ImagineFX

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

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Welcome to…

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Whether it happens on a walk in the park, or while looking through an online gallery, getting an idea is manna from heaven for any artist.

Reading through this issue, I realised that flashes of inspiration take work. Olly Lawson came across an idea for his video game world (page 76) in a book on gardening. Jort van Welbergen scoured interior photos of military helicopters to get that authentic look for his Star Citizen vehicle design (page 66).

When Nadia Enis hits upon a new character concept (page 72), the first thing she does is redraw it three times to push her idea even further. Even our cover artist Remko Troost reveals he always changes the way he starts a painting (page 58) to maintain his creativity and focus.

So, don't wait for inspiration to come to you – make sure you search it out.

Claire

Claire Howlett, Editor
claire@imaginefx.com

EDITOR'S CHOICE
Three things you need to check out

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Even Almighty
Even Mehl Amundsen give a refreshingly honest take on the industry and learning to work with others.

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Crusaders of art!
The talented For Honor art team showcase their stunning game art for this year's most exciting game.

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We're giving away a print edition of our beautiful Concept Artist magazine with every print subscription.

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Subscribe, save money, get a copy of **Concept Artist** magazine and 20 per cent off Adobe. **Woo! See page 36…**

ImagineFX
NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

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Ubisoft concept artist Maxime Desmettre

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FXPosé Traditional

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Erik Gist

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX
Resources

Getting hold of all of this issue's videos, artwork and brushes is quick and easy. Just visit our dedicated web page at **http://ifxm.ag/plate141armour**

OVER 2 HOURS of video tutorials from pro artists to watch and learn from!

WORKSHOP VIDEOS

Generate ideas for characters

Watch Nadia Enis develop character design ideas and make them work for the video game industry.

GET YOUR RESOURCES

You're three steps away from this issue's resource files…

1 Go to the website
Type this into your browser's address bar (not the search bar):
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2 Find the files you want
Search through the list of resources to watch or download.

3 Download what you need
You can download all of the files at once, or individually.

EXCLUSIVE VIDEO TUITION!

Watch our videos to gain a unique insight into how our artists create their stunning art

Foundation Art Group

Understand both the importance of solid foundation art skills and how artists work together in an industry pipeline, to design and light a Final Fantasy-inspired airship.
WIPs, brushes and final image

Carmen Sinek

Learn to stay organised to minimise errors as you illustrate World of Warcraft art.
Plus WIPs, brushes and final image

Q&A VIDEOS
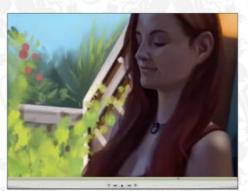
Nick Harris

See how using the Sticker Spray – a "fabulous tool", says Nick – in ArtRage and creating your own brushes can help you to quickly create convincing-looking foliage.
Plus WIPs and final image

Tony Foti

Pay attention to light and dark in order to paint a hologram from a sci-fi scene.
Plus WIPs and final image

Lorena Lammer
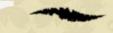
Advance your plein air skills, learn about colour and light, train your eye to translate 3D scenes into 2D – and see why it's best to start with a limited colour palette.
Plus WIPs and final image

TRAINING

April Connors

Go on a quest to find the character lurking inside your drawings, with Developing Storytelling Skills From Life.

AND ALL THIS! Detailed workshops with advice from the best fantasy artists around the world, including Peter Chan, Charlie Creber, Kev Crossley, Michelle Hoefener, Olly Lawson, Remko Troost, Tan Hui Tian, Jort van Welbergen and others.

12 CUSTOM BRUSHES, INCLUDING…

METAL BORDERS
This brush is used by Remko Troost for realistic, worn-out metal edges.

SCRATCHES
Jort van Welbergen uses this brush to create scratches and edge weathering.

SMOKE1
This brush is Carmen Sinek's favourite for applying quick smoke effects.

Reader FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Craig J Spearing

LOCATION: US
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MEDIA: Photoshop

After graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design with an MFA in illustration and printmaking in 1992, Craig took a wander around New Mexico before starting to illustrate children's books and historical material in 1995. Thirteen years later he jumped to digital, and into gaming art.

"My primary clients are Wizards of the Coast, Paizo and Arcane Wonders," Craig reveals. "My primary hobbies are cooking, eating, looking for things to eat and adventure motorcycling!"

© Paizo Publishing
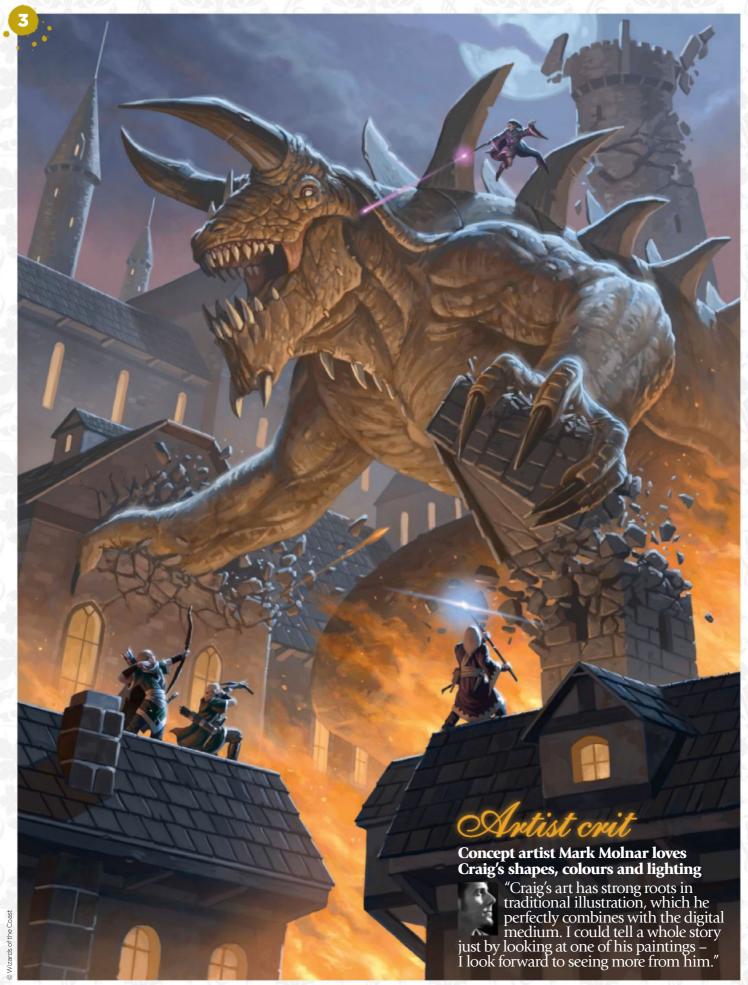
1 MAIDEN MOTHER CRONE "This was a cover from the six-part Adventure Path Reign of Winter. All colours were mixed with a base blue to cool the palette, except the flames the sorceress is casting. The final image was considerably wider on the right side to accommodate a superimposed character over the image, the standard format for Pathfinder Adventure Paths."
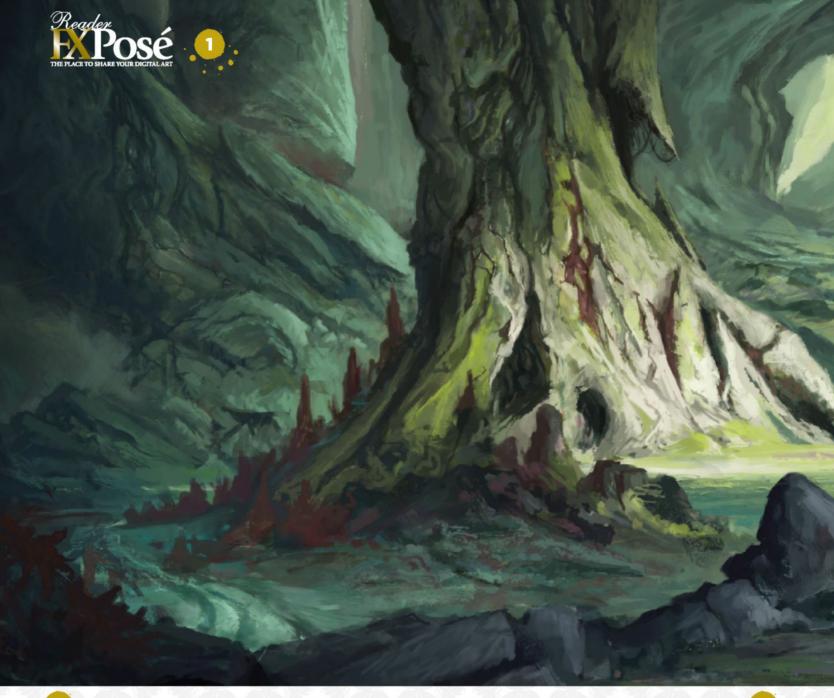
2 EXTRICATOR OF SIN "I put the top portion of the figure in shadow to create a more sinister vibe. I used a very limited palette, staying away from blues and greens for a dingy weathered look, and the coolest hues are neutral grey. This is an executioner who loves his gruesome job."

3 TERRASQUE ATTACK "The art description said: 'We're looking for a Godzilla moment here.' While reading that I knew it was going to be a lot of fun, and a chance to channel the monster films that I loved as a kid. The tiny humans have zero chance of survival, along with everyone else in the town. My rim light addiction of old is glaringly apparent here."

© Wizards of the Coast

Email your submissions to fxpose@imaginefx.com

Artist crit

Concept artist Mark Molnar loves Craig's shapes, colours and lighting

"Craig's art has strong roots in traditional illustration, which he perfectly combines with the digital medium. I could tell a whole story just by looking at one of his paintings – I look forward to seeing more from him."

🇺🇸 **Sam White**
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MEDIA: Photoshop
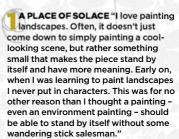
Self-taught freelance illustrator and concept artist Sam enjoys spending his days on Twitch Creative, streaming his art. He's keeping busy working on personal project, Solstice, and tells us that his interests and experience lie firmly in fantasy illustration, with a focus on environment art and scenery.

"My work is inspired by traditional mediums such as oil," Sam explains, "which I find strange because I've never done any oil painting!"

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"Sam doesn't need the occasional wandering salesman (as he puts it) to sell his grand fantasy landscapes – they do a great job by themselves. The atmospheric lighting and sense of scale on show is top notch."
Cliff Hope,
Operations Editor

1 A PLACE OF SOLACE "I love painting landscapes. Often, it doesn't just come down to simply painting a cool-looking scene, but rather something small that makes the piece stand by itself and have more meaning. Early on, when I was learning to paint landscapes I never put in characters. This was for no other reason than I thought a painting – even an environment painting – should be able to stand by itself without some wandering stick salesman."

2 AN OFFERING FOR THE STORMS "I don't think I would have ended up making this painting if it weren't for a terrible storm we experienced one night. I was out with a friend and there was this calm-before-the-storm moment. I looked up to the clouds and they were a teal green – unlike anything I'd ever seen. That image of those stormy clouds stuck with me for weeks, until I finally decided to paint this image."

3 HEARTHFIRE "This is what happens if you go with your gut and stray from the original design. This was also a piece where I used some photobashing as a base to work up the textures. I don't like photos to be noticeable, so I use them more to get a general outline and some colours, before painting over them to get that painterly feel I love so much."

Reader FxPosé
THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

🇺🇸 **Ryan Yee**
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MEDIA: Photoshop

From scouring comic stores to huddling over fantasy art books in dimly lit libraries, Ryan has always felt a sense of wonder from fantasy worlds. "However, it wasn't until high school that I realised I could make a living creating that wonder," he says.

After studying media arts and animation, Ryan went on to create for properties like Pathfinder, Star Wars and Lord of the Rings. Working with Wizards of the Coast on Magic: The Gathering since 2009, he's finally been featured in the galleries and illustration annuals he loved staring at as a kid.

Currently, Ryan's a lead concept artist at Schell Games, and says that, "I'm continuing to draw and create worlds my 15-year-old self once dreamt about."

IMAGINEFX CRIT
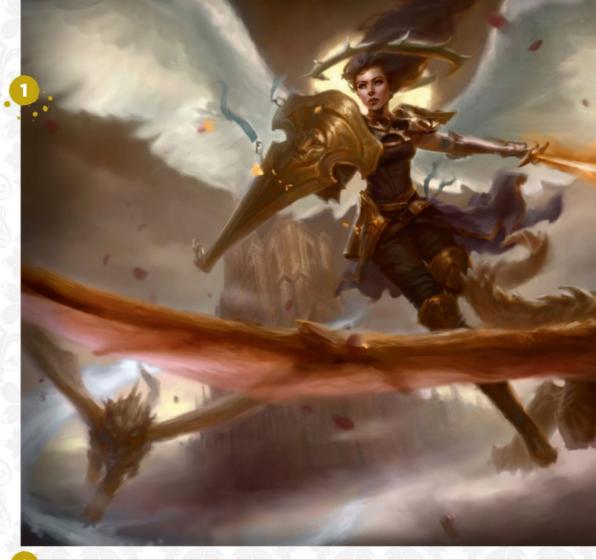
"Character design, environments, fire, movement… Ryan has all these in the bag, and more. If I had to single out one painting, it's Angel Protector. You can almost feel the beat of the character's wings, such is the impact this piece has."
Daniel Vincent,
Art Editor

1 **ANGEL PROTECTOR** "An angel and her gargoyle guardians. I had fun researching bearded lizards and tigers for inspiration."

2 **FRUIT OF THE FIRST TREE** "Created for Magic: The Gathering. For me this piece is about finding something you've been searching for so long and it's just within arms reach. This image was nominated for a Chesley Award for Best Gaming Related Illustration Category 2016."

3 **ARID MESA** "For Magic: The Gathering. I wanted to capture the scale of floating canyons and how one might feel seeing them for the first time. The sense of discovery plays a big part in my image making. As a fantasy artist we have the ability to take the viewer to a world with no limits."

4 **DIG THROUGH TIME** "Another piece for M:TG. The description asked for a shaman peering into a basin of a magical water. Here she's able to see into the past or even the future. This piece was accepted into this year's Spectrum Fantastic Art Annual 23."

© Wizards of the Coast

Email your submissions to fxpose@imaginefx.com

✛ **Luke Maddox**
LOCATION: England
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MEDIA: Photoshop

Luke is an aspiring professional artist looking to find work in the sci-fi and fantasy realms. He's completely self-taught, citing ImagineFX and the vast online art community as great places to get information and techniques from.

"Sharing feedback and critiques with other artists online has really helped me improve my art and figure out what makes an image work," he says.

Storytelling through his art is Luke's main aim. "I like introducing little details that complement the story of a character, rather than adding stuff just because it'll look cool."

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"Luke's evocative Big Bad Wolf, with its atmospheric use of colour and clever character details, is a great piece of visual storytelling. On this evidence, I'm sure he has a promising future in fantasy art."
Claire Howlett, Editor

1 BIG BAD WOLF "I wanted to show the Big Bad Wolf as a sort of sci-fi mutant. Maybe he's a werewolf that uses technology to stay in a wolf state permanently. I used the red cloak and the pig's ear necklace to tie it into the classic fairytales. The mixture of fur and muscle was fun to paint!"

2 SNOW "I used the little details on the Seven Dwarfs' outfits to tell the story of who was who. Compositionally this was hard to place all seven dwarfs and still keep focus on Snow. I wanted to give lots of points of interest to pull the eye around the centre."

3 ABSOLUS "An adventurer comes face to face with an ancient monster. This piece taught me a lot about dynamic lighting. I also had some really great feedback from a fellow artist on staying away from using total blacks, even in an extreme piece like this."

Stefanie Odendahl
LOCATION: Germany
WEB: www.stefanieodendahl.com
EMAIL: mail@stefanieodendahl.com
MEDIA: Photoshop

Stephanie lives with her two tomcats in Bielefeld, Germany. She began her career as a graphic designer, but after a few years in the industry Stephanie decided it was time to follow her dreams and become a full-time illustrator.

"Since I started to learn how to draw in 2009 and to paint digitally in 2010, I'm constantly improving my skills," she says. "I'm mainly self-taught, with some help of my friends, the internet and several workshops."

Right now Stephanie mostly works on RPGs and board games, but would love to paint book covers in the future.

1 DOOMED "I painted this for the ArtOrder AIR challenge – the topic was water pollution. The destruction of the ocean is something that concerns me. It was tough looking up references for this piece... all those dead animals! This is a very personal image and one of my favourites. I like her expression."

2 STAR WARS BATTLE "An illustration for the RPG magazine Mephisto. I used model spaceships for reference. I love to paint explosions, exhausts and laser beams. It was a challenge to paint something that everybody knows and give it something of your own."

3 EXPLOSION "Work for my personal Project VARGHAS. I like the extreme angle in this shot and the action. I got inspired by a John Scalzi novel from the Old Man's War series, and my favourite video game Killzone."

4 CRASH "Another illustration for Mephisto. I wanted to paint a daylight scene for a change. This piece went through many iterations as I worked on developing the storytelling aspect."

SUBMIT YOUR ART TO FXPOSÉ

Send up to five pieces of your work, along with their titles, an explanation of your techniques, a photo of yourself and contact details. Images should be sent as 300DPI JPEG files.
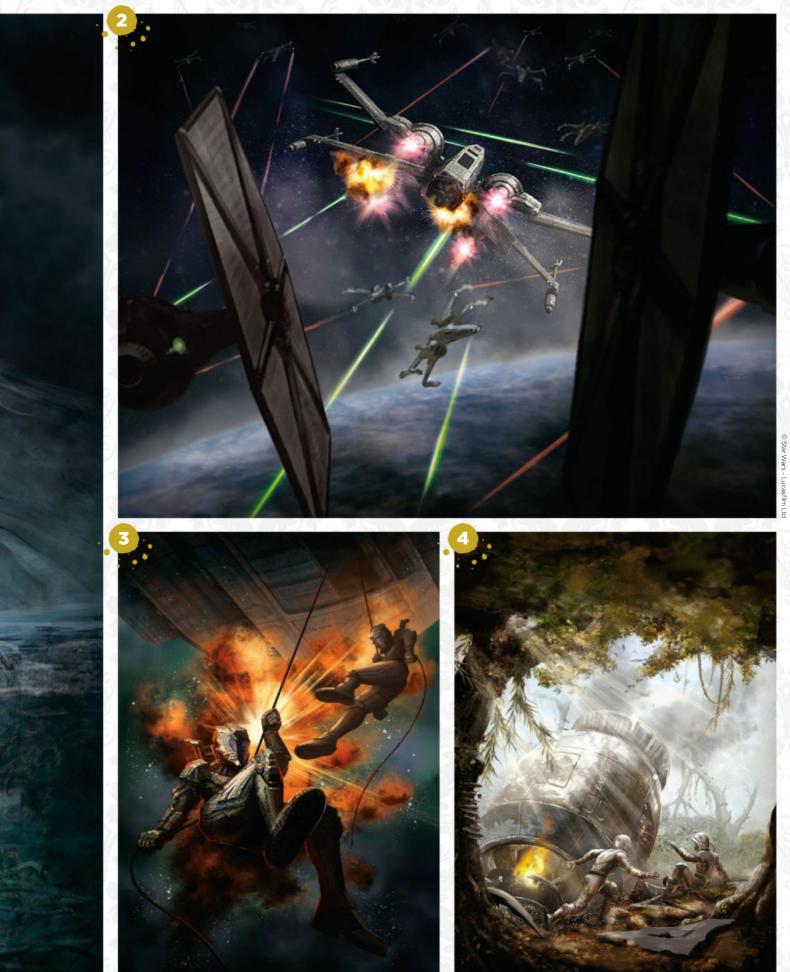
Email: fxpose@imaginefx.com (maximum 1MB per image)

Post: (CD or DVD):
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ImagineFX
Quay House
The Ambury
Bath, BA1 2BW, UK

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"Doomed strikes a balance between getting a clear environmental across, and being a strong composition in its own right. The figure's subtle expression of resignation is well depicted, as is the polluted, dying sea."
Cliff Hope,
Operations Editor

Email your submissions to fxpose@imaginefx.com

2

3

4

Heroes of the Storm art by Peter Lee, inspired by the Braxis Holdout level from the game.

Break into Blizzard

In the know Leading voices at the games company explain what kind of artists they're looking to recruit

If your dream is to work in game art, there are few greater prizes than a job at Blizzard Entertainment. With its headquarters in Irvine, California, and studios across Europe, Asia and the Americas, the 25-year-old company is home to the world's biggest MMORPG, World of Warcraft. It's also behind the best-selling Diablo and StarCraft series, the online collectible card game Hearthstone, the multiplayer first-person shooter Overwatch, the online battle game Heroes of the Storm, and more besides.

