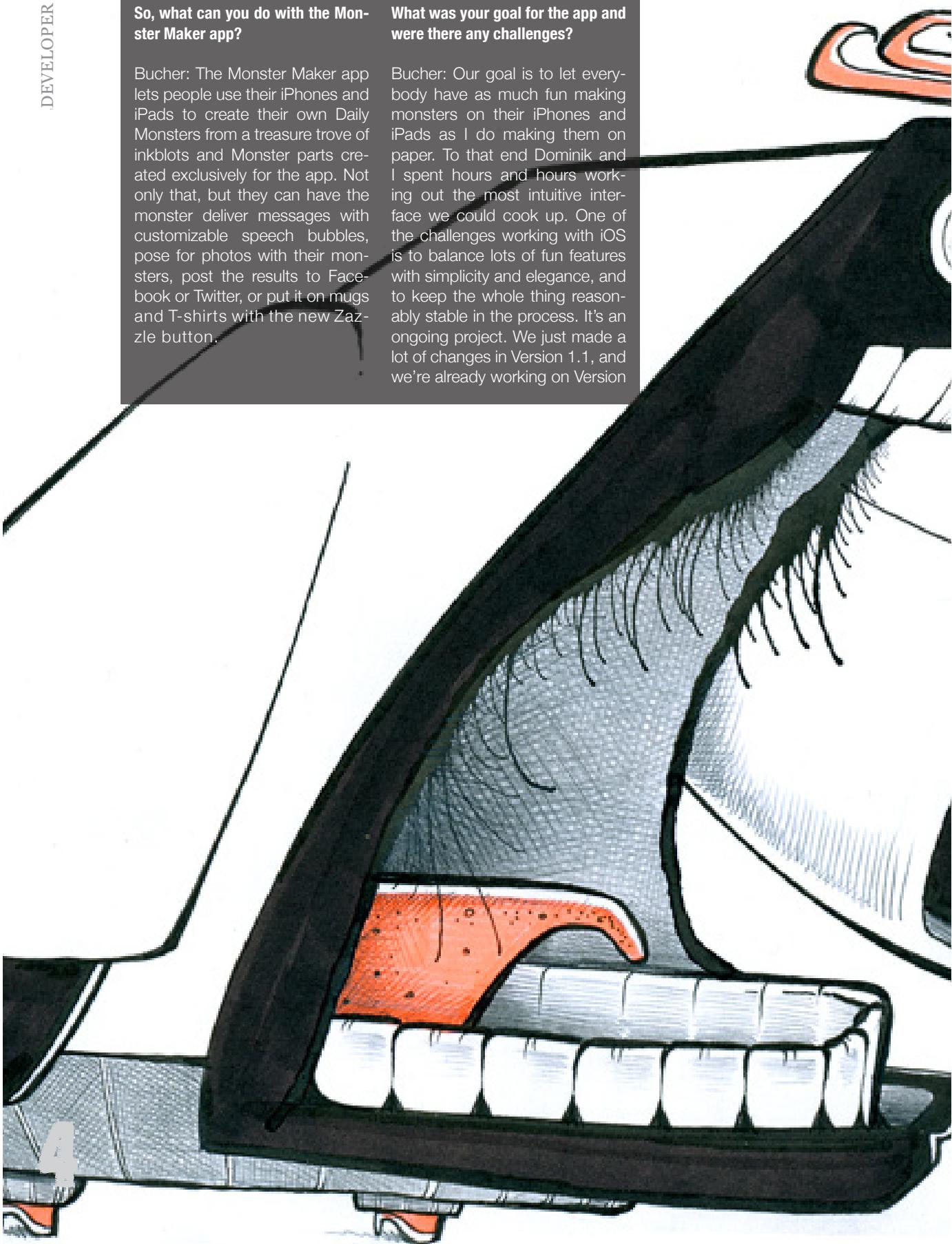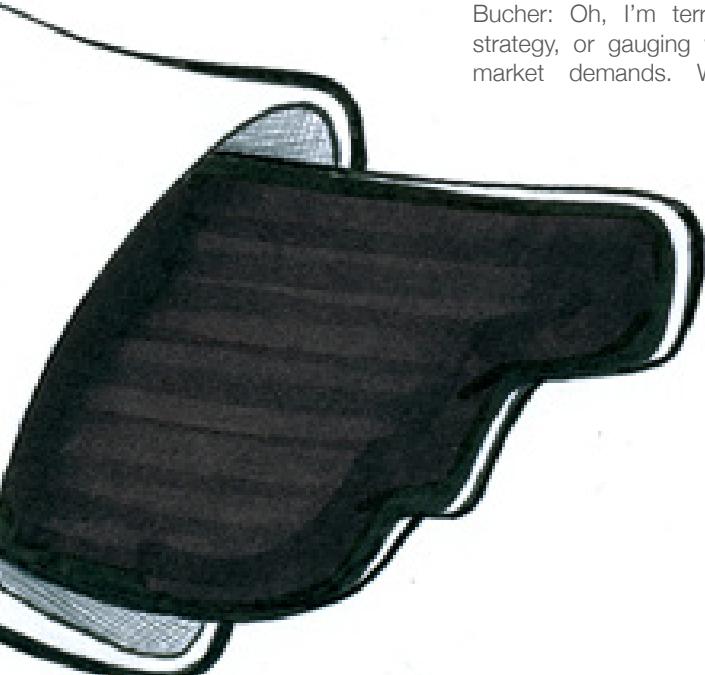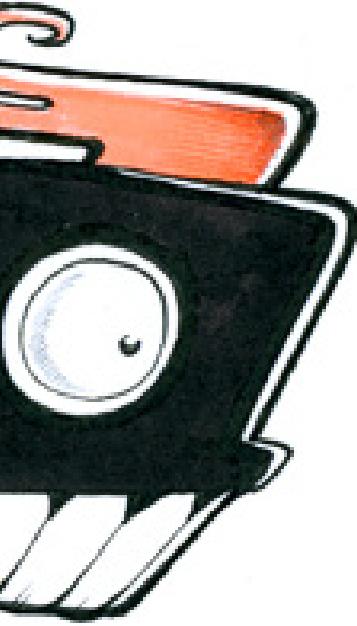
1.2. But that's the great thing about the App Store—you buy the app once, and you get automatic upgrades for free. I hope people will enjoy playing with the app as it evolves, much as they've been following the original Daily Monsters as they've grown on the site.