In fact, Blizzard's games are so iconic, and its artists so world-class (names like Laurel D Austin, Dan Scott and Arnold Tsang spring to mind), you might think you're nowhere near good enough to work there.

However, that might be a mistake. As Ben Thompson, art director on Hearthstone explains, you may be a better fit than you think.

"It's a common problem that as artists, we don't always have the greatest of self-esteem," says Ben. "For example, I can't tell you the number of times we've approached an artist and they're surprised to find that they're a candidate at all, that they could even be considered."

Phill Gonzales, lead character artist on Heroes of the Storm, has experience of this disjoin between talent and confidence. "I played Blizzard games at school, did a lot ➤➤

Concept art by Luke Mancini for Zarya, a warrior hero from the Overwatch franchise.

Concept art of the demon orc Gul'dan by Alex Horley, for Heroes of the Storm.

66 I can't tell you the number of times we've approached an artist and they're surprised to find that they're a candidate 99

This is key art by Luke Mancini for the Machines of War update of Heroes of the Storm.
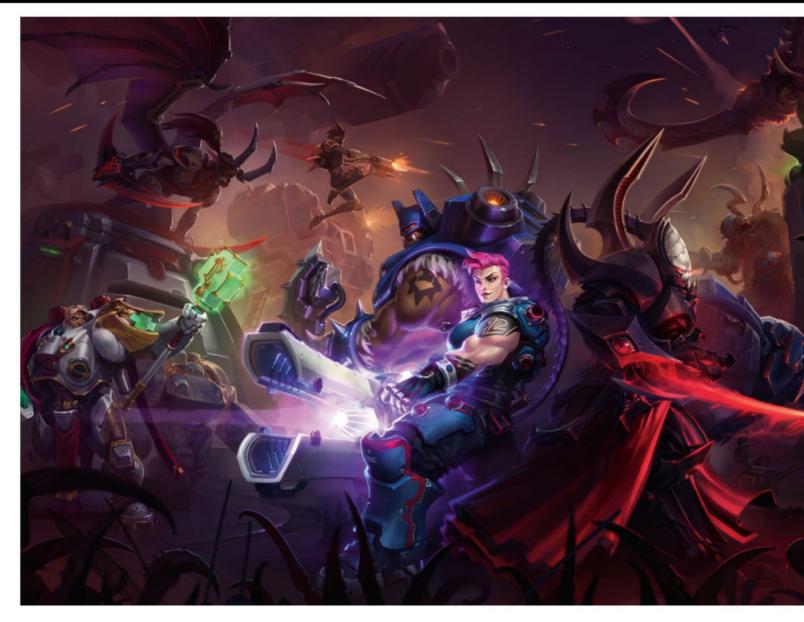
➥ of fan art, scanned it in and posted it on fan sites," Phill says. "But I had no idea until I interviewed here in 2006 that art director Samwise Didier – someone I'd looked up to for a long time – was aware of me. He was like, 'I was wondering if you'd ever apply! We've been seeing your art for a long time.'

"It kind of threw me off that they knew who I was. But clearly they knew from my fan art that I understood the artistic style and what they were trying to achieve, the themes and the aesthetics."

THE OVERWATCH EFFECT

That awareness of Blizzard fan art continues to this day, adds Seth Spaulding, senior art manager for Overwatch. "There's a tremendous amount of fan art being generated for the Overwatch project right now," Seth says. "We've been in contact with some of the artists who we've seen and gone: 'Wow, that looks amazing.'"

But of course, Blizzard finds new artists in other ways, too. These include getting personal recommendations, persuading freelancers to stay on full-time, and the time-honoured method of posting vacancies on its website and then sifting through applications.

That site is packed with clear information about exactly what your cover letter, CV and

> **66 Potential Blizzard artists need to have what we call a game developer mentality 99**

portfolio should include, as well as what kind of experience and education the company's looking for. You'll find all those helpful details at **http://ifxm.ag/blizzard-job**, plus an explanation of the 'Blizzard style'.

Characters should be "big, epic, heroic and dynamic. They stand wide in frames and strike action poses. They're exaggerated and stylised (not realistic) to allow them to hold up over time rather than being quickly dated by increasing graphics processing power." Environments, meanwhile, are

"vibrant – striking with colour, light and saturation and, above all, immersive." So what kind of artists are Blizzard looking for, and who's likely to have the best chance of getting a foot in the door?

It depends in a large part on the game in question, says Ben. "So as far as Hearthstone goes, we celebrate the generalist. That's because at any one point, you could be doing anything from a cardback to the 3D modelling for a board, to doing the textures for either or both of those things, possibly dipping into the effects on all of that. It really makes for a fun, collaborative environment."

SPECIALISTS REQUIRED

For Overwatch, in contrast, Seth is more interested in recruiting specialists. "We're a bigger team, therefore we're more specialised," he says. "People who come in to do concept art do concept art. People who like modelling do modelling." But there's one commonality all the teams look for, he adds. "Artists need to have what we

Concept art of Auriel, Archangel of Hope, from Heroes of the Storm.

Laurel D Austin painted this Key art for the Hearthstone adventure One Night in Karazhan.

Blizzard's animated short The Last Bastion follows the story of Overwatch character Bastion.

BEN THOMPSON

The Hearthstone art director talks about recreating the Blizzard look

As Hearthstone's art director, you're the perfect person to ask: do you think there's a specific Blizzard art style?
Certainly. And so we have to work to guide new recruits and freelancers, who may have a less-thorough understanding of the Blizzard style, in the creation of artwork. As well as that, there are also important variations in that style between games. So Hearthstone's style, for example, is 20 degrees off that of Warcraft – there's a little bit of a flavour change there. And getting artists who understand both of those things well is very important to us.

So do you think Blizzard's art style is something any talented artist can pick up?
I think it's a lot to ask for every artist to do everything. It's like saying, "This artist can paint in oils, surely they can do acrylics? It's not that different." And truth is, they're worlds apart. Just as you might see someone who's very talented at photo rendering and say: "They must be able to do caricatures, it's much simpler and with fewer lines." Also not true. So I wouldn't necessarily say that everyone is able to dive into something as specific as the Blizzard style.

What do you do when an artist's application shows some obvious talent, but their art style just doesn't match a game's specific needs at that time?
Just because you've applied for Overwatch, Hearthstone or StarCraft, doesn't mean we don't share a lot. So, for example, I'll often get an applicant to Hearthstone that's just wrong. The look, the feel, it's just not quite right. But I might walk down to the desk of Diablo or Overwatch and say: "This guy wasn't right for us, but I think they'd be dead-on for you." So we do pass things back and forth a lot.
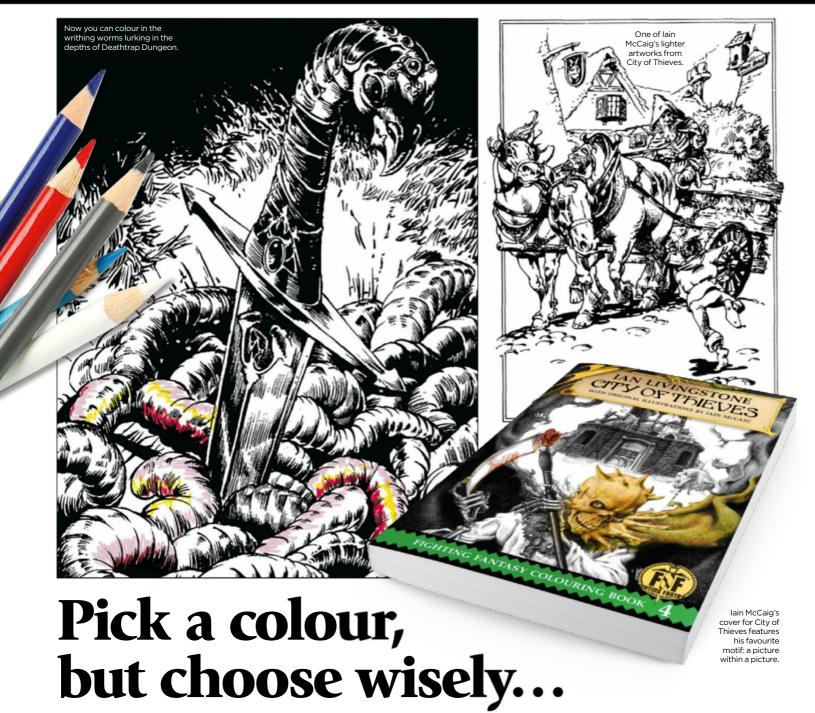
Ben has been working at Blizzard for seven years. His role combines illustration and art direction skills.

www.benthompsonart.com

call a game developer mentality. That means they first make decisions as game developers, and second as artists. It's important to us to keep focus on that core tenet of 'gameplay first'."

In the past, Blizzard has recruited artists who weren't gamers themselves," Seth says. "But personally, I think that means you're going to hit a ceiling. If you're not a gamer, you're not going to make great decisions for the game. At the end of the day, Blizzard isn't an art company, it's a game company."

In short, then, it's as much about attitude as talent. "We've passed on artists on Hearthstone who were talented beyond all measure, but just weren't going to fit," says Ben. "Your personality, how you work with

Ana, a founding hero of Overwatch, by Arnold Tsang.

others: those are as important as anything you do when stylus goes to screen. Equally, we've brought in people who have some work to do to bring the talent level up, but they've been the best team members."

And when it comes to creating the art, it's all about adaptability, says Phill. "Do you have that malleability to shift and turn on a heel and deliver what we want? Myself, I don't paint like Samwise – I have a gritty pen and ink style. But I was able to show Blizzard that I could figure out what they were trying to do.

"That's what we're looking for. We ask ourselves: can you shift a gear, can you do what a project needs? That's the core of what makes a great commercial artist."

Now you can colour in the writhing worms lurking in the depths of Deathtrap Dungeon.

One of Iain McCaig's lighter artworks from City of Thieves.

Iain McCaig's cover for City of Thieves features his favourite motif: a picture within a picture.

Pick a colour, but choose wisely…

Colour of magic The classic Fighting Fantasy artwork from the 1980s returns in a new collection of books in which YOU are the colourist

Making their debut in 1982, Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone's Fighting Fantasy gamebooks opened up magical worlds in which the reader was the sword-wielding hero. Now four of the titles are back as colouring books, featuring the distinctive line art from the series.

Ian, the co-creator of the Fighting Fantasy books, is happy to give readers a new way to enjoy the illustrations. "For some, these colouring books are wonderful art books, collecting together some of the best Fighting Fantasy art of the past three decades," he says.

The set of colouring books is made up of four early titles: The Warlock of Firetop Mountain, The Forest of Doom, Deathtrap Dungeon and City of Thieves. "The images from these books are more suited to the colouring book format than the others," Ian adds, "as there is plenty of detail and not too much heavy shading."

By taking scans of the artwork, and in some cases tidying them up on the computer, Ian believes the books present the illustrations as they deserve to be seen. For The Forest of Doom illustrator Malcolm Barter, his

© Martin McKenna

"Fighting Fantasy gamebooks are a great form of escapism, and so is colouring," says the FF co-creator Ian Livingstone.

art's legacy makes up for the personal misgivings he has about his work.

"It's still difficult for me to look at some of them," he reveals. "It still amazes me to have had any influence on a young person's formative 'inner world' or to have produced 'iconic imagery' (not my words)."

Russ Nicholson's work in the first two books is also rated as among the best in the range, despite reports at the time describing his work as the most disgusting to appear in a children's title. "That gave me pleasure," he laughs. "I had worked hard to create frightening

The Serpent Queen is one of the City of Thieves' many surprises, courtesy of Iain McCaig's storytelling and art skills.

This prospective picture of a werewolf secured Malcolm Barter the job as illustrator for The Forest of Doom.

© Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone

Russ Nicholson drew the Warlock from the first book.

The Forest of Doom, Deathtrap Dungeon and City of Thieves art © Ian Livingstone

It'll be up to you, the colourist, whether you leave some of the line art uncoloured, for added visual impact.

66 I worked hard to create frightening images suitable for a 12-year-old, without them being too scary… 99

images suitable for a 12-year-old, without being too scary and which would have appealed to me at that age."

For Fighting Fantasy cover artist Iain McCaig, whose concept art has since fuelled many high-profile films and video game, the series shows him still pioneering his own painting style and searching for an identity for the books. "I hope they've lived on because of the characters," he says. "Even if it's just in my head, there's always a story behind the things I create, making the Fighting Fantasy covers not-too-distant

cousins to the many characters that I've designed for the film industry."

In fact, fans have noticed that the skeletal creature on the City of Thieves cover bears a striking resemblance to Iain's Darth Maul character design years later. "I'm afraid Zanbar Bone is simply a coincidental design," Iain confesses. "The spikes bristling across Darth Maul's head were a late addition by master make-up artist Nick Dudman, who interpreted the stiffened black feathers in my original design as horns."

The Fighting Fantasy colouring books are available as hardbacks and paperbacks from Snowbooks (**www.snowbooks.com**).

Iain McCaig says he enjoyed painting every pustulous part of the loathsome Bloodbeast.

ImagineFX
ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Feng Zhu

Double whammy Feng has organised two very different studio setups: one geared for work, one definitely for play

I've had a lot of studios over the years. Most of them looked like standard creative environments, filled with PCs, Macs, Wacom tablets, movie posters and so on. When I was younger I preferred this type of setup. It made me feel part of the industry.

Back then, I wanted to be surrounded by work stuff. It somehow validated the fact I was working in the business. These days however, I prefer my studio environment to be more relaxing. The studio still needs to cater to my work needs, but I also need a place to get away from the daily demands.

So I've separated my working environment into two locations. The first is my "hardcore" work area. This consists of two 30-inch screens, a Wacom, a laptop and subdued lighting. When here, I can work undisturbed for hours at a time. I always recommend investing in good-quality screens. If you're going to spend up to 12 hours a day in front of them, get the best. A lot of this equipment is expendable. If I need to upgrade or get rid of kit, I can access them easily – nothing is built in or hidden.

The second area is my "play" studio. I can still work here, but it's limited to just emails and document writing. I purposely removed the Wacom to prevent myself from drawing. I don't even have Photoshop installed on my second PC. To create a sense of calm, I custom built this area to hide all wires. Even the PC is hidden behind the shelf. My second PC is used mostly for gaming. I invested in a beefy one, with quad SLI GTX 980s graphic cards, four Samsung 1T SSDs and 32GB of RAM. This PC also outputs to a television, to which various gaming consoles are connected. There's a time and a place for work, and this room isn't that place.

Feng is the founder of the FZD School of Design, in Singapore, and he recently founded a film production studio, FZD Films, in Beijing. Find out more at www.fengzhudesign.com.

I don't collect too many toys or figures, but I absolutely love this Alien design. I've owned this sculpt for many years now.

These aren't all the books in my collection, but they're the ones I loved when I was a student. They hold a special place in my heart.

I love to travel and bring back little souvenirs. In my studio there are vases from the Maldives, jars from Rome, sculptures from Lake Como, toy cats from Japan, a metal pig from Bali... the list goes on.

In my work studio is podcasting equipment for my Design Cinema series. Although lately I haven't had time to record new episodes.

I love listening to movie soundtracks while relaxing in my studio. My favourite is Blade Runner, of course.

I got these at Lake Como, one of the most beautiful places I've ever visited. These period piece dolls always remind me of that place.

Yup, I own two children's dolls. I was just amazed at the quality of them when I saw them in Tokyo, and I had to have them!

Jojo keeps me company all day. That's nice when I'm working late.

Some of my games collection. With Steam and digital purchases now, I miss the old days of game boxes. It's nice to see them on the shelf.

A big, relaxing sofa for all my console gaming sessions. I love getting lost in games, so I invested in a comfy sofa.

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES

Issue 140
November 2016
Ilya Kuvshinov shows how he created our manga special's cover. We also have a Genzoman workshop, talk to YouTube star Ross Tran, get an insight into Stranger Things promo art, visit The Sequence Group, celebrate a 2000 AD milestone and more!

Issue 139
October 2016
We cover epic environments this issue, and bring you the cream of artists who are busy creating new worlds for video games and films. Elsewhere, creature artist Brynn Metheney shows us around her studio and we take in the vehicle designs of Scott Robertson.

Issue 138
September 2016
Our fantasy art special kicks off with Viktoria Gavrilenko's vivacious Shakespearean cover and workshop. Elsewhere there's portrait tips, an art of DOOM exclusive, Scott Gustafson interviewed, Hellboy, Chris Dunn, Atomhawk and much more.

Issue 137
August 2016
Comics have never been more popular, and this issue we give you the skills to break into the industry. We also chart Conan's appearance in the comics, talk to illustrator Iain McCaig about his love of storytelling, and help you combine 2D and 3D techniques.

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BRUTALLY HONEST BY DEYA MUNIZ

AAH, I'VE FINALLY GOT SOME TIME TO RELAX AND PLAY VIDEOGAMES

POW BOOM

AAA

I'M RELAXING SO HARD RIGHT NOW

A pencil walkthrough that's quick on the draw

Watching the video will give insight into how Miles builds up his work.

Timelapse tricks Miles Johnston's latest video explores the tools, materials and sketching techniques that go into his art

Sometimes the written word just isn't enough, especially when it comes to communicating a lot of artistic knowledge that's come from years of study and practice. To make the task of drawing less daunting, English illustrator Miles Johnston has released a new tutorial video that reveals plenty of insights into his workflow.

Taking eight hours of footage and condensing it down into an hour and a half of video with commentary, Miles' Pencil Drawing Walkthrough offers the sort of guidance that can't be found in books.

"I think the best thing about video is that it enables you to watch and see how a piece unfolds from a blank page to a finished piece," says Miles. "This way, it's possible to see all the little awkward and ugly in-between stages behind finished work."

With a portfolio that focuses on stunningly realistic and hauntingly surreal pencil drawings, watching how they're built up, tweaked and improved will prove enlightening to his fans, who have been clamouring for such a tutorial from the illustrator. Perhaps a little surprisingly, Miles reveals that he's taken a few things away from the video himself.

Viewers can expect more video tutorials from Miles, which will concentrate on the basics of drawing.

"Having to listen to so much of your own voice to record a voiceover is an easy way to develop some serious self-loathing!" he jokes. "Seriously though, I feel that watching yourself draw at timelapse speed is a great way to gain some insight into the broader methodology of how you work, and to spot mistakes and inefficiency in your workflow."

Pencil Drawing Walkthrough with Miles Johnston is available for $5 by visiting **http://ifxm.ag/mj-pencil-video**.

Miles tends to focus on pencil art, so it made sense for the artist to produce a video that showcased his skills.

Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS

Contact the editor, Claire Howlett, on **claire@imaginefx.com** or write to ImagineFX, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK

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Do digital artists have any flair?

I bought the August issue of ImagineFX (137) solely for the amazing step-by-step Photoshop workshop on drawing Harley Quinn by Admira Wijaya. I enjoy drawing comic book heroes, but have never attempted digital imagery as I'm old school – I'm in my 50s and use pencil, black ink and watercolour-based inks.

I had a go at Harley and have attached the results for your perusal. What I would like to ask is, do you think you need to have some degree of artistic flair to be a digital artist, or can you get the computer to do all the work for you? For example, rectify mistakes, blend colours and so on?
John Pugh, via email

John painted Harley Quinn using traditional media, after being inspired by Admira Wijaya's workshop.

Claire replies Hello John. Thanks for emailing in. I love your Harley Quinn drawing. It's really great. As for your question about needing artistic flair to be a digital artist, the answer is a resounding YES. The computer is a tool to create, not a creation generator. Anyone can create art on a computer, but without knowledge of the basics – colour, light, anatomy and so on – it'll be bad art. I'd be interested to hear what others think.

Lots of love for our Ross Tran interview

I got home after my second week of art school in my first year of studying animation – whoo-hoo! – to find my new (Damaged! Damn you Mister Mailman) much-awaited issue of ImagineFX in the mailbox. Yay!

I have never had the urge to write to you (I've sent art to the FXPosé team, with no luck yet), because I didn't think it necessary to comment on the art content when so many already have. That is, until I read the artist portfolio about Ross Tran. I just wanted to give a MAJOR thumbs up to the writer of the article! It was such an

DID YOU MISS OUR SPECIAL MANGA ISSUE? Turn to page 26 to see how you can hold of this edition and older ImagineFX issues.

Like Dana, did you have an emotional moment after reading our interview with Ross Tran? Let us know!

interesting break down and it complemented Ross' channel so well. I love writing and I found the article so very lovely. I actually got super emotional. I get like that when people are so awesome and I just can't handle it. Naturally that's only possible when the article is well written and engaging. Thank you for giving such an awesome insight into such a wonderful artist and person!
Dana Alink, via email

Claire replies Dana, thanks so much for writing in, you've made our day with your kind words! Ross is such an enthusiastic person, it was hard not to get caught up in his exuberance. For those that missed the issue, it's still available to buy online. See page 26 for more details.

Star Trek wagon

A few issues ago you had a workshop on drawing a science fiction version of a covered wagon with horses [issue 125 – Lorin Wood workshop]. It was really great and I enjoyed reading it. About halfway through it, I remembered something I'd read in a Star Trek book eons ago.

As you may know, Gene Roddenberry's first explanation of the Star Trek spaceship was that it would be like a wagon trail to the stars. So the designers working on the ship design started with a covered wagon and horses. LONG before computers, they drew on paper and made wooden models.

One day, one of the wooden models fell from where it was hanging. One of the designers picked it up, but put it upside down. He showed the idea to Gene, and with some small modifications, they had a ship design. Fans know it today at the USS Enterprise.

Take a look at the workshop, and imagine flipping the pictures upside down. It's there.
Mac, via email

Claire replies Mac, what an interesting letter. We have some Star Trek aficionados in the office and they did not know this. Thanks for writing in.

Your art news that's grabbed our attention

Sean P. Tourangeau @SeanTourangeau

"More work on this illustration that features my own set of villains."

Thorsten Schmitt @ArtistThorsten

"Hänsel & Gretel WIP."

Jordan Dyke @JordanGRFX

"I hope you're getting ready for Halloween season. Today's portrait was Dias de los Muertos themed art."

Just finished something you want us to shout about? Send it our way on Twitter (@imaginefx), or find us on Facebook!

Artist Q&A

STRUGGLING WITH A PAINTING TECHNIQUE OR TOPIC? EMAIL **HELP@IMAGINEFX.COM** TODAY!

The ImagineFX panel
NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

Michelle Hoefener
The US illustrator and concept artist is busy working in the entertainment and gaming industry. More of her art and techniques can be found at her Patreon page
www.patreon.com/michellehoefener

Charlie Creber
Charlie's a concept artist and illustrator working from Cardiff, Wales, where she spends her days creating digital and oil paintings, and collecting felines.
www.creberart.com

Nick Harris
English artist Nick switched to a digital canvas in 2000, after 18 years of using traditional media. Most of his work involves creating artwork for children's books.
www.nickillus.com

Lorena Lammer
Lorena is a freelance illustrator based in Germany who works mainly for card game, and pen and paper publishers. She spends her days painting and entertaining her two cats.
www.lululana.com

Tony Foti
Tony joined Konami earlier this year, but he's still able to work freelance on a range of projects: books, trading cards, video games, magazines and advertisements of all types.
www.tonyfotiart.com

Artist Q&A
Need our advice?
Email **help@imaginefx.com** with your art questions and we'll provide all the answers!

The finished artwork of Aya, her red and pink pigtails flowing behind her as she runs.

Question
How should I paint manga-looking hair in motion?
Tanja Schuhmacher, Germany

Answer
Michelle replies

I follow a simple step-by-step process that uses movement, shape, colour, lighting and texture. I first sketch the basic shape of the hair, keeping in mind both the movement and the basic form. Then I add more detail to the hair shape with line art to define the smaller hair groups. Next I add in the colour and lighting, using the basic three-dimensional shape to determine where the light hits it and where the shadows form.

Once I've added the basic lighting and colour, I use a hair strand brush to quickly add in realistic hair texture and detail on top of the hair groups, using white on a black Color Dodge layer on top of the hair. After this step is done I clean up the hair, by motion-blurring the hair tips and Gaussian-blurring areas to make them look more distant.

Artist's secret
USE A HAIR STRAND BRUSH
To add realistic finishing detail and texture to the hair after I have added the basic lighting, I create a hair strand brush (available with this issue's resources) and use it to paint with white on a black Color Dodge layer on top of the hair.

Step-by-step:
Depict long hair blowing in the wind

1 I first sketch out the basic shape of the hair that I want, keeping in mind the shape of its movement and the basic 3D shape that the hair is built from. In this example, the hair is making a large waving curve shape, so I make sure that this form is pronounced and dynamic. I then break the shape into basic planes.

2 I add detail to the hair shape with line art to define the smaller hair groups. I do this on top of the rough-sketched basic hair shape on a new layer and use a small brush that has Shape Dynamics turned on, Minimum Diameter set to 0 per cent and Transfer turned on, with Opacity and Flow set to Pen Pressure, set to 0 per cent.

3 Then I add the colour and lighting to the hair, thinking of the 3D shape it makes and using this to work out where the lighting hits it and where the shadows form. I clean up the hair, by motion blurring the tips and Gaussian blurring more distant areas. I also soften the lines by blurring to soften them, but not removing the detail.

Question
Any tips for depicting clouds at sunset?
Jarogniew Adamski, Poland

Add dramatic flair and contrast to your image by making the most of natural light formations such as crepuscular rays, ambient fog and rim light.

Answer
Charlie replies

Sunset skies are a great opportunity to play around with a generous colour palette and push your values to create a dramatic finish. If you're aiming to create a realistic cloud formation then references are a must-have, but even if you want to make a more stylised scene, deciding on wind and light direction early on will help to sell your final piece.

Contrast the shape of heavy, dark clouds with long thin ones to guide the eye across the image and create more visual interest. Create crepuscular rays by holding Shift and making long strokes of colour with a Hard brush. Remember to always make these lines originate from your light source – in this case, the sun – even if it's entirely hidden behind the clouds. The closer the clouds are to the sun, the more colour-saturated they will appear. It's harder to go wrong with light effects here, so this is a good time to experiment with layer blend modes such as Color Dodge, Overlay or Hard Light to find something with the intensity you need. Small details such as rim lighting around the closest clouds to the sun, and cool washes of desaturated colour over the outer edges of your image, will enhance the overall effect.

Use the Lasso tool for precise control over the direction of lighting. Use a Soft round brush to erase away unnatural hard lines and make the light appear more 'filtered'.

Artist's secret

MAGIC HOUR LIGHTING
The soft red glow and long shadows associated with 'magic hour lighting' are very flattering to most scenes. You can emphasise this effect with a soft brush in a low Opacity Linear Dodge layer, using a bright red or orange hue.

Question

I want to show a character in a state of anguish – any advice?

Leon George, England

Answer
Michelle replies

To convey strong emotion, I make use of all the elements in my image: posture, expression, setting, storytelling, colour, mood and composition. I first gather references of anguish from the web, recognising that it's very close to physical pain – hence the screwed-up eyes and furrowed brows. In sketching out the basic pose and composition, I try to tell the story of the reason for the character's pain, in this case the destruction of his robot friend.

I choose the camera angle to focus attention on his facial expression but also pay attention to the posture, which communicates his anguish. I then detail the image with line art, clarifying his facial expression and all of the important details in the image. When the line art is finished, I add the colour and lighting to focus attention on the key areas, with the face highlighted and red elements to draw the eye to both the character's face and his robot. Elsewhere I use cool colours to create a sad mood, and add rain to show that the environment is rainy and moody, emphasising the sadness of the scene.
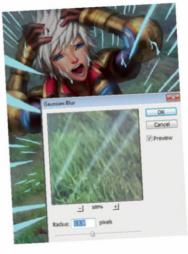
Here is the final artwork of the young inventor, Zack, in anguish over his broken robot friend as the rain sadly pours down on them.

Artist's secret

ADD BLUR TO EFFECTS

To add realism to the rain, I lower the opacity of the rain layer and add Motion Blur to give it a realistic motion, plus Gaussian Blur to selected areas make some of the rain appear more distant and some very close up.
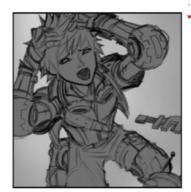
Step-by-step: Painting an emotional and upset character

© iStock.com/Juanmonino

1 I first gather reference of anguish from the web. The images I've used show people with their hands on their heads in disappointment, mouths open and eyes and eyebrows squinted and furrowed in pain. In this example, I don't copy the references exactly. I only use the references to get the basic facial expression and pose, but I draw it at a different angle in this scene.

2 I first sketch out the basic pose and composition, showing the reason for the character's pain. In this scene, the character is a young inventor and mechanic and the robot friend he built has been broken and is lying in pieces in front of him. The camera angle is placed above the character to capture his facial expression in detail to communicate his anguish and sadness.

3 I then detail the image with line art, clarifying the facial expression and important details. Other storytelling details are important in this phase, like the gear shapes on the character's armour, communicating that he's a mechanic or inventor. I repeat the gear shapes in the robot, implying that it was possibly built by the character. I also add details to hair and clothing.

4 Once the line art is finished, I add the colour, lighting and rendering. I use red to make the viewer look at both the character's face and his broken robot. I then add rain and atmosphere to distant objects to show that the environment is rainy and moody, further communicating the sadness of the scene. I also use cool colours in the scene to make it feel sad and dreary.

If you've painted the images for a Sticker sheet yourself, they are much more likely to sit well in any image you paint with other brushes.

Question
How can I paint foliage quickly in ArtRage?
Steven Humphries, England

Answer
Nick replies

I use the Sticker Spray in ArtRage – a fabulous tool, particularly if you make your own brush heads for it. While it seems a bit of a rigmarole at first, it's well worth the effort. I've made foliage brushes that have become very useful.
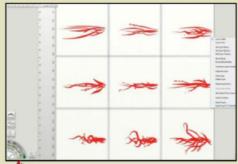
It's a three stage process: a) paint a Sticker sheet; b) load the Sticker sheet; c) adjust the settings. Easy, huh? So what is a Sticker sheet? It's the image(s) which the tool sprays. It can comprise a single image or multiple images (as we tackle here). At stage (b) it becomes obvious why the images need to be arranged in a grid – that's how the Sticker Spray is built, to read

the image. There are row and column setting windows to input grid settings. Painting multiple dabs according to a grid means you'll be able to load them as a Sticker sheet.
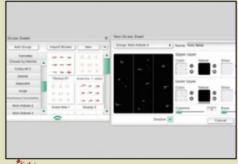
I paint a sheet of nine 500px squares, on square canvas. Loading the image will require a three-row/three-column setting. If I paint the nine dabs in a row, it requires a one-row/nine-column setting. The tool architecture requires you paint the Sticker sheet in pure red – R255, G0, B0. I set the Saturation to 100 per cent, but Luminance to 50 per cent. Now for the real fun. Open the Sticker Brush settings and select Spray Variation…

Step-by-step:
Three steps to a custom Sticker brush
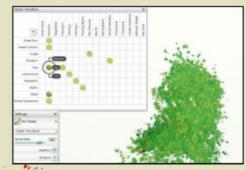
1 Paint the marks you want to make up the Sticker brush into a grid formation on one layer. Pure red marks will afford you more colour control later. Paint marks left to right, or right to left, depending on which way you want the sticker brush to flow. Export the layer as a PNG to keep transparency information for the image.

2 Click the Stickers tab to open a palette of all the Sticker sheets available. Click New to open the Load pane. Click Colour and open your saved PNG file. Repeat for a second layer. Click Texture if you wish to load the same file for texture. Pick Shadow (or not). Set rows and columns appropriate for your sheet. Save with a suitable name
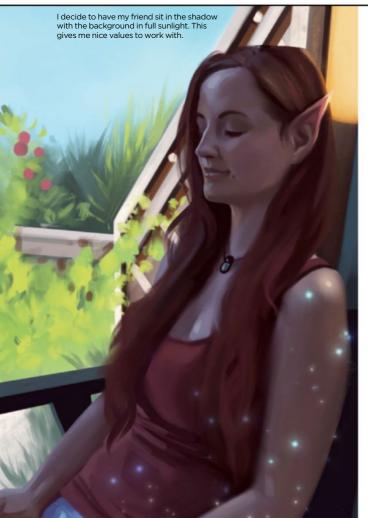
3 Close all the panels and select the Sticker Brush. Click Settings>Spray Variation. Each grid square is a control, like Pen Pressure/Scale, which you can drag from +100 to -100. Hue/Tracing H 100 per cent gives more colour control, if you used pure red in step 1. I use Sheet sequence 100 per cent random; see what works for you.

Question

Can you give me some advice for plein air sketching please?

Rebecka Åström, Sweden

I decide to have my friend sit in the shadow with the background in full sunlight. This gives me nice values to work with.

Answer
Lorena replies
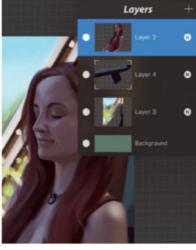
Plein air sketching, whether done traditionally or using digital tools, is a great way to learn about colour and light and also for training your eye to translate a three-dimensional scene into 2D.

Outdoor sketches in Procreate are a lot of fun. The app offers you everything you need for sketching and for taking things up to a decent level of finish, and because it runs on an iPad, you can travel lightly.
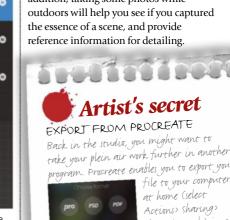
I prefer to kick things off by creating a quick sketch, especially when there's a person in the scene. After I set everything up very roughly I block out the foreground, lock the layer (choose Alpha Lock – simply swipe from left to right on the layer list) and splash in colours with big brushes. From there I get into detailing, but since the light keeps changing I need to be quick and keep things rough. Later on I can still go back and fix mistakes if I want to.

When taking your first steps with plein air, try limiting your colour palette. This will help you to simplify what you see and then get it down in the app. You can always embellish your colours in Procreate once you get back home, or transfer your art to another program for further work. In addition, taking some photos while outdoors will help you see if you captured the essence of a scene, and provide reference information for detailing.

There are many options for the layers in Procreate including locking them, using one as a reference layer, and changing their blending modes.

Artist's secret

EXPORT FROM PROCREATE

Back in the studio, you might want to take your plein air work further in another program. Procreate enables you to export your file to your computer at home (select Actions> Sharing> Share Artwork) in a variety of formats.

Question

My project involves giving a fantasy twist to a real-world animal. How should I start?

Zaid Mensah, Denmark

Ensure your environment ties in with your creature concept, so that your beast doesn't look out of place.

Answer
Lorena replies

If you want to give an animal a fantasy twist or want to put it into a fantasy setting, there are a few things to keep in mind. First, decide what you want to do – where does this creature live and how would that affect its appearance? Once you have that figured out you can get to work. Fortunately it's fairly easy to turn a normal animal into a fantastic one as long as you stay consistent within the story or world you have in mind.

Remember that there are different kinds of the same animal – so before you get started, look up some pictures that might inspire you. For example I've chosen a fox but there are many species of foxes that offer quite a lot of inspiration: Maned fox, Fennec fox, Arctic fox… So start out by gathering some suitable reference. You don't necessarily have to use it during your painting process, but it will help you come up with different ideas. When it comes to adding the 'fantastic factor', there are no limits and you can go from adding feathers or horns to turning the animal into a fire elemental and so on.

VIDEO WORKSHOP

Question
How can I paint a portrait that looks like a hologram?
Freddie Sanders, England

Answer
Tony replies

Holograms in real life have been realistic looking for a few years now. For narrative purposes, though, I still love when computer screens and technology have a little bit of distortion to them. It leaves room for artistic flourishes.

For this example, the bulk of the painting process is pretty much the same. Paint with bright blues at first and keep the light areas on their own layer. Make the darker layers more transparent with the Opacity slider in the layers window. Having the lighter layers more opaque will make it feel more dimensional. Focus on painting all of the highlights with bright, saturated, high-value shades, and keep it relatively light in the mid-tones as well.

Once the portrait is done, copy the highlight layer and apply a Gaussian Blur. The halo created implies that this image is a light source. Add some rays coming from the projector if you like. Select all of the light-eminating layers, then right-click and choose Group From Layers. Copy/paste an army of thin, evenly-spaced horizontal lines on their own layer. Put that layer over the main group, right-click it and select Create Clipping Mask, then set the layer to Subtract. The lighter your lines are, the more transparent they'll be. I prefer making them white and just adjusting the Opacity slider.

Giving the representation imperfections like being monochromatic or having scan lines helps the viewer quickly grasp that this is a digital 3D facsimile.

Even though the hologram itself is emitting light, you still need to plan out the portrait with a highlights and shadows as usual.

Artist's secret
AMBIENT LIGHT

Duplicating the Gaussian-blurred layers enables you to control the intensity of the glow around your image. You can then adjust the layer's Opacity and blending mode to control exactly how much ambient light the hologram is giving off.

Step-by-step: Creating a fantastical beast

1 Start off with a rough sketch that gives you an idea of where you want to take the design. You can do as many of these as you want and combine them until you get one that you're happy with. It's best to keep it loose, though, so you don't get lost in the details – for now, at least.

2 Now you can flesh out your idea more, based on your previous sketch. As soon as you're happy with the result and amount of detail, throw in some basic values on different layers (here I keep the crystals on a separate layer at all times). This will make the next step easier.

3 Try out different colour schemes. Keep different parts of the design on separate layers and then change the Hue and Saturation of the colours (Cmd+U) to see how it affects the overall appearance. Depending on what kind of setting and creature you chose, you can go crazy here.

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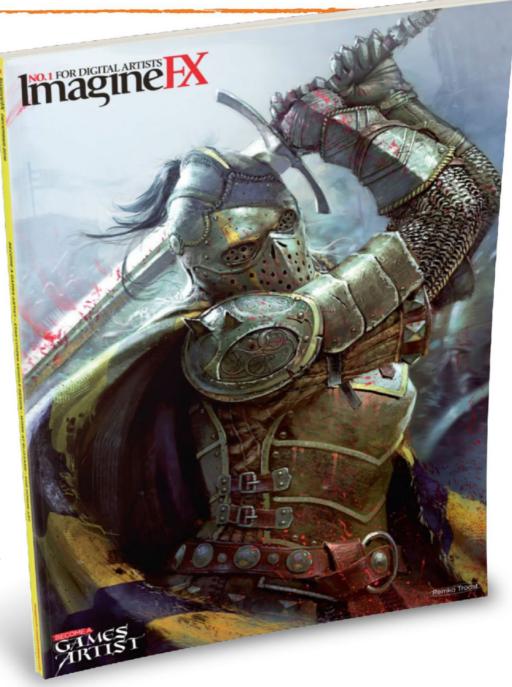
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ANGRY WARRIORS
Concept artist Guillaume
Menuel worked on the
For Honor knights, who
are at war with the
samurais and vikings –
who he describes as "big,
bad, angry warriors."

Live by the sword, die by the sword

Knights, samurais and vikings wage war in **For Honor's** post-apocalyptic, medieval setting. Confused? So was publisher Ubisoft. **Gary Evans** met the art team behind the game to find out how they made it work

Calligraphy by Massimo Polello

The knight storms a medieval castle. Metal clashes, men shout, fires burn. Blood quickly covers the ground as the bodies pile up. With one part of the battlefield won, the knight runs deeper into the castle, adopts a fighting stance and crosses swords with a samurai. This is the part of the game its creators at Ubisoft Montreal call The Art of Battle.

For Honor is Braveheart, Game of Thrones and every samurai movie you've ever seen all rolled into one. Live by the sword, die by the sword, respawn and die by the sword all over again.

Another point of reference for the art team was the TV series Viking – because, alongside knights and samurais, axe-wielding Scandinavian warriors also roam

this place. History's most feared fighters are at war in a dystopian world and have been for as long as anyone can remember.

What stops this high-concept game from become high-fantasy is the art team's attention to detail. We're just one or two steps away from reality. Magic doesn't exist here. There are no dragons. The armour and weapons and environments look real. For Honor is beautiful to look at – at least, beautiful for a game in which the object is to chop your opponent's head off.

"It's a bad-ass medieval warfare game with big, bad angry warriors," says concept artist Guillaume Menuel. "The idea was to depict a world that is violent and bloody and raw, where everyone's focus is the fight."

IN IT FOR THE HONOR

Meet the Ubisoft Montreal artists who made For Honor…

Maxime Desmettre

JOB TITLE *Concept artist, environments.*
WHAT DID YOU DO ON THE GAME? *Defined the visuals for the environments and props with the art direction team.*
YOUR JOB BEFORE UBISOFT? *CG artist and illustrator for video games and animated films.*
FAVOURITE GAME? *Another World.*

You can play as a character from one of three different factions – knights, samurais and vikings – named The Legion, The Chosen and The Warborn, respectively. Within each faction there are four distinct classes, each with its own skills, weapons and fighting styles.