Do you have plans for Android too?

Bucher: Unfortunately, the two platforms don't really get along. We'd have to rebuild everything from scratch, and then test it across a wide range of devices. I'd love to have the app available for Android, but I don't have the necessary resources right now.

Could you say something about your strategic approach to designing and launching this app?

Bucher: Oh, I'm terrible with strategy, or gauging what the market demands. Whenever

I've tried I've failed. All I know to do is to make things that make me proud. Dominik and I spent five months working out the finer points of the interface, adding fun and useful elements to the Parts palette, and tweaking how everything works together for a seamless experience. My favorite part of Version 1.1 is the color picker on the iPad version. How many people will even see it? I have no idea. But I love knowing that it's there. The goal is always to make the app as much fun to use as possible, and to keep things intuitive. Or at least easily discoverable. It's a simple little toy, but once you get into it you'll find that it lets you do a lot.

One item of strategy may be the $0.99 price tag. Some apps in this category are free, others cost $2.99 or more. I want the app to be as affordable as possible, to get the widest possible reach, but I don't want it to be free. We work hard on this app, and I think people value things more when they've had to pay for them, even if it's just a very small amount.

What research went into your creation of this app?

Bucher: I spent a lot of time playing with drawing apps, of course,

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but in the end most of the research we did on this was to rely on our excellent team of 1.0 beta testers—Marian Bantjes, Bruce Heavin and Ze Frank (who came up with the idea for the Insta-Monster which lets you generate a complete monster with the push of a button). On Version 1.1 we also had the help of Michelle Stephens and Lila Symons, who really helped us fight our way through the snow blindness that sets in when you've been working on the same thing for so long.

How do you define success for the monster app?

Bucher: Seeing people post their homemade monsters on their Facebook profiles and Twitter feeds is the greatest success for me. I want the app to let more people feel that they can create fun characters—that they can be artistic, even if they can't draw. I want to see a million monsters bloom, and I think this is a good way to get started.

Are you still making one a day? If not, what's the frequency like now?

Bucher: It's the Maddeningly Infrequent Monster right now. (I'd rename the site, but the URL was taken.) As I'm working on things like the app, and on a few other skunk works projects surrounding the Monster universe, I have less and less time to draw them daily. They come in bursts these days, and it may soon be time for another. But now that I've drawn new Halloween parts for the app, I'm already busy getting the palette filled with Thanksgiving, holiday, and New Year's elements.

One of the fun things about the blog, and now the app, is seeing how people create their own narratives for each monster. You mentioned Facebook, Twitter, Zazzle… how else might people share or collaborate on their monsters?

Bucher: We're working on a public gallery that lets people show off their creatures on the site. Version 1.2 will also have iCloud support, and we're fiddling with a way to have two people on two gizmos working on the same monster at the same time.

For me, the best thing about the app is seeing how people use the tools and the parts, because they come up with things I never even thought of. A lot of them make a monster and then embellish it in other apps like Instagram or Marron. We wanted the whole thing is an experiment to create as much fun as possible.