Guillaume worked mainly on the knights, but says each artist within the team had the chance to work on the other characters, too. The biggest challenge the team faced was making all these different aspects of the game feel cohesive.

BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

Guiding the team through the project was Christian Diaz. Things didn't always run smoothly on what is essentially a big game built around a big idea. The art director ➤➤

DESOLATE BEAUTY
The For Honor world is a post-apocalyptic medieval setting, painted here by Ludovic Ribardiere. Ubisoft Montreal aimed for a "desolate beauty".

THE WARBORN
The vikings are fighting the knights and samurais, but no one remembers why! Here, Guillaume captures their brutal nature.

BIG CHALLENGE
One of the biggest challenges Andrew Jangwoon Im faced was making the various characters recognisable, but also different from their enemies.

THE LEGIONS
Guillaume helped to create a big game full of tiny details, as this knight orthographic shows.

➥ says, at one point during the production process, Ubisoft HQ also had reservations. Christian and his team had almost finished work on the characters when he made a presentation to HQ. When the lights went up, his bosses said: "Something's missing." He had to go back to the drawing board.

"For Honor is an invitation to imagine," Christian says. "At first, the process is very instinctive. Then I have to rationalise what I feel in order to explain and elaborate on it."

He describes the overall arc of the project as going from marco to micro, the very big to the very small. In the first year, the art director established "the pillars of art direction and the game itself". He generated lots of ideas quickly. The pillars, he says, needed to be wide enough apart to hold all of these ideas, but strong enough to stop the whole thing collapsing in on itself.

First the team defined the three main archetypes. They needed be recognisable as knights, samurais and vikings, but also clearly different from each other. They found it easy to separate the knights and samurais, but knights and vikings proved to be a more difficult proposition.

AMPLIFYING AND REMOVING

To do this, Christian asked his team to approach characters the same way a sculptor approaches his work: "These artists have to synthesise a lot of details," he says. "So they take the most important and strongest assets of a character and crank them up. The essence is intact, but with a little something more, which brings a lot of identity. One of the first goals was to reflect what you find in the collective unconscious when people think about those three great warrior legacies. It's a hook. Then you can start twisting some attributes. We want to get the essence of each hero, getting rid of unnecessary elements, magnifying others."

This is how he managed to get the nod from his bosses: not by going bigger, but by going smaller, isolating certain elements from each faction to give them their own distinct identity. Once the characters clicked, the team had to work out how make them fit into a medieval setting.

Christian says, "We created a world that isn't just a reproduction of reality. This game is not historical. With the kind of game we were building, there was room for more than that. There was room for some fantasy, even if magic doesn't exist. A very nice influence for environments is Game of Thrones, especially how they pushed the fantasy. If you just look at the architecture, the costumes, it breathes a medieval ➥

❝ **We created a world that isn't just a reproduction of reality. There was room for fantasy, even if magic doesn't exist** ❞

Ludovic Ribardiere

JOB TITLE *Concept artist, environments.*
WHAT DID YOU DO ON THE GAME? *I was in charge of enhancing the visuals of the game in 2D. From the global view to the details, we tried to have the most accurate vision of what a map was going to look like.*
YOUR JOB BEFORE UBISOFT? *I started as a 3D modeller for Monte Cristo. Then I worked at Ubisoft Paris as a level artist. I switched to concept work seven years ago at Ubisoft Montreal.*
FAVOURITE GAME? *Civilization V and The Last of Us.*

Remko Troost
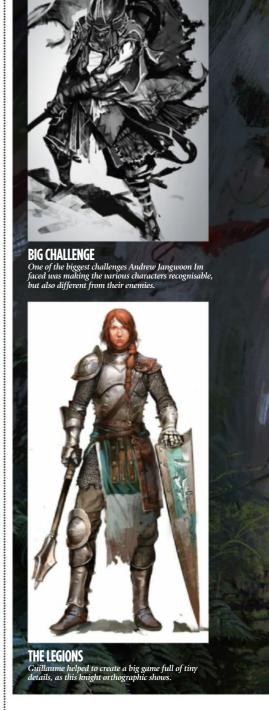
JOB TITLE *Senior concept artist and illustrator.*
WHAT DID YOU DO ON THE GAME? *I created concept art and illustrations for the characters, factions and their weapons.*
JOB BEFORE UBISOFT? *I've worked at several studios and been a freelance artist.*
FAVOURITE GAME? *Too many to list here!*

Guillaume Menuel

JOB TITLE *Concept artist.*
WHAT DID YOU DO ON THE GAME? *I created character art.*
JOB BEFORE UBISOFT? *I was a student – I've only ever worked at Ubisoft.*
FAVOURITE GAME? *Day of the Tentacle.*

TOUGH AT THE TOP

Art director Christian Diaz explains what happened when Ubisoft HQ sent him back to the drawing board

What was the toughest part of the production process?
We have these regular meetings – "stage gates" – to explain the progress of the project to the editorial team. We were finalising the design of all our heroes and at a stage gate in Paris we received feedback saying, "You guys have created beautiful characters, very nice illustrations, but there's something missing. They're a bit too complicated to read and we need to feel a stronger faction culture." I realised the character style guide needed to be more micro. I needed to make stronger choices, isolating more elements for each faction, separating and reinforcing each faction's identity, and simplifying some elements of the designs.

How did you relay that to the team?
When you go back to the artists with a plan to address the feedback, you need to explain not only what we have to do, but especially why we need to do it. It wasn't easy telling them that we had to revisit some of the heroes, but they understood and agreed that the reason was right. I see each artist as a musician, who's part of a symphony orchestra. The conductor maintains the tempo, and each artist can bring something unique, as long as we all stick to the style of the melody.

How do you and your team handle criticism?
When you work in an artistic discipline you need to handle criticism. You have to be ready to listen, receive and understand any type of comments. Art is driven by the emotional part of ourselves. It's very subjective and so you need to put a lot of meaning in the choices you make so that you can explain why you made them. Being an artist requires a lot of dedication, humility and patience. And passion will help immensely.

What advice would you give to an artist who wants to break into the games industry?
Identify what you like to do the most or what you do best, and work hard to progress in that field. Only showcase your best work. Your portfolio is key: it enables us to see the potential of each candidate, and 10 good images will always be better than 30 average ones.

FACTION IDENTITY
Halfway through the production process, art director Christian Diaz realised he needed to strengthen each faction's identity by simplifying some elements of their design. Ludovic helped Christian visualise his ideas.

HIGH-CONCEPT
While For Honor is a high-concept game, the look is realistic, as is clear from Remko Troost's art.

SAMURAI FORTRESS
Jeong Hwan Shin's early concept art for the samurai faction is based on historic Japanese buildings.

Christian Diaz
JOB TITLE *Art director.*
WHAT DID YOU DO ON THE GAME? *I was in charge of the art direction for characters and environments.*
JOB BEFORE UBISOFT? *I've been working in the games industry for 18 years.*
FAVOURITE GAME? *Bloodborne.*

KNIGHT'S CASTLE INSIDE
A production sketch by Jeong Hwan Shin. Sometimes, working in greyscale helps to focus on certain design goals more easily.

IMAGINE
Remko accepted art director Christian Diaz's "invitation to imagine" during the ideas stage.

flavour, but it's pushed to an edge where I'm like, 'Yeah, I buy it – it could have existed.'"

Released early next year, For Honor is a shooter with swords instead of guns. There are single and multiplayer modes. You start a match, cycle through maps, meet your new team and together, swords swinging, storm the battlefield. "When it comes to the look and feel of For Honor," environment concept artist Maxime Desmettre says, "we could call it amplified reality. An important breakthrough was the map Citadel Gate, the first official map we produced. It represents the global art direction we were aiming for, which meant a lot of back and forth to find the right balance between architectural ingredients, shapes and scale.

"Often, we needed game mechanics' point on the map to be precisely located

> 66 **When it comes to the look and feel of For Honor, we could call it amplified reality** 99

and built under constraints. These gameplay areas have to have an easy-to-identify building or landmark. To overcome this, we focused on giving a functional reason to these specific points, so that they make sense and have a function in a medieval fortress."

WAR, CLANS AND SUFFERING

"An all-new IP," Remko Troost says, "a new world, new challenges. I like challenges. Things that take me out of my comfort zone." Remko, a senior concept artist and illustrator, looked after the vikings.

Initially, he did a lot of sketching and speed painting to rough out all the various routes he'd take with the characters. He then sat with the rest of the team to brainstorm these ideas, to put meat on the bones of his characters. Once he knew which direction he would take, he began working in more detail. At this stage, he says Christian often came and sat beside each member of the team while they worked.

Despite the game's high concept, Remko says once the characters lined up against each other for the first, the whole thing made sense. From there it was a case of
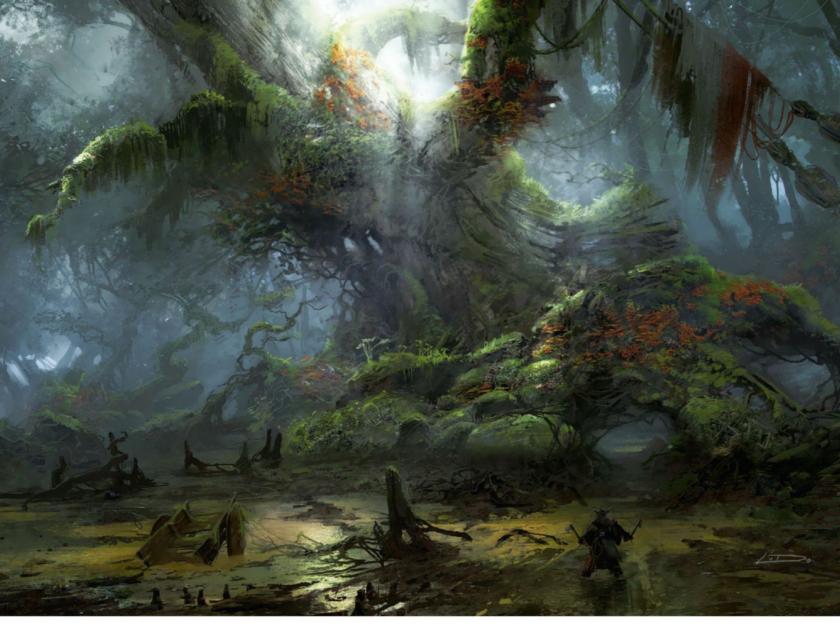

VISUALISING IDEAS
In the game's first year, Remko came up with lots of ideas very quickly. Then, slowly, throughout the production process, he began to focus on more specific details.

OROCHI
For the character Orochi, Andrew combined elements of the ninja and samurai aesthetic.

THE CHOSEN
The samurais are known for their brutal efficiency, but will they win the fight? Andrew's concept art shows the calm before the storm.

BEHIND THE SCENES

CONCEPTING A SAMURAI ASSASSIN

Assistant art director Andrew Jangwoon Im explains why research was key to creating his favourite character

"I first got assigned to do a character by my art director, Christian, and he explained minor details about the characters. This was a time when I used all my creativity and spent most of my time researching, to learn about the character.

When we had our next meeting, we exchanged our ideas using early sketches, and tried to solve any problems. This was when the design boundary kicked in, which means I learned what was possible for rigging purposes, animation and so on.

I made mistakes at the start of the project, which meant my art couldn't work for either modelling or animation. I learned my lesson: always check with everyone before submitting a character! After many iterations, I met the lead 3D artists and riggers to check if my concept art was functional. Once I got their approval, my art was presented to the upper management.

My favourite character is Orochi, a samurai assassin. It was the first character I was asked to do and it survived all the way through the project. I collected hundreds of reference images from movies, games, animation, comic book, illustrations, figurines and photographs of real armour.

I would normally spend almost 60 per cent of my working process finding references. Not only images, but reading materials, to learn about the history of armour. Because I like to completely understand what I'm designing, sometimes it takes even longer to start sketching.

Orochi was my first character, so I learnt a lot about samurai culture and their armour during the game's development. I created many iterations, because there were lots of flaws in the design. But whenever I see this character, he reminds me of the excitement and passion I felt at the start of the project."

Andrew Jangwoon Im

JOB TITLE *Assistant art director and character concept artist.*
WHAT DID YOU DO ON THE GAME? *Character concepts.*
JOB BEFORE UBISOFT? *I was a creature designer at Spectral Motion.*
FAVOURITE GAME? *Bloodborne.*

refining each character until the image onscreen matched the ideas in their heads.

"A lot of research was done on each faction – their culture, their tools, object art, how they live – in order to find what really separated them," say Remko. "It's a harsh and dark universe where war, clans, suffering and the search for power rules. People are fighting since the ages. Probably they don't even know why they're fighting anymore. Live and die by the blade!"

The medieval setting in which these blades are swung is as captivating as the characters who swing them. As Ludovic Ribardiere, concept artist on the game, says, "The biggest challenge was credibility: will the player believe what they're seeing on screen?"

"Even if – or maybe, because – we're not a historical game," Jeong Hwan Shin says, "we have to be consistent. The senior concept artist says the team wanted to be respectful of the art, culture and architecture for the three

CURSED LANDS
Like a lot of lands in the game, forests are cursed, poisonous environments. Ludovic depicted trees as tortured shapes mixed with parts of wrecked ships and other objects.

KNIGHT SANCTUARY BACKDROP
To give a wow feeling to the player at ground level, Jeong exaggerated medieval architectural wall elements.

INSPIRATION
Guillaume says that when he came up with his character designs the TV series Viking was a big inspiration, as was Game of Thrones.

FIGHTING STANCE
Is the axe mightier than the sword? Each of the game's three archetypes has their own strengths and weaknesses. Remko's viking favours the axe.

HOME SWEET HOME
Ludovic's early concept for a viking fortress. He aimed to depict something quite rough: a mix of huge engraved wooden beams, old stones, tarpaulins and ropes.

FIGHT THEM ON THE BEACHES
For all its violence, For Honor is a beautiful game to look at, and Maxime's environment art reflects this aesthetic well.

groups of warriors. But at the same time, each had to have a strong identity.

"You have to totally reinvent parts of a real world," Jeong continues. "The result is gritty and grandiose, with a desolate beauty." He explains how each member of the team was given a lot of freedom to put their own ideas into the game, but they always came back to Christian's original pillars. "We were told to look at the shape and design of architectures. Look at how we emphasised or exaggerated things. And also look at some other layers of decorations on top of the basic structure of architectures, set dressings and graphic designs such as emblems and faction logos. These were added to give some more modern touch Christian wanted, to enhance the colour and tone of the overall look of the game."

The team studied architecture and left no stone unturned in their attempts at make their settings credible, researching the kind of roofing, columns and engravings each warrior lived among. It wasn't just a case of replicating what they found, but rather getting the facts straight and then adapting designs to make them their own. "Sometimes we had to really study, to understand how the building was made," Jeong says, "what materials were used, what functions the structure has, why the architecture has a certain shape."

YEAH, BAD-ASS
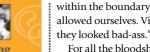
Andrew Jangwoon Im, in charge of vikings, gives a good examples of how facts were twisted to create something new. Despite the idea we all have, he says, vikings never really had horns on their helmets.

"We decided to add horns to vikings because that was

Jeong Hwan Shin
JOB TITLE *Senior concept artist.*
WHAT DID YOU DO ON THE GAME? *Created environment concept art and defined the three factions' architecture.*
JOB BEFORE UBISOFT? *Vehicle concept designer for entertainment and automotive industry at General Motors and Hot Wheels.*
FAVOURITE EVER GAME *Cyberia.*

within the boundary of fantasy we had allowed ourselves. Visually, with horns, they looked bad-ass."

For all the bloodshed and beheadings, the game is lovely to look at. And it's more technical that you might think. The Art of Battle fight mode – holding your sword in one of three stances to defend and attack – gives fights a tactical element. There's also a strong narrative tying all these battles together. But mainly it's a tough, meaty brawler of a game: the art team has captured perfectly the nobility and stupidity of war. For Honor is fun. But, above everything else, it's believable.

"Honestly, I never had a single doubt for our game," Andrew says, "Even when there were only stick men fighting each other. The gameplay, The Art of Battle, was just amazing. I'm a hard-core gamer. I've played this game for about four years and I still enjoy playing it.

"Bad-ass. I hope bad-ass is the word to describe our characters. Yeah, bad-ass."

❝ You have to reinvent parts of the real world. The result is gritty and grandiose ❞

Sketchbook

Artem Solop

A Ukrainian living in China, Artem specialises in fusion – of east and west, of tech and the organic

Artist PROFILE

Artem Solop
LOCATION: China

Artem is an Ukrainian artist who recently moved to China to explore his interests in animation and vector graphics, as well as punk graffiti culture. He's working as a freelance illustrator and mobile game art director, and is inspired by electronic music, retro video games and graphic designs. Artem's passion is to create a unique style using digital and traditional tools, a reminder of both the past and future of art.
www.behance.net/artemsolop

TIBURON BASSLINE

"This guy is the driver of a futuristic Formula 1 vehicle. But it's the future and so he drives a giant robotic shark instead of a car. I made a cool vector graphics piece based on this sketch."

POWA

"This kawaii TV squid is some kind of hybrid between a robot and home video device, with cables instead of tentacles and early PC monitor head. This was a great exercise in drawing an '80s-style background."
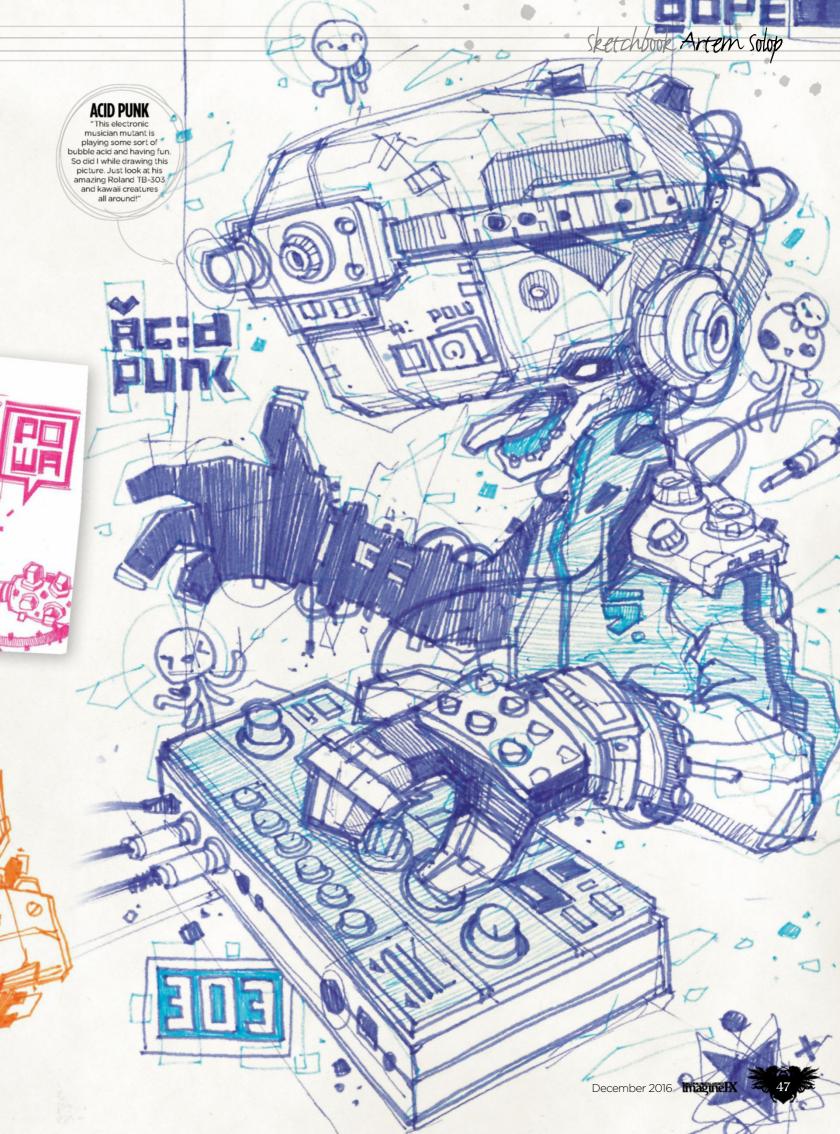
"I've played in different bands, and music is still my main source of inspiration"

GUNDAM

"This is a kind of gothic robotic knight. He could be a scary guy if I drew him with black pen."

ACID PUNK
"This electronic musician mutant is playing some sort of bubble acid and having fun. So did I while drawing this picture. Just look at his amazing Roland TB-303 and kawaii creatures all around!"

SHARKS

"An old study of dangerous sea inhabitants inspired by a BBC nature programme. This was my first drawing to feature a thin, chaotic outline."
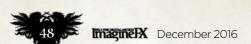
LOUDSPEAKER 1 AND 2
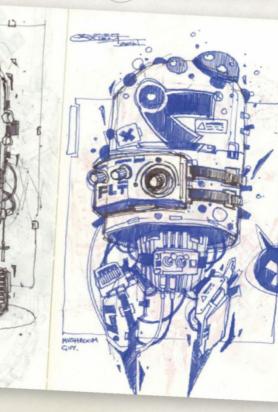
"These guys are futuristic hardware demons. Some people will see lots of symbolism here and they are right, but I was just testing a new pink marker."
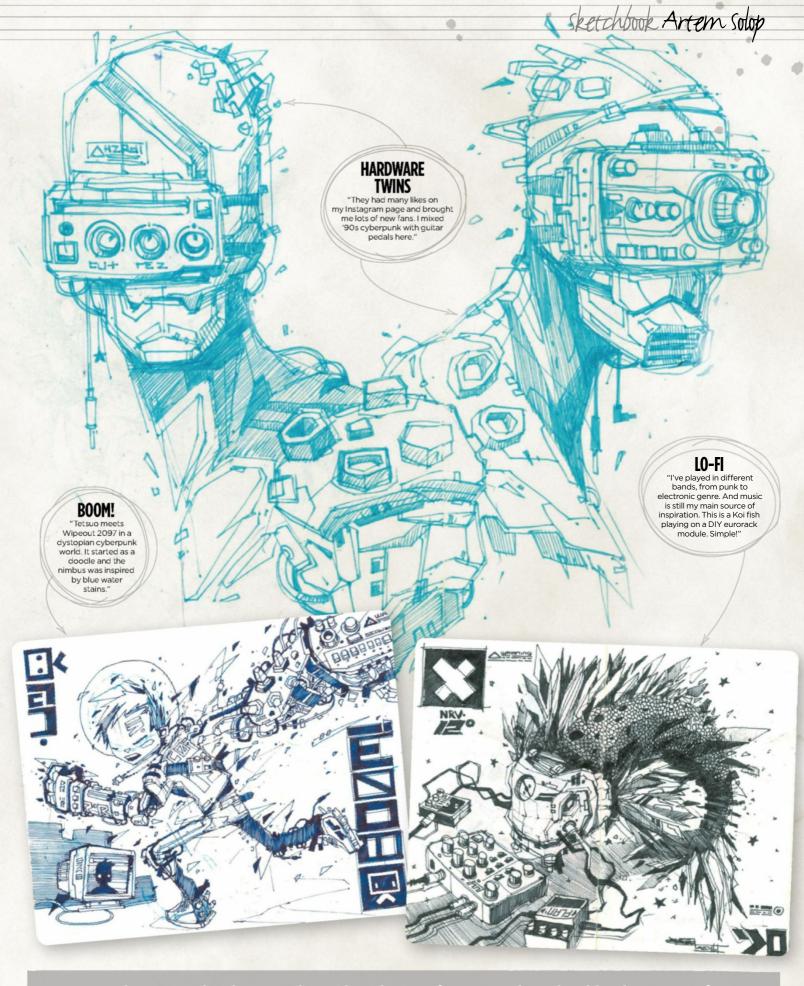
"People will see lots of symbolism, and they're right, but I was just testing a new marker"

RETRO ROBOTS
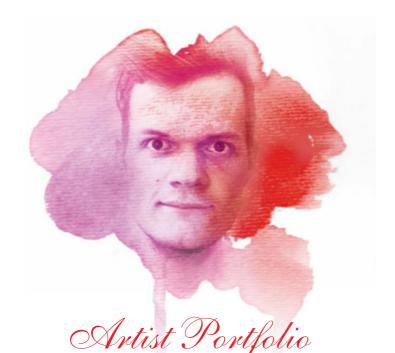
"Seafood mixed with stompboxes. I just noticed they have names: Fuzz Guy and Mushroom Guy! My black pen stopped working while I was drawing the second one, but this is a case when a mistake worked out well. Beware of fake Japanese letters here."

FUZZ GUY.

MUSHROOM GUY.

HARDWARE TWINS

"They had many likes on my Instagram page and brought me lots of new fans. I mixed '90s cyberpunk with guitar pedals here."

LO-FI

"I've played in different bands, from punk to electronic genre. And music is still my main source of inspiration. This is a Koi fish playing on a DIY eurorack module. Simple!"

BOOM!

"Tetsuo meets Wipeout 2097 in a dystopian cyberpunk world. It started as a doodle and the nimbus was inspired by blue water stains."

FAREWELL
"One of my recurring characters, Birker, and his companions saying farewell to new friends."

WHITE HAIR
"One of the many gods who are explored within my sketch project."

EVEN MEHL AMUNDSEN

The Norwegian tells **Gary Evans** how he overcame a "tendency to argue" to become a successful globe-trotting artist

The art test called for a modern assassin with an old-school weapon. Even Mehl Amundsen created a range of thumbnails, various styles, different anatomical types, then Volta picked the design it liked most. Next, the visual development studio asked him to come up with an environment for his character. The stakes were high for the young Norwegian artist. Even had just quit art school and needed a job.

The Quebec-based studio provided him with a 3D mock-up, so he had to learn photobashing and other new skills for the first time. Even worked on the test for most of the "long, stressful summer" of 2011.

"Seldom have I felt as much dread as the week and a half it took them to get back to me," the Norwegian says. He was visiting a friend when he got the nod: "I danced around his studio for a solid 10 minutes – yelling incoherently, singing triumphantly."

Even left Falmouth School of Art, the UK's number one arts university, because he felt the fees were too high, a gamble that paid off when Volta offered him his dream job as a concept artist. The Norwegian now looks back on this as the greatest milestone of his career so far. But his career faltered before it got going, when he began to "butt heads" with a fellow Volta artist.

A TENDENCY TO ARGUE

Even was born in wealthy, conservative Stabekk, to the west of Oslo. Doodling pirate ships and dinosaurs had grown into a more serious hobby by the time he was 15 years old. A few years later, he ➤➤

Artist PROFILE

Even Mehl Amundsen
LOCATION: Denmark
FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Paul Bonner, Paul Dainton, Jesper Ejsing, Kim Jung Gi, Karl Kopinski, Alphonse Mucha, Ilya Repin, Hiroaki Samura, Adrian Smith and Claire Wendling.
SOFTWARE USED: Photoshop
WEB: http://ifxm.ag/evenamu

SPIRIT OF THE HUNTED
"Perhaps the most interesting of all the gods that I've drawn from my sketch-a-day series, this is Gypla, the spirit of the hunted."

HARLEQUINS
"I've done a good bit of work for Games Workshop's Warhammer 40K products. The Harlequins were one of my favourites to play with."

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" Seldom have I felt as much dread as the week and a half it took them to get back to me "

BIRKER
"Birker, with his two friends, Hedda the Goat and Mickel the Fox, making a narrow escape."

VOLTA STUDIOS ART TEST

Even tells us more about landing his dream job at the Canadian visual development studio

"I think my greatest career milestone," Even Mehl Amundsen says, "at least in terms of how different life was before and after, was passing the art test for my first in-house job at Volta Studios in Canada."

Even had just dropped out of Falmouth School of Art and was looking for freelancing jobs in Norway. A friend said he knew of a job going in Quebec. "I had barely any notion of where in Canada it was," he says, "but I buckled down and took on their art test, working at it all summer.
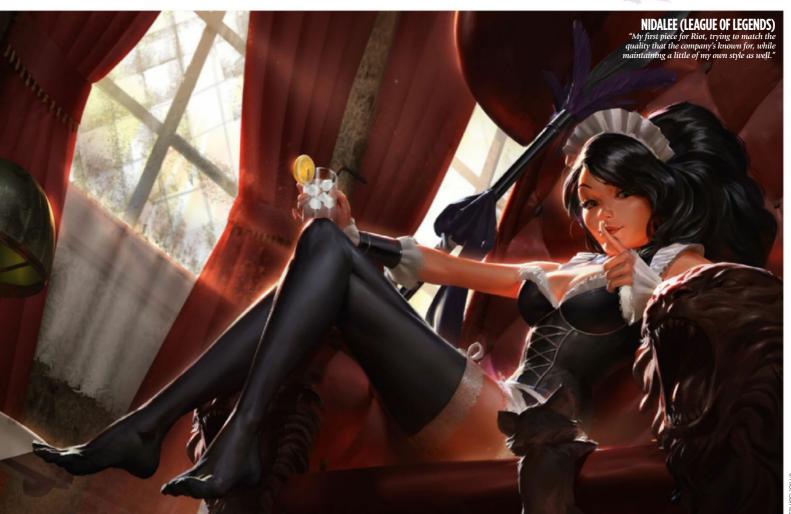
"The test was to do a character, going through the usual feedback system that most studios use, and after it was done, to do an environment to put that character in. The brief called for a modern, Asian assassin, using an old-school weapon."

The finished piece is a kind of urban ninja, dressed in a zip-up coat and combat pants, wielding a couple of swords. The backdrop was a narrow, cluttered street strung with Chinese lanterns. "For the environment, I worked off of a 3D mock-up that Volta provided. That was a far greater challenge. I had to learn how to do photobashing and stuff like that. It somewhat cemented my dislike of that process."

It took Volta a week and a half – a week and a half of "dread" – to get back to him. "I was visiting a friend when I received the confirmation." Cue the celebrations. Even remembers it as "a very good day."

VOLTA ART TEST
"The assassin was a chance to really put in some hours on rendering, and as a result, it all came out looking a little plasticy. Let that be a lesson – study your materials, kids!"

discovered concept art and became hooked. After two years at the Einar Granum Fine Arts School in Oslo, he earned a place at Falmouth. By his own admission, he wasn't a very good student, but he was also dissatisfied with the teaching he received. So after a year, he left.

Even remembers a lot of time in Falmouth spent sitting around in a local cafe and art gallery called Babahogs, drinking coffee, sketching and talking:

– was creating characters for The Lord of the Rings Online: Riders of Rohan.

"As for challenges," he says, "I think getting over my own ego was the one that taught me the biggest lesson, and allowed me to grow the most as an artist."

At Volta, Even was asked to work with an artist named Arnaud Pheu. The Norwegian's "tendency to argue" strained the pair's working relationship, particularly when it came to solving visual problems.

❝ I've learned adults ought to be able to disagree without being disagreeable – but that's not always the case ❞

"Long rambling chats with good friends is a hallowed activity for me, especially when accompanied by the fruits of the grape and the grain. I imagine it's how some people feel about church."

The university also taught him, however inadvertently, the importance of "making one's mind up". His mind was made up to quit and he was soon on a plane to Canada. He spent three years in Quebec, learning his trade from many artists he looked up to, a "small but very skilled phalanx of heroes". He also began working for bigger and better clients. The most memorable of which – Even being a self-confessed Tolkien geek

"I have a tendency to argue," says Even. "Over the years, I've learned that while two adults ought to be able to disagree without being disagreeable – but that's not always the case. However, we both came an understanding of our respective stubbornness, and once we managed to redirect our focus on collaboration rather than insisting on our own visions, we worked tremendously well together."

INSPIRATIONAL COMPANY

These days, Even lives in Copenhagen. He gets out of bed at 7am and runs in his local park. After a shower and breakfast, he walks

NIDALEE (LEAGUE OF LEGENDS)
"My first piece for Riot, trying to match the quality that the company's known for, while maintaining a little of my own style as well."

while listening to a podcast to a place he calls Embarrassing Company. He shares a workspace at the illustration studio with Danish artist Jesper Ejsing: "A glowing ball of inspiration and 90s rap lyrics."

For the first hour or so, Even replies to emails and Facebook messages. Afterwards, he works until around five or six, at which point he begins his daily sketch, a project that culminates with the release of an art book later this year.

Sometimes he'll sit down and actively decide to create a certain kind of character, then come up with an idea to go with it. Other times he'll have an overriding idea that leads the pen around the page. "It might be a pose," he says, "it might be a combination of colours, it might even be a phrase that pops up in my head. The trick is to always be searching."

For Even routine and discipline go hand in hand. But he does make room for his other great passion: travel.

EUROPE CALLING

After three years at Volta, Even heard "the strings of old Europe call." Coming straight out of a studio job, he was unsure how much he could expect to make, at least his first year, as a freelancer. So he looked for somewhere he could live well but cheaply. Prague seemed perfect. ➤➤

WOODKIN
"When their borders are threatened, the elves of the Deep Wood send their warriors into battle, armoured in living wood."

CIRCLE
"A mellow moment for the travelling trio, taking an opportunity to explore some landscapes in the little world I came up with."

PRESENTS
"Dwarves inhabit every corner of the world I'm building. This one is an adoptive father to one of the characters, presenting her with a fine new blade."

DREAM
"Sweet sleep her gift, in all its many forms. Be it for a blink of the eye, or the dreams that never end, hers is the hand that grants them."

GUNNAR
"Gunnar the Giant, one of the many little side characters who I hope I'll get a chance to revisit."

➤➤ A few friends had already made the move to Prague and spoke highly of the place. So he spent a year in the Czech capital, establishing himself as a freelance illustrator and concept artists, and "making merry". Then Blizzard Entertainment asked Even to join them in California.

Highlights of his time in the US include contributing to the cinematic trailer for the third Hearthstone expansion, Whispers of the Old Gods. "I got to do some of the establishing artworks," he says, "and I did the base design for the troll character. And I had the chance to have my work critiqued by the terrifyingly skilled Laurel D Austin. That sure taught me a few things!"

Even says knowing when to stand his ground and when to back down, a skill he first learned at Volta, is one of the greatest challenges a working artists faces. California wasn't for him, so he left for Denmark, moving to Copenhagen and returning to freelance work with a new-found talent for diplomacy.

"Working for a client involves interpreting another person's vision. To do this, it's very useful to compartmentalise one's personal pride. You have set that aside for commercial work. This will make you far more open to learning and adapting."

ALL ABOUT THE STORYTELLING
Even is reluctant to describe his own art, preferring to leave that up to others. As well as creating concepts, he's a gifted illustrator and character designer whose art is always incredibly lit. Rather than separating concept art from illustration, he sees it as all part of the same medium: storytelling. The challenge, he says, is to find the most interesting way of telling the story.

"The central theme I try to pursue is believability. Not realism, mind you. The fine balance of creating something that can be fantastical, but still not beyond the realm of what could work in a world as true as our own."

❝ Inspiration is a lovely little minx. But Miss Deadline has no time for romance ❞

Expression, for Even, is far more important than technique. He uses a pen and paper as much as Photoshop. He's always trying to simplify his process. A new project moves quickly from "generals to specifics". The artist is conscious of the specific problem he's trying to solve, so uses a kind of reverse-engineering. He knows where he needs to end up and works backwards from there. He's also very willing to try a new approach if the current one isn't working. "I am," he says, "ready to kill my darlings."

Even knows the importance of balancing his artistic side with the level-headed

SEEN EVEN'S COVER ART?
He painted issue 127's cover. To find out how to get a digital copy, turn to page 26.

common sense needed to be a successful freelancer, which is probably why he's currently so in-demand as an art teacher, something he's increasingly doing more of. So far he's shared pithy advice everywhere from London and Warsaw to Zagreb and St Petersburg.

Pablo Picasso said: "Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working." Even offers students his own, remixed version of this famous quote: "Inspiration," he says, "is a lovely little minx when she comes around to spice up the day. But Miss Deadline, she has no time to wait for that kind of romantic affair. She's got stuff to do." ◗

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

Workshops

VIDEO WORKSHOP

Advice from the world's best artists

This issue:

Photoshop

PAINT FOR HONOR CHARACTER ART

Remko Troost talks you through his process and techniques for creating Apollyon, from Ubisoft's upcoming game and this month's cover star

Artist PROFILE

Remko Troost
LOCATION: Canada

Remko is a senior concept artist and illustrator who's working on For Honor at Ubisoft Montreal, where he's also collaborated on titles such as Far Cry and Assassin's Creed.
www.pandraw.com

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

For this workshop I'll show you how I created the art for this month's ImagineFX cover. From the first sketches, looking for a dynamic pose, through to an image that respects For Honor's universe, it's all about being flexible to the various requirements of the editorial layout. The to and fro of painting commissioned art is pretty standard in the industry. I'll reveal what tools I use for dropping my first lines and then how I go over to the values before attacking colours and atmosphere.

We'll also talk about using Warp Tools, which come in very handy for adjusting the character's pose while in the middle of the painting process and how to use and customise several brushes for creating textures for different materials that will follow the perspective and lines of a character's pose.
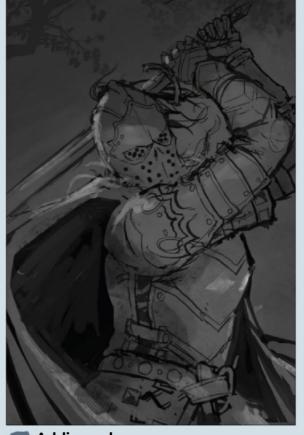
I had the joy and, er, honour to work on this character of Ubisoft's all-new video game, For Honor. It was a blast working with Christian, my art director, and this character has a kind of dark, powerful and mysterious aura.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's my great pleasure to present to you… Apollyon!

PRO SECRETS
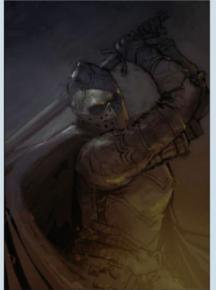
Browse images in Mini Bridge
On my second screen I keep my Mini Bridge open so I can quickly navigate through my PSDs and then my folders while working on several images at a time. It's also handy for when you work with textures above your painting, because you can see and open them quickly.

1 First sketches

I start with several quick sketches in black and white, so ImagineFX can decide on a composition that will fit the cover best while respecting the For Honor universe. I don't use layers or anything fancy here. I put my background on grey, which is easier on the eye for me, then sketch my pose with a simple hard-edged Round brush, with Opacity at around 85 per cent, I flip the canvas while sketching to detect proportional errors.

2 Adding values

Pretty soon I start to add values. Not too much, just enough for me to better understand where I'm heading with my shapes. I sometimes create values, light and shadows in black and white, first especially on more complicated subjects. But I prefer starting on colours – it's more fun this way. I try not to use the Color Picker much, but rather choose colours by hand. This helps to create a more varied colour palette.

3 Time to start painting

I have many methods for starting on an image and this is what keeps my passion going. Trying new things, media and techniques is a way to learn while maintaining my levels of creativity. Following the same painting process time after time will get boring, and reduce your capacity for original thought and ideas. This is especially so if you paint and draw for eight hours or more a day, for many years! In this case I start painting on one canvas, with no layers, using yellows and reds (warm colours) for the light and blues, and cold greens and greyish purples (cold colours) for the shadows. By doing this I'm setting up my lighting scheme.

4 Layers or not?

I don't use layers much and often paint on just one. When I use layers, it's usually for trying out things or when I'm not sure if something will work out. Once it does, I flatten and keep on painting. In the end I might use Adjustment Layers or layers set to Overlay, Multiply or Color Dodge to add textures, light or shadows. Here I add greens and slowly separate out different parts of Apollyon's design by giving them their own colours.

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: SPECKLED 01

I use this regularly, in Overlay Mode on a low Opacity setting, to add overall texture. It also comes in handy for snow, rain (with Motion Blur) and water splashes.

METAL BORDERS

I use this to quickly create a realistic effect for used and worn out metal borders. I create a layer above my metal to paint on, then erase the parts I don't need.

5 Light and realism

Now I slowly start to work my light sources: back and bouncing lights, diffusing lights and so on. A lot comes into play when you try to make things look realistic. I rarely use photos for creating characters (though I do for chainmail – I hate chainmail!). In the end I think that achieving a realistic look depends on how much you observe real life from around you – I do this all the time. It's slower for learning but faster once it's inside your head. Again, I don't use layers here and if something goes wrong I paint back over it again. I find that doing it this way will give you realistic-looking surfaces and a painterly feel, especially if you use Pen Pressure or if you keep your Flow and/or Opacity low.

6 Chainmail, the bane of my life!
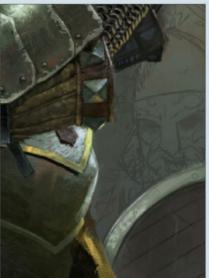
As I said, I hate doing chainmail. Even if it's possible to do it by hand, you can save yourself lots of time in production by using a photo for suggesting materials such as leaves, grass or sand that have to get painted quickly. But even when using photo textures, I prefer to make a custom brush that does the work, so that it still feels more like painting. For example, you could make a little circle, set your brush to Directional and play with the space inside the brush media window to develop a chainmail effect. Here I use a chainmail photo, put it on a layer above the rest, set it to 70 per cent Opacity and put it in perspective using the Warp Tool.

7 Adjusting shapes

Sometimes while you're deep in the painting process, you'll suddenly realise that something's wrong with your pose or proportions. Sometimes it might be a colleague who, while on the way to the coffee machine, throws you a helpful, "That hand's too big" and then keeps on walking. You could use the Liquify Tool to somehow resculpt it, or the Lasso Tool to cut out that part and rework it. But here I add another layer above, with a light colour, set to 70 per cent Opacity, and then on yet another layer above I redraw my lines to correct the area in question.

8 Tackling the background

Just as I did for correcting things before, here I put a layer above my canvas, which I fill up with some lighter colour and then lower the Opacity. Now on another layer above again, I use a hard-edged Round brush that's set to 80 per cent Opacity to roughly sketch in some characters and the ongoing battle in the background. I then delete the layer in between, so I only keep my lines, which I also lower the Opacity on, and quickly block in some values. This will all stay pretty rough and blurry because the background doesn't play a big role in the picture: it's just there to add some storytelling and enhance the overall mood. ➡

10 Applying the final touches

This is one of the most enjoyable parts of the painting: adjusting elements to make the image really pop. I use Color Balance and Levels to tweak colour and mood, and I try to push the twilight atmosphere. I also like to use Adjustment Layers above my canvas during the final tuning stage. I add some noise with a very low Opacity, to give the picture a paper-like appearance. Finally, I play with High Pass/Sharpen and Motion/Zoom/Radial Blur for the moving parts and to better separate the fore, middle and backgrounds. See you on the battlefields (or Valhalla), warriors – Odin owns you all!

9 Textures and details

Now my picture starts to head towards the finish. I begin to add details and textures. I paint most of the textures by hand and then use some texture brushes. I use custom brushes (you can get hold of these along with this issue's resources) which are great for developing a realistic look for leathers, metals or fabrics. I paint them at full Opacity on a new layer and then adjust the layer's Opacity to get them right. I erase what I don't need and drop my layers again to do the final scratches and details by hand, using a simple hard-edged Round brush. Sometimes I use the Lasso tool for the final set of hard lights on hard surfaces.

Shortcuts
Color Balance
Ctrl+B (PC)
Cmd+B (Mac)
I use Color Balance at the end to quickly change mood or overall colours.

PRO SECRETS

Use force lines with poses
It's not always easy to draw dynamic poses starting from the head. Add perspective and it becomes even more difficult. One- or two-minute sketch poses that focus on the action lines will boost your skills. Develop the gesture and avoid depicting details. Try to feel the action and force that's flowing through your character.

Ctrl/CMD + B
Ctrl/CMD + M

11 Meanwhile, back in the real world...

The guy starts talking about Valhalla and Odin, so the workshop is done, right? Well, no. The industry reality is that a client, your art director or whoever sometimes needs to change things. In the middle of the process or sometimes near the end, corrections are needed, so the concept art better fits their new requirements. This is normal, it happens, and you should be able to answer the call and be able to do quick adjustments. In this case, we decide that a clearer background would work better for the final cover layout. As time is against us, I grab an early screenshot from the game and put it in the background. I use the Lasso Tool with one per cent feather to cut my fore- and middle ground out, and start painting on it again for it to fit the new mood. Finally, I use Color Balance and Levels to make it all come together. Did I already say Odin owns you all?

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Clip Studio Paint

POSE YOUR 3D MANNEQUIN

Tan Hui Tian explains how to use Clip Studio Paint's 3D poser as a base for complex figure stances

ImagineFX CORE SKILLS

Artist PROFILE

Tan Hui Tian
LOCATION: Singapore

Tan is a senior illustrator at Collateral Damage Studios. Her academic background is graphic design, and so her illustrations demonstrate a strong sense of design.
http://ifxm.ag/th-tian

Most people will be familiar with the humble wooden drawing mannequin. While its blocky nature doesn't represent the human figure accurately, it's a simple and effective drawing aid.

Clip Studio Paint has a similar, if not far superior, artist mannequin referred to as a 3D drawing doll. The figures are more detailed than your usual wooden mannequin, with models of both sexes and the ability to modify each body type.

There are preset poses, and you can create any pose you like before saving them in the library. This tool is helpful in blocking out a scene with characters, and as a guide for difficult character poses and foreshortening. Coupled with the Perspective Ruler (see issue 140), you can create a lived-in scene with multiple figures that fit the perspective of the environment.

That said, as with the wooden drawing mannequin, the 3D models in Clip Studio Paint aren't fully representative of real humans. The joints can sometimes be rotated at physically impossible angles, and there aren't real muscle interactions in the model to show how the topography of the body changes in different poses. Furthermore, Clip Studio Paint models are anime in nature.
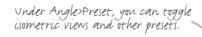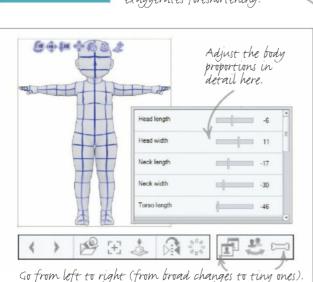
With that in mind, it's key to gather other references and not blindly follow the model. While a handy shortcut, such tools are no substitute for building up core knowledge of the human anatomy.

PRO SECRETS

Dynamic drawing
By drawing over a 3D model, you run the risk of making the movement look stiff. Consider putting your 3D model on its side and drawing it loosely with a clear action line.
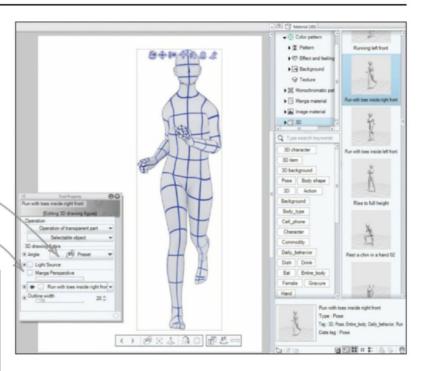
1 Placing a 3D mannequin

The 3D materials are nestled within the Material>3D tab. It's fairly intuitive. To place a figure on the canvas, simply select the pose you want and drag and drop it on to your drawing canvas. It creates a special 3D layer that you can edit as well as lower its Opacity (so that you can use it as a guideline).

Under Angle>Preset, you can toggle isometric views and other presets.

Toggling Manga Perspective exaggerates foreshortening.

Adjust the body proportions in detail here.

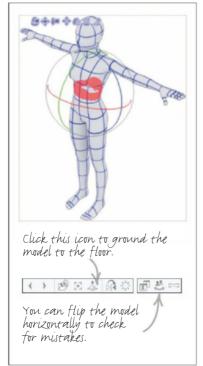*Go from left to right (from broad changes to tiny ones).*
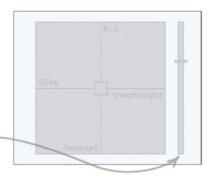
2 Customising the model

You can reset the pose to a default T-pose with the fourth icon from the bottom right. The three icons in a box at the bottom right enable you to change the model's body type. As a rule, work from broad-sweeping changes to the minutiae.
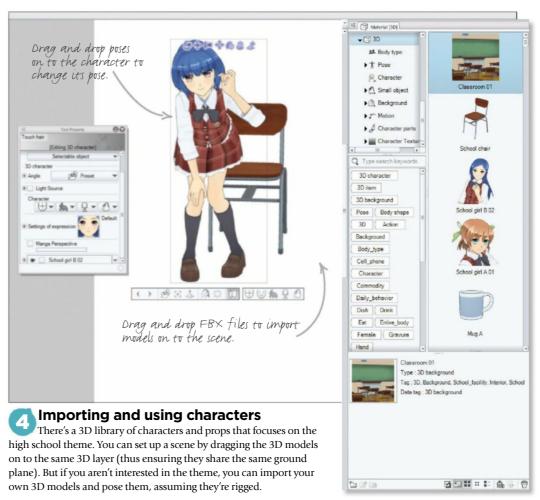
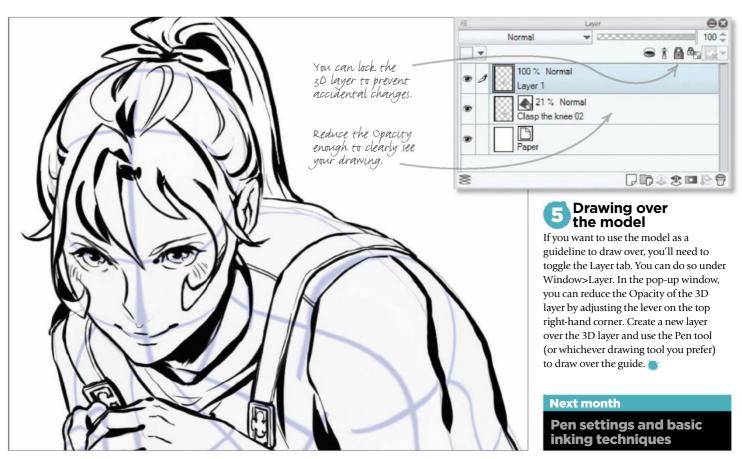*This level, though not indicated, adjusts head-to-body ratio.*

Click this icon to ground the model to the floor.

You can flip the model horizontally to check for mistakes.

3 **Posing the model**
You can tweak posture by clicking and dragging it by its parts. Alternatively, click a section of the model and rotate it along the x-, y-, or z-axis. The first method is less precise but quicker, while the second is more precise for tweaking movement along individual joints.

Drag and drop poses on to the character to change its pose.

Drag and drop FBX files to import models on to the scene.

4 **Importing and using characters**
There's a 3D library of characters and props that focuses on the high school theme. You can set up a scene by dragging the 3D models on to the same 3D layer (thus ensuring they share the same ground plane). But if you aren't interested in the theme, you can import your own 3D models and pose them, assuming they're rigged.

You can lock the 3D layer to prevent accidental changes.

Reduce the Opacity enough to clearly see your drawing.

5 **Drawing over the model**
If you want to use the model as a guideline to draw over, you'll need to toggle the Layer tab. You can do so under Window>Layer. In the pop-up window, you can reduce the Opacity of the 3D layer by adjusting the lever on the top right-hand corner. Create a new layer over the 3D layer and use the Pen tool (or whichever drawing tool you prefer) to draw over the guide.

Next month

Pen settings and basic inking techniques

Sketch Up, Keyshot, Photoshop & Modo

DESIGN A VEHICLE FOR STAR CITIZEN

Jort van Welbergen of production studio Foundry 42 reveals how he follows a concept brief for the upcoming space simulation epic

Artist PROFILE

Jort van Welbergen
LOCATION: England

The concept designer specialises in developing environments, vehicles and tech. He's worked on Horizon: Zero Dawn and Star Citizen, and loves cycling, charity work and Gouda cheese.
http://ifxm.ag/jortvw

Not so long ago I was asked to design the first ground vehicle for the starship-rich universe of Star Citizen. This proved to be one of the most fun designs I've done in my career so far.

Vehicle design is what I enjoy most of all in my work. It's satisfying when I achieve the balance of interactive elements, raw mechanics and compelling aesthetics – for me, that's what concept design is all about. It's therefore my greatest pleasure to give fellow tech heads some insight into the way I go about designing these roving machines.

I'll also give an exclusive look into the design pipeline here at Foundry 42. Designing a vehicle for yourself is completely different from designing one for such a complex game as Star Citizen, where every screen and every panel has to work and open. Yet working with such constraints has its benefits: the resulting vehicle is full of technical solutions that give it its own unique aesthetic.

Finally, a word of thanks to Graeme Palmer and Tomas Woodward who translated my concept into an even better 3D model, and Nathan Dearsley and Paul Jones, for their focused art direction.

1 Analysing your brief

The first part of any design process is to understand the brief. If the art director can supply any key words, so much the better, and try to find out what has been done before you got the job. I tend to make a short list of key words, adjectives, the style the art director's after, and anything else that will inform my design. At this stage I prefer using words instead of images so I don't narrow things down too early. This checklist will be the backbone for the rest of my design. ➤
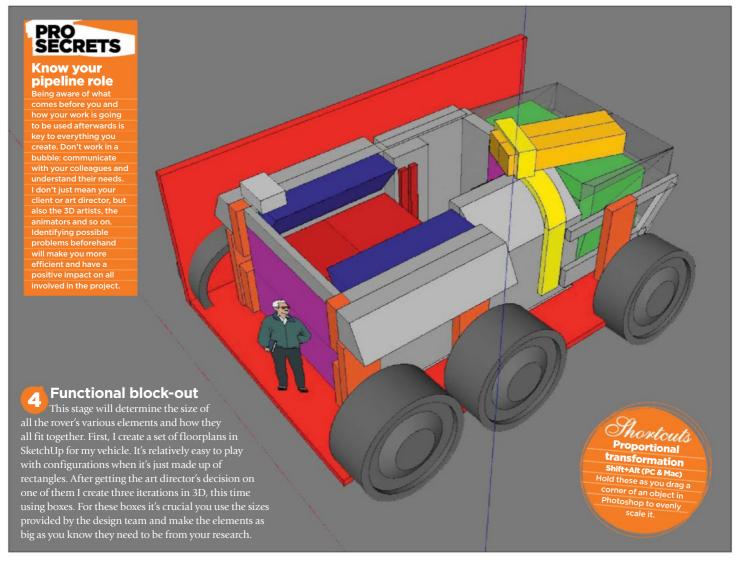
2 Checking the pipeline
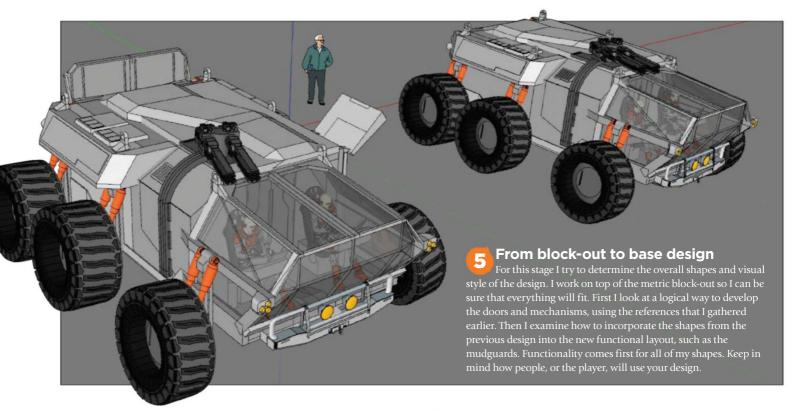
Now it's time to visit everyone else involved with your design. Knowing about possible issues before encountering them can save you a lot of redo work later on. This means going to the design and tech design teams, and the vehicle guys. In the case of this design, players will be running inside the rover, and the vehicle needs to fit inside the cargo hold of the Constellation freighter. These constraints turn out to be the key features of the overall design. Next, I start solving these constraints. I do this before searching for reference images online. This is because the mechanical problems require solutions before I make a start on the design. Once I've figured out the technical obstacles, I start looking for visual design opportunities. Doing this beforehand will narrow down my reference searches, resulting in a more focused workflow. I produce a lot of sketches on paper at this stage.
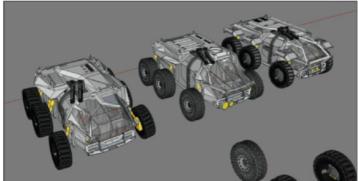
3 Reference gathering

Next up is the traditional reference pull. I tend to use Google and Pinterest for this: Google for the more focused look and Pinterest for inspirational images. I search for military buggies, six-wheeled armoured personal carriers and jet fighters. I try to stick to real-world objects as much as possible instead of exploring designs from other games and films. This is because real-world objects tend to be full of layers of visual information, and so anyone translating this into a new design will always spot new angles or interpret things differently.

PRO SECRETS

Know your pipeline role

Being aware of what comes before you and how your work is going to be used afterwards is key to everything you create. Don't work in a bubble: communicate with your colleagues and understand their needs. I don't just mean your client or art director, but also the 3D artists, the animators and so on. Identifying possible problems beforehand will make you more efficient and have a positive impact on all involved in the project.

4 Functional block-out

This stage will determine the size of all the rover's various elements and how they all fit together. First, I create a set of floorplans in SketchUp for my vehicle. It's relatively easy to play with configurations when it's just made up of rectangles. After getting the art director's decision on one of them I create three iterations in 3D, this time using boxes. For these boxes it's crucial you use the sizes provided by the design team and make the elements as big as you know they need to be from your research.

Shortcuts
Proportional transformation
Shift+Alt (PC & Mac)
Hold these as you drag a corner of an object in Photoshop to evenly scale it.

5 From block-out to base design

For this stage I try to determine the overall shapes and visual style of the design. I work on top of the metric block-out so I can be sure that everything will fit. First I look at a logical way to develop the doors and mechanisms, using the references that I gathered earlier. Then I examine how to incorporate the shapes from the previous design into the new functional layout, such as the mudguards. Functionality comes first for all of my shapes. Keep in mind how people, or the player, will use your design.

6 Developing 3D thumbnails

Now I make three completely different versions based on the base design I created from the functional block out. Usually the art director or client will ask you to mix and match elements from all three designs. I then present these thumbnails to the art director and make a final decision on which elements to go with. Pictured is the thumbnail that the art director likes best. I then add the mudguards from the marketing model. I work from the shapes of the base model, making the shapes flow more. I want to get away from the boxy shape.
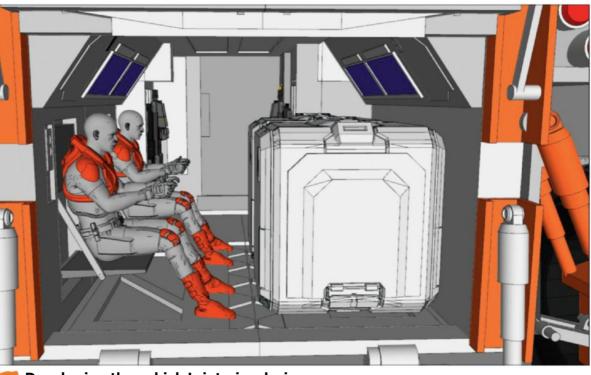
7 Finalising the exterior 3D model

Now it's time for the fun part: adding those all-important details. For me this is just finalising and polishing every element, and making things align so that the lines flow better over the design. This is a very organic and personal process. The key thing to keep in mind is to refine rather than radically alter the design. However, sometimes you'll need more bolts, vents, cables, support frames and so on, to make your model look more realistic. Study your references carefully and see how similar designs work in the real world. ➡

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: SCRATCHES

I use this brush at 6px size to create scratches and edge weathering.

TEXTURE

I use this brush to add weathering and interesting texture to otherwise clean surfaces.

8 Developing the vehicle's interior design

Interior designs are usually even more restricted than the exterior. This is because, especially with Star Citizen vehicles, the space you're designing is small and has to be traversed by player models with invisible hitboxes. Therefore, low hanging cables and similar tech are to be avoided. I try to use elements that fold into the wall, studying aeroplane chairs and desks. The interior is also a good place to use different patterns and materials than the usual painted metal, so I examine interior photos of military helicopters.

PRO SECRETS

Design with principles
Try to base your design on key words and plausible function instead of fantastical features. Think of how your design might work in real life and then come up with elements that support those functional principles. They can be mechanical in function, but also help to convey the overall feeling of the design.

9 Finishing the interior

Before I create the final 3D model I look primarily at the interiors of similarly styled vehicles already in the game. The interior work is usually the hardest stage of the process, in terms of building the 3D renders and setting things up quickly. This is because light bounces around a lot in such a confined space, and as a result recreating that effect realistically really pushes your computer's CPU to the limit. To save time, I identify elements that would be easier to depict in Photoshop, thus reducing what needs to be done in 3D. In this instance it's the cloth-like pattern on the interior walls of the rover.

10 Go into Keyshot for lighting and camera angles

Your final artwork will have to do two things: get approval from the art director or client; and inform the 3D artists how to model the concept. Keep this in mind when setting up your camera angles and lighting. Marketing images can always be made at a later stage. The 3D guys will have a better time translating your images into 3D if you put in the groundwork. I need to show all of the rover's functions: the folding seats, the cargo ramp, and the folding wheels and gun, leaving nothing for the 3D artists to guess at.

11 Painting the exterior in Photoshop

The first thing I do when I get my base renders is make a list of all the changes I want to make. For the rover I look at how to get back to the faceted look that I was originally going for. This means simplifying surfaces wherever possible, in particular the area around the escape hatch. I don't change too much however, because I need to stick to the metric block-out I started out with. In addition, I check in with the 3D department, to ensure that the new shapes I'm coming up with are physically possible.

12 Weathering and depicting surfaces

I try to introduce imperfections into most of the edges and surfaces. I do this with Photoshop's Scatter and Smudge brushes. For the wheels I use mud textures with blending modes, before masking them out with more texture brushes. Don't spread out your imperfections evenly. If you look at real-world objects you'll often find where there's the possibility of contact with other objects.

13 Use photobashing to develop the rover's interior

Photobashing saves time when it comes to depicting the interior of the rover. While the patterns look less refined, they're enough to inform the 3D guys what the art director and I have decided on, which is ultimately what matters most. I also change a lot of the lighting to produce a more realistic look in terms of light fall-off. Stickers and decals such as warning labels help to bring an extra layer of depth to my design.

14 Providing support up the production pipeline

The final concept isn't where my job stops. 3D production is the next step and the team is bound to find new issues or run into problems. I therefore keep in touch with them throughout their process as well, providing extra sketches or advice where necessary. For the rover there are a couple of elements and angles that don't look right in the renders, so the extra sketches help the 3D guys enormously.

Traditional skills & Photoshop
GENERATE IDEAS FOR CHARACTERS

Nadia Enis shares her method for developing new ideas for character design and making them work for the professional video game industry

Artist PROFILE
Nadia Enis
LOCATION: Germany

Nadia works as a freelance concept artist, developing new character designs for video games. She lives in Berlin and says that comics are her secret passion.
www.nadiaenis.com

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

Whenever I'm invited to create a character "in my own style" I'm aware that this gives me the opportunity to really push myself and go crazy with the design. But I also have to make sure that the concept still works as a video game character. This means it has to be readable in its environment, the design has to support the game function of the character, and the technical artists have to be able to rebuild the design within the game's technical restrictions. So I separate these stages into two distinctive steps.

I'll first show you how to go completely nuts and push your ideas and concepts to the extreme. Then I'll show how I take the design and clean it up for professional use. A key aspect is creating a beauty shot, which clearly shows the attitude and movement of the character.

My painting process combines traditional and digital media, but my steps don't require mastery in any of these mediums. They require an open mind, patience with yourself, and pushing through until you have that great idea.

Because creating a piece of concept art involves working within limits, here's the character brief I'll work to: create a non-playable character (NPC) for a 3D role-playing video game, with a merchant game function and a wicked attitude. And just for fun, the shape will be page-filling and the colours will be flashy. So get your pencils ready and follow me!

PRO SECRETS
Make an action for selections
1. Click with the Magic Wand outside the complex shape.
2. Go to Window>Action
3. Create a new action by clicking the New Action icon.
4. Select a function key you want to trigger the action, say F5. Now hit Record – the red dot shows that you're recording.
5. Go to Select>Modify>Expand, enter two pixels and hit OK.
6. Now stop recording by hitting the square next to the red dot.
7. If you fill the layer beneath the outline you'll see that it's clean.
8. Now Invert Selection (Cmd+Shift+I), and you've selected your complex shape without artefacts.
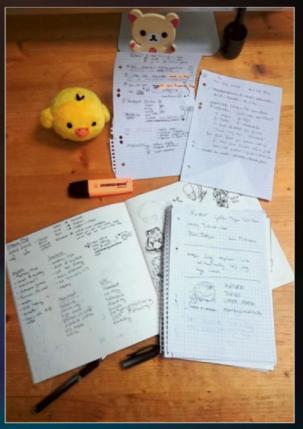
1 Explore sources of inspiration
The brief is to create a Merchant NPC with a street-wise attitude, who'll appear in a 3D RPG. My goal is to create a strong design with artistic value, so I explore photo books, music, art and literature for imagery that provokes an emotion. I take in as much as possible and make notes on whatever catches my eye. Scribbles at this stage are often ugly, so don't worry about that.
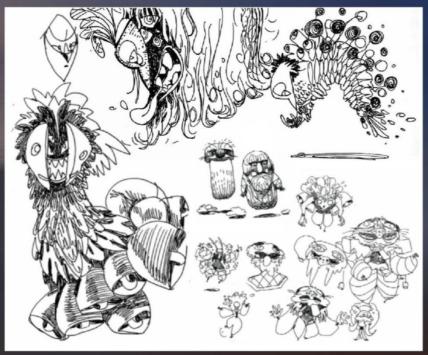
2 Clearly defined game role
Now to the character's game function. Given the brief I write down whatever I associate with the terms "merchant" and "NPC". Then I separate my list into two: things that are necessary for the character's readability; and those that aren't. Exploring unconscious design decisions and then discarding them gives me room to freely explore outside the box. ➛

3 Time to go wild!
With this conceptual foundation in place, I start drawing whatever comes to mind. I want to find my own, unique source of inspiration. It's at this stage that I get an idea for my character for the first time. I decide on complex patterns and simple, clean-cut clothing to balance them. I want an eerie-looking face and lots of items attached to the body.

4 Be prepared to push an idea
Whenever I hit an interesting idea I stop and redraw it three times, each time pushing it further, changing the main volumes and the level of detail. I also have to think about whether or not to add a main element, and decide that it'll be a house. To keep my drawing bold, I only use Fineliners here.

PRO SECRETS

Add flavour
To make a character more convincing or appealing, sometimes it's enough to add an unnecessary detail that tells a story outside of the game. A cup for dice on the belt, a small necklace with a ring on it or a pocket full of papers will work wonders. I try to think of an actual person I know, or someone from a TV show. I take some elements or shapes from that reference and then add it to my design.

5 Pick the strong designs
After taking a break I return to look at the sketches and immediately mark those designs that catch my eye first. Then I mark convincing attitudes and then strong shapes. I add notes to remind me later what I saw in each. I look out for opportunities to create clean volumes and contrast, because they add interest.

6 My first set of concepts
In Photoshop I take my good ideas and combine them into strong, single designs, keeping them loose but readable. I ensure each design has a clear focus. I select a shape using the Lasso and Magic Wand, then add colours or values. If you have a clear vision for the colours, go for it. Otherwise, work in greyscale for now.

What makes a good design?
Good design supports the function of the character and is easy to make look cool in-game. This design has a simple 3D volume, details are textures, and animation can be made using VFX. To help players interact with our NPC I designed something visually interesting, with a focus on the upper half – ideal for the conversation camera to zoom in on. A player character would demand a lot of mockups in the actual game, to design for the correct camera angles. Always consider the required context in each case.

7 Translate for your medium
My final medium is 3D, so I have to break the design down into simple volumes and translate details into textures. I ensure that posture and gesture can be animated easily while everything else can be summed up with minimal effort. In a team I would work closely with the animator and modeller during this stage.

8 Beauty shot thumbnails
I do a lot of beauty shot thumbnails until I get a feeling for the character. A good beauty shot shows both the attitude and the atmosphere of the game. Showing the main volumes is more important than showing design details. These are the criteria for choosing the right sketch to take forward; I choose III.

Shortcuts
Invert Selection
Cmd+Shift+I (Mac)
Ctrl+Shift+I (PC)
Instantly deselect an existing selection and select unselected areas instead.

9 Shapes are your friend
After drawing a clean sketch based on the thumbnail, I use the Pen tool to create the different shapes on separate layers. I keep things simple here because I can add details later using a mask. I then quickly airbrush some shadows indicating my main light source, to get a feeling for the overall look. After that I start rendering and adding details.

10 Sprint to the finish
To make sure I don't overwork it, I try to finish every element as quickly as possible. For this, selecting areas with the Lasso is key. I change the feathering from 0 to 8 pixels and add texture, smaller volumes and effects this way. I use a textured brush to fill my selection until I achieve the desired effect. I continue defining volumes and textures until it's finished.

Artist insight
BUILD BETTER ENVIRONMENTS

World building environments for video games has its fair share of challenges. **Olly Lawson** shares his pro tips to help get you started

Artist PROFILE
Olly Lawson
LOCATION: England

Olly is a freelance concept artist and illustrator working from Cambridge. His passions include painting, cooking, the piano and writing about himself in the third person.
www.ollylawson.co.uk

For this workshop I'll be bringing you my tips and ideas to consider when designing environments, from the researching and idea generation through to the final polishing stages. I'll be taking you along the same process I used to generate these in-game areas, with some key advice along the way.

I'm tasked with bringing to life a long-abandoned island palace, based on simple line art and boards of reference images from the client. There are many ways to approach this kind of assignment, but here I'll show you a method I currently prefer for its consistent results and efficiency.

I begin by blocking in basic shapes in Google SketchUp, rendering out in Keyshot to show the forms and add lighting, then finally painting over the result to add colour, detail and life.

SketchUp is free software from Google that has a very gentle learning curve, but as with any software, you get out of it what you put in. Lots of professional artists use it to quickly block in buildings, or environments. I like to work in it for simple laying-out because the software can be fast, it interferes very little with my intentions, and the limitations of it being a simple program stop me from getting distracted with adding details and materials. I use Keyshot to render out my images, simply to add nice bounce lighting and proper shadows, something SketchUp can't do without plugins.

These concepts are designed for Spellstrike (**www.spellstrikegame.com**), an upcoming independent strategy game that I had the pleasure to work for.

So, let's begin building…

FLOOR PATTERN

RELIC AREA

TO MANSION

WHITE PERENNIAL VINES (NO TEAM)

N

TEAM COLOUR FLOWERS

TO THE CONCLAVE/OVERLOOK/GARDENS

1 GET BETTER IN YOUR OWN TIME

This is the first, most important step in commercial work. When working on personal projects, you have both the time and liberty to experiment with new software and approaches, but it's a different game when working on a team project. You can prepare by focusing on experimentation while not doing client work, and thus finding new workflows that can bring new solutions. I'd been experimenting for a while using SketchUp, Keyshot and paintovers, and it's resulted in a very reliable workflow.
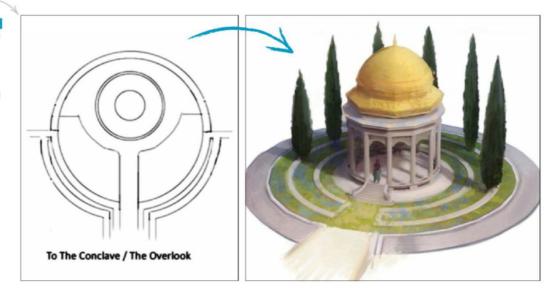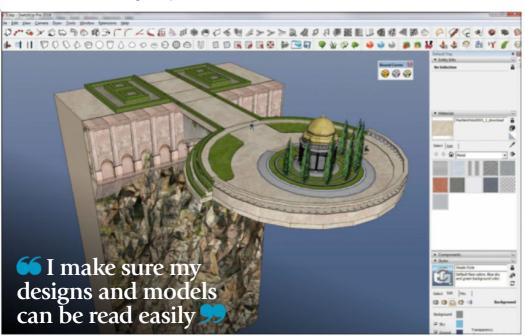
2 COMMUNICATION WITH THE CLIENT IS THE KEY

For this project I've been tasked with bringing designs such as the first one shown here in plan view into this painted scene (the second image), and you have to satisfy two criteria here. First, the client always has something in mind for what they want; and second, they've hired you because they know you'll come up with something even better. For this reason, communication with the team is key, and you should never be afraid to ask every question you need to ask at every stage of the entire process, if you have any doubts over the direction.

To The Conclave / The Overlook

3 LEARNING YOUR SOFTWARE
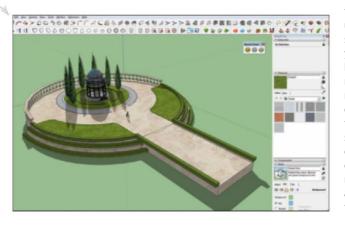
I block out each area in SketchUp. I use an erosion plugin to instantly give some volumetric noise to this wall, but most of the time I find myself working with just the default features. There are hundreds of free and useful plugins for SketchUp to speed up whatever you might need to do, from adding crowds to deforming shapes.

66 I make sure my designs and models can be read easily 99

5 WORKING WITH SKETCHUP'S COMPONENTS

I think components are vital, but they're often overlooked when using SketchUp. Right-click and select Make Component to turn your object into not just a group, but an Instanced Group. This means you can copy and paste it multiple times, and whatever you do to one Instance will be done to the rest. Modular building like this saves lots of time, and components can be nested inside other components. Everything in my models is cleanly split into these, and controlling this grouping helps to prevent future headaches. ➡

4 UNDERSTAND THE GAME'S CAMERA

This game is viewed from above, so I make sure my designs can be read easily this way. This is a spawn area, and a path leads the player towards the island, so I keep the grass and path clean and simple to create the maximum visual contrast between them. Even with debris painted in, I'm happy all the character models will read cleanly. I'm not tempted to model the kind of taller structures you'd get in a first-person game.

6 RESEARCH EVERYTHING

I research extensively before every gig, and for this assignment I find myself reading through some second-hand gardening books, where I discover some interesting historical rules for Italian garden design. I use real-world expertise to help me visually solve problems and create interesting spaces, instead of just randomly experimenting myself and hoping for the best. Be an information sponge, and soak up knowledge about everything you can! I often find books to be a much better resource for this than the information you can find on the internet.
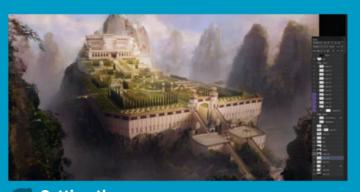
7 CREATING MY FINAL ENVIRONMENT ILLUSTRATION

Olly explains how, once he's finalised his design concept, he's able to showcase the entire area as an illustration

1 Import the 3D model
After merging the 3D areas, I can easily create quick thumbnails to paint an illustration over. After selecting one of them, I take it into Photoshop and start to immediately tweak colours and remove edges with some blurring. I need to unify big areas and remove the excessive details that make things look computer-generated.

2 Setting the scene
I find some scenery photos that fit the required mood and place them behind the render to quickly get a unified 'full picture' to better paint over. I use Hard Light blending layers to tweak the colours and add fog, as well as Soft Light layers to punch some soft warm orange to the centre.

3 Add feeling and atmosphere
I continue to 'unify' by making bigger, simpler areas of light and shadow, pushing a sunset mood to give the illustration more feeling, with looser strokes bringing it some life. This is a very quick process, because all the tricky questions are solved in the modelling and rendering stages.

9 ORTHOGRAPHICS!

This means orthographic views – things seen straight from the side, front, above or below, with no perspective. The big drawback of working in SketchUp is that your models won't be usable as actual game assets, but you can still make things much easier for the 3D team by providing orthographic views. You can do this in SketchUp by clicking Camera>Parallel Projection and then Camera>Standard Views. I combine SketchUp and Keyshot screenshots for these on 50 per cent Opacity, so the shapes will clearly read, but there are some shadows to help describe the forms a bit better.

8 WORKING WITH RENDERS

You have several options after making your model. You can work straight from SketchUp itself, which has some limited styling options, but I prefer to save time painting shadows and reflections and render out my models. It's not really important which renderer you use, but I'm currently enjoying Keyshot, since it's super fast to set up and work with. This render just involved dragging the SketchUp file with all the default materials into Keyshot, turning up the quality and taking a screenshot! You can see my use of repeating components here clearly, before painting over them.

> 66 I define a simple colour scheme early on and keep it consistent between areas 99

10 CHOOSING THE COLOURS

I define the simple colour scheme early on, and keep this consistent between areas. Colour is a powerful conveyor of information and mood. Because this is more of a palace than a fortress, there are gold domes, flower beds and hedge mazes. The map is divided between two teams, so I adorn each team's areas with either red or blue flowers, and a central shared area covered with violets. If you struggle with colour, try to paint outside with either a tablet or watercolours, and you'll be a pro in no time! ➼
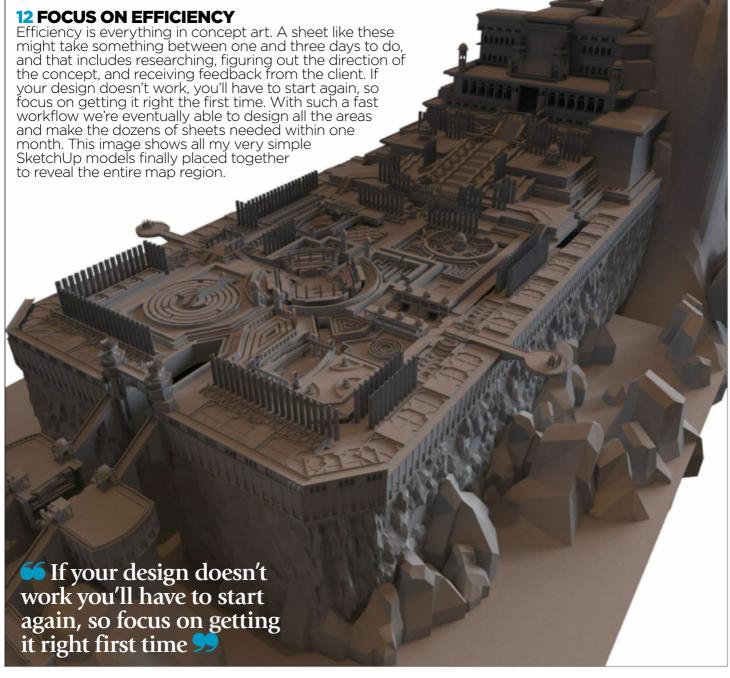
11 BREAKOUTS!

Breakouts are simply enlargements of particular assets in a concept sheet. For visually important objects you can take it to another sheet and do "turnarounds" to properly communicate to the modellers in higher detail. One of the regions on my map includes two statues of a god and goddess, so this is an early pitch for what they might look like. It's important to note that when you're painting for concept art, always try to paint in a keenly accurate 3D space, so your 2D design will work when it's rotated and given depth.

WORN GOLD/BRASS DOMES

ORTHOS

N

S

OVERGROWN FLOWERPOT

12 FOCUS ON EFFICIENCY

Efficiency is everything in concept art. A sheet like these might take something between one and three days to do, and that includes researching, figuring out the direction of the concept, and receiving feedback from the client. If your design doesn't work, you'll have to start again, so focus on getting it right the first time. With such a fast workflow we're eventually able to design all the areas and make the dozens of sheets needed within one month. This image shows all my very simple SketchUp models finally placed together to reveal the entire map region.

> 66 If your design doesn't work you'll have to start again, so focus on getting it right first time 99

13 CLEANING UP 3D

A simple SketchUp model like this will be strange to paint directly onto, because when every plane, edge and value is so perfect and square, there is a kind of 'dead' feeling. I don't like working on top of something like this, so I duplicate the render to a new, low Opacity layer, and throw on filters like Smart Blur and smudge the paint around a bit with a Mixer brush or the Smudge tool until it's almost hazy with blur. Now when painted on top, the fresh paint and details will become sharp focal points to the render underneath.
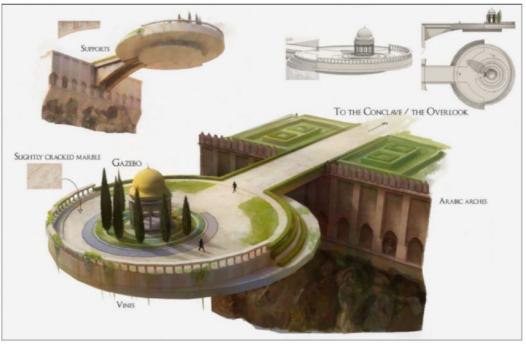
14 Z-DEPTH

When you render out your model, you can also make different kinds of renders, including a Z-Depth pass. This creates a greyscale image with areas in the foreground dark, and going back in space goes along a gradient to white. Search online for how to create this in Keyshot, V-Ray or even SketchUp by just using 'fog'. In Photoshop I use this to mask overlays, or create fog with selections, enhancing the overlapping of forms in space. This enables me to quickly select the areas behind the bridge so I can boost the contrast and add depth.

SUPPORTS

TO THE CONCLAVE / THE OVERLOOK

SLIGHTLY CRACKED MARBLE

GAZEBO

ARABIC ARCHES

VINES

WORN GOLD/BRASS DOMES

EAST/WEST STAIRCASE DETAILS

STAIRCASE WITH TWO ARCH SUPPORTS

MAIN ENTRANCE

TOTALLY OVERGROWN ENTRANCE AREA

MIX OF BROAD, DECIDUOUS AND TALL CYPRESS TREES
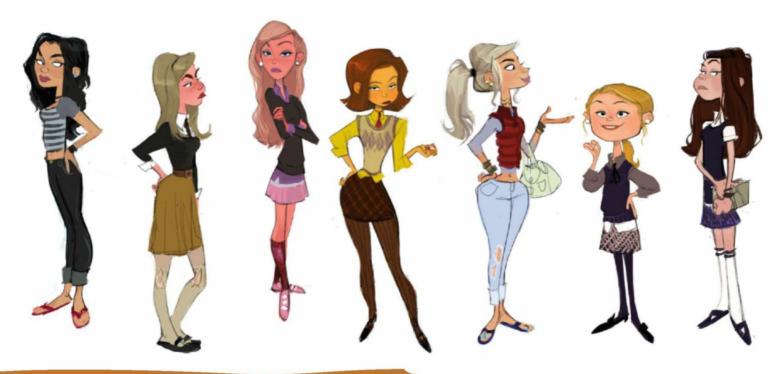
15 DRAWING THE APPROPRIATE LINE

A concept artist is a visual designer. We've done our real-world research but are designing a fantasy world – so how do we bridge the two? Too fantastical or abstract and your designs will only confuse players, but too realistic and it's not what you expect in a fun, fantasy game. It's up to you to decide where to draw this line on each project. I make sure there are enough supports and big structures in this huge but inaccessible area, which in turn lets the near-floating spawn platforms shown before stand out as special.

Jana Heidersdorf
creates a mixed
media illustration
inspired by
Guillermo
del Toro.

Traditional skills, Sketch Up & Photoshop

COLLABORATE ON AN AIRSHIP DESIGN

From sketch to finish, see how three artists at **Foundation Art Group** work together to draw, design and light a Final Fantasy-inspired airship

Join us and dive deep into the mindsets of three artists and designers, as we take you behind the scenes at how we work at the Foundation Art Group (**www.foundationartgroup.com**). In this special workshop, we'll show you how we collaborate to draw, design and paint a Final Fantasy-inspired airship.

The most important factor that we want you to keep in mind while reading or watching this workshop is that a strong foundation is key. Although we're using standard art software here, all our creative decisions reflect our group's primary focus: education.

Many artists rush to learn the latest software tricks, or try to emulate trending painting techniques, while too few spend their time developing their core design and drawing skills. That's why we've focused this workshop on using basic tools and software: pen and paper, SketchUp and Photoshop. The techniques used when working in the software are also very limited. And our collaborative approach is meant to give you a taster of how artists work in a pipeline, at industry level.

In SketchUp, we'll be bashing together parts of models found throughout their 3D Warehouse (see step 6). It won't require a lot of 3D techniques to do so – just a familiarity with the program. Meanwhile, in Photoshop, we'll utilise basic Adjustment layers, as well as photos for textural detail.

However, the fundamental of this workshop all began with the sketches of the flying ship. We want to show you how some rough marks on paper can result in a strong design that's ready to be passed up the pipeline. Okay, here we go!
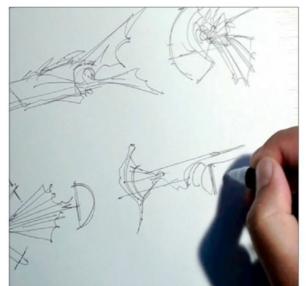
PART 1 JOHN PARK: RAPID IDEA DEVELOPMENT

Artist PROFILE

John Park
LOCATION: US

John is both a concept artist working in the film and video game industry, and a teacher and co-founder of Brainstorm School in Burbank, California.
www.jparked.com

1 Generate plenty of rough sketches

After gathering reference and doing your research, it's time to begin sketching out some loose forms and ideas. It's best to do these in a flat profile view, since we'll be filling them in with black shortly. Go wild! The more you explore here, the more you'll have to choose from during subsequent phases.

Shortcuts
Layer Mask
Alt+Shift+Cmd+K (Mac)
Alt+Shift+Ctrl+K (PC)
(custom shortcut)
Applies a mask to a layer and inverts it, enabling you to paint white to reveal areas.
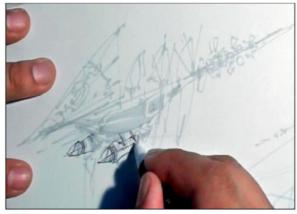
2 Identifying a strong silhouette
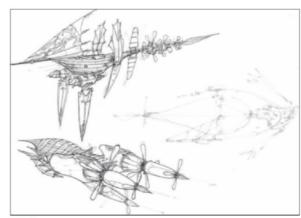
Now comes the fun part! It's time to get out your brush pen or black markers, and fill in your shapes. Don't restrict yourself to the lines that you previously laid in – instead, think in terms of both positive and negative shapes. Giving your airship a unique form and visual language will also unify the design and help sell the idea to your art director or prospective client.

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

3 Lay in your markers
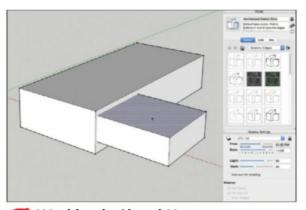
Now I select a few of the silhouettes to explore. With a 30 per cent grey marker, I lay in a three-quarter perspective view version of my ship. This will now help me visualise my forms and loosely sketch on top to reveal the designs that I have in my head. This is a technique that's used by many professionals, and helps to quickly generate variations and new ideas.

4 Refine your lines

Here we have three sketches all in difference phases. The middle design is in the original markers, while the top one has been loosely sketched on top of, and the bottom is been refined a little more. Consider blowing up the sketch, reducing the opacity and further refining your drawing, because this will help save time later on down the line. ➦
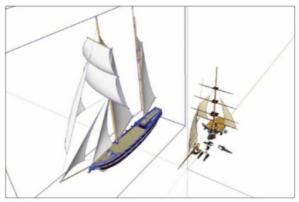
PRO SECRETS

Why work traditionally?
When in doubt, sketch it out! One thing that traditional media allows for is rapid, loose exploration. There are times when we become too precious while using software because we're afraid to destroy our image. With traditional sketching, we know that the sketch isn't going to be the final result, so this enables us to loosen up and explore some really cool ideas in the process.

PART 2 DANIEL PARK: TAKING THE IDEA INTO 3D

Artist PROFILE
Daniel Park
LOCATION: US

In 2006 Daniel graduated from ArtCenter College of Design, and is now a visual artist busy working in the industrial design, entertainment and architectural sectors.
http://ifxm.ag/daniel-p

5 Working in SketchUp

The second part of this workshop will be to take the approved idea and bash together a rough model using Google's SketchUp (**www.sketchup.com**). 3D is a daunting tool for some artists, but SketchUp really helps to bridge the gap for beginners. There is a free version of the program, and learning how to navigate and rough in geometry is a user-friendly experience.
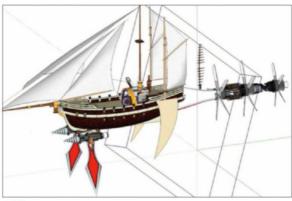
6 Visit the Warehouse!

One of SketchUp's main advantages is being able to use the Warehouse. This resource is filled with designs that have been uploaded by SketchUp users for sharing with the community. At this stage in the process, it's a great time to look around, find a couple of rough models to get you started, and begin to break things apart so you can use them for kit-bashing.
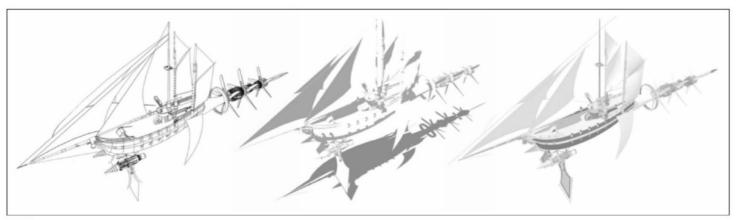
7 Kit-bash individual assets

As you can see, utilising the contents of the SketchUp Warehouse can give you a great head start on designing a fantasy vehicle. I'm only using parts and pieces of models here, and I'm still staying true to the original design. Most of the hard work was done earlier when we laid out our sketch – now I'm finding pieces in the Warehouse to bring that idea to life.

8 Finalising the rough 3D model

Here's an almost complete version of the model. You can tell that I've utilised pieces from the Warehouse throughout the model: turbines, boats, drills, and so on. At this phase, I'm also unconcerned by the texture information provided from the pieces because – just as with real-life kit-bashing – we'll be painting it grey very shortly…

9 Save out multiple passes of the model

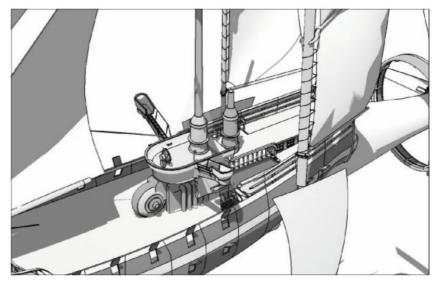Now it's time to save out the model for further refinement. I save out a line pass, a shadow pass and a general 3D model pass of the ship. These three passes alone will be able to give us a very nice head-start when it comes to finalising the design in Photoshop.

10 Composite everything together

With a white layer on bottom, I take all three passes and align them perfectly in Photoshop. Then I set each layer mode to Multiply to reveal the layer underneath. I would also encourage creating a mask by selecting the area around the outline, inverting the selection, and filling it with black on a new layer.

PART 3 MATTHEW ZIKRY: LIGHTING AND TEXTURES

11 Lay in the shadows

It's time to refine a shadow pass of the model. Here, I fill in the mask with a 25 per cent grey value. On top of that layer, I create a Levels layer and clip that into my mask layer. I can then drop the white point until we get a dark version of the ship. Now I mask that layer and paint white to reveal the shadows.

12 Overlay a range of textures

With my shadows in place based off my general lighting direction, I find multiple photos of various textures that I'd like to add to my design. I utilise Overlay layers at this point, and crush the black and white points of my textures so that the shadows underneath are left intact.

13 Refine the textures

At this stage I have a good idea of how my textures are beginning to read on the ship. Now I make use of additional photo textures on Normal layers, while adjusting Levels and Curves to match the layers underneath. The benefit of working in greyscale is that it enables me to focus purely on values, and not complicate the process with colour.

14 Putting in the finishing touches

A few final touch-ups and we're done! I brighten up the top sail, as well as some of the railings on the ship. I also darken some shadow areas on the boat itself, to further reinforce the lighting scheme. With all textures, materials and shadow information in place, the airship is ready to be passed on to the next phase of the production pipeline. Thanks for joining us!

Artist PROFILE

Matthew Zikry
LOCATION: US

Matthew is a concept designer in the entertainment industry, who's working on film, video game and theme-park designs in Los Angeles.
www.matthewzikry.com

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP CS6

CUSTOM BRUSHES: SOFT BRUSH

Very useful for blending textures and creating soft shadows while painting on adjustment layers.

TEXTURE BRUSH

A great brush to help break up forms and add texture variation without having to use a photo.

SILHOUETTE BRUSH

Create a solid shape with no transparent opacity, enabling you to lock the layer and paint within it.

Photoshop
SHARPEN YOUR PAINTING PROCESS

Carmen Sinek illustrates Sylvanas Windrunner from World of Warcraft, while explaining how to stay organised to minimise painting mistakes

Artist PROFILE

Carmen Sinek
LOCATION: US

Carmen is a freelance concept artist and illustrator. Her clients include companies such as Activision, Blizzard, Lucasfilm and Wizards of the Coast.
www.carmensinek.com

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

When illustration is your job, having a streamlined process can save time and reduce the amount of obstacles and frustrations you'll run into. It can also help you to achieve a more consistent level of quality and help you better predict your own work times.

I'm going to show you how I break down the many parts of painting into smaller steps so I can focus on one at a time. It's almost impossible for me to avoid all unforeseen complications, but the number has been significantly reduced ever since I began trying to establish a consistent process for my daily work.

My process consistently evolves as new skills become more comfortable or I find better ways to approach my professional assignments. It takes time to find a process that works for you, and a great deal of patience to stick with it over the weeks and months. However, the more you work with it, the more that many of the steps become second nature, and the faster you'll become at your day-to-day art tasks. This opens up more time for experimenting with other styles, mediums and processes, as well as for personal work.

When following another artist's process, remember that it's only one of many ways to make good work. Give it a try, and adopt the things that work for you, but don't be afraid to leave behind the ones that don't.

PRO SECRETS

Use a keypad
A few years ago I picked up a gaming keypad (Razer's Nostromo, which has since been discontinued). It took a while to train my muscle memory, but once I did it became an essential part of my work flow. Creating new adjustment layers with the correct name and layer mode, accessing my favourite brushes and so on, are just a tap away, enabling me to stay focused on the painting.

1 Have a clear goal
Knowing what I'm trying to accomplish is important, so I start out with a fairly advanced digital sketch to guide me. Sometimes the goal is to experiment with new techniques, while other times it's to illustrate a specific scene or moment in a narrative. This is a storytelling portrait, with the goal of showcasing Sylvanas' personality while also hinting at the turbulent history of the character.

2 Get the drawing right
I can't always properly execute this step, but I've at least learned the importance of trying. Get as much accurate information as possible in your initial drawing. Rushing ahead has been the downfall of many an artist, so think of it as an exercise in patience and self-control. While you might change things later, aiming for an accurate drawing makes it much easier to keep things under control. ➤➤

Putting your base value in the layer title will help you keep things organised.

3 Establish local values

The local value is the value of the material itself, independent of light and shadow. This relationship between local values must be maintained throughout the process. If her armour's base value is 20 per cent darker than her skin tone, then it'll remain 20 per cent darker in either light or shadow. This is a general rule; adjustments will be made later, based on the materials.

4 Block in large shapes

I tend to keep things flat and blocky in the early stages. This helps me focus on my value structure and defining the initial read of the image. I'm thinking mostly in planes at this moment, trying to suggest the form under the line drawing.

Shortcuts
Proof Colours
Cmd+Y (Mac)
Ctrl+Y (PC)
In Photoshop, you can edit the colour setup by going to View>Proof Setup.

PRO SECRETS

Set up your own Actions
Photoshop's Actions panel enables you to automate almost any task. You can see a demonstration of this in my video workshop, but taking the time to set up actions for your most common tools will pay back big time. I use these for creating layers with the right blending mode and name, as well as for selecting my most-used brushes. You can map these actions to a keyboard command for easy access.

I create a palette of colours with the Brightness set to 50 per cent, then pick from them using a Soft Light layer.

5 Adding base colours

Sometimes I need to be able to see the bigger picture to know if I'm heading in the right direction. I use a Soft Light layer to add my first colours, focusing first on local colour the same way I did with the values. I keep this on a separate layer for now, so I can turn it on and off when I'm rendering in greyscale.

6 Adjust for focus

To help maintain the focus on Sylvanas' expression and character, I use a Multiply layer and the good old fuzzy Round brush to push back everything around her face, and to soften the edges where her body meets the background.

7 Greyscale rendering

This is the most time-consuming part of the process. Using the structure I've put into place, I start painting it out in greyscale, defining the large forms first. This is a crucial stage, so don't let yourself get sucked into details before you've established the larger forms correctly. Down that path lies much pain and suffering, as Yoda might say.

8 Lighting the colours

Usually when I feel my rendering is about 75 per cent of the way there, I'll stop to work in my colours using Soft Light, Color and Overlay layers. I showed in a previous workshop (issue 118) how I use Adjustment layers to start my colouring process, and a shorter video demo is included as part of this workshop.

9 Making anatomy adjustments

This is where things start getting messy. Because there are inaccuracies in my drawing, I need to adjust some things that look off to me. Her head is slightly too big and the position of her chest and arms are a little low. I lasso these areas, copy them to a new layer and adjust appropriately.

10 Tackle the background

I want a simple but meaningful background, so I've roughed in some shapes that resemble her bow and parts of the Forsaken faction symbol. As tempting as it is to paint out all of those bone pieces, I try to keep them simple to avoid pulling too much focus away from Sylvanas herself. I chose the bright green colour and glow to be reminiscent of Undercity. ➤➤

Shortcuts

Step Backward
Cmd+Alt+Z (Mac)
Ctrl+Alt+Z (PC)
Step Backward enables me to undo as much as I need.

PRO SECRETS

Better layer organisation
If you're going to use a method that involves keeping track of a large number of adjustment layers, learn the proper hotkeys and commands for moving, merging and grouping layers. These days, I'll flatten my images early for a more painterly look, but for many years I painted with upwards of 100 layers in each image! Keeping them organised from the start will save you much trouble later on.
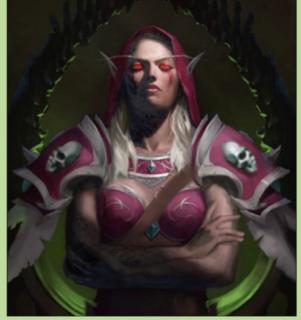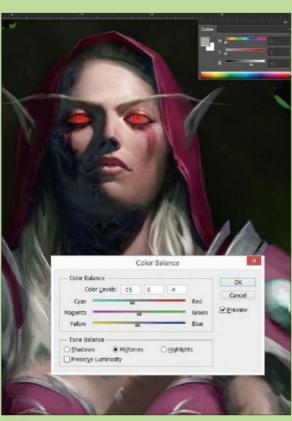
11 Add texture – but carefully

In recent years, I've tried to rely less on photo textures. Nowadays, I mostly use it when time is short, or when I feel it would better achieve the look I'm going for. While photo texture can be helpful, it must be used carefully or you run the risk of losing style consistency. Here, I've used it mostly in the shadows of her skin to suggest decay.
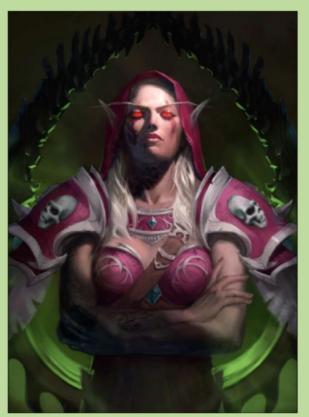

12 Behold, Rendersaurus Rex!

Start with the focal point and render out from there, loosening up as you move out. If you want a painterly look, take a painterly approach. Don't scrub the brush back and forth, but treat it as you would treat a paintbrush. I highly recommend testing out traditional mediums if you want to achieve a more traditional look to your digital work.

13 Making colour adjustments

When I'm far enough into my rendering that I'm ready to push for the finish line, I flatten the image and use the Color Balance tool to help bring it all together. I also use Color layers for more specific or subtle colour changes. This is also a good time to adjust any areas that may need more or less saturation.

14 Final touches

Now I paint with an opaque textured brush for a more traditional feel. This is where I begin to add the little things that bring it all together. I make a final pass over the image to adjust anything that stands out. You can get a closer look at the final rendering part of the process my the layered PSD files.

Reviews

The latest digital art resources are put to the test by the ImagineFX team…

PaintShop Pro's versatile and familar-looking Layers system will help you manage your painting process.

PaintShop Pro X9

PRO-VEN ABILITY Corel's venerable image editor offers more for artists and illustrators than you might expect

PC ONLY

Price £60/$80 (Ultimate version, £80/$100) **Company** Corel **Web** www.corel.com

PaintShop Pro has been around since 1990 in one form or another, meaning it's only a couple of years younger than the doyen of graphics software, Photoshop. The two products are broadly similar in that each caters for a wide range of designer and artist needs, including photo-editing and illustration. PaintShop Pro competes on price rather than features: it offers a subset of what you can achieve with Photoshop, but for much less dosh.

What you get for your 60 quid (which buys you about six months of Photoshop access, even on Adobe's best-value subscription plan) is a package that's capable and well thought out, but probably won't offer

Support for new technology in this release includes RealSense cameras with depth information, and Surface tablets.

the seasoned creative many surprises. The Ultimate version costs £20 more, but the extra features are geared towards photographers, not artists.

The tools are divided into three areas: Manage, Adjust and Edit. Manage is a basic cataloguing facility, enabling you to locate your image then open it in either of the other two areas to work on. It actually works better as an integrated tool in PaintShop Pro than Adobe's awkward system of maintaining its organiser, Bridge, as a separate program to Photoshop.

Edit is where your artistic muse can best express herself, and is the area in PaintShop Pro that most resembles Photoshop, with tool palettes and panels. There's a basic Brush tool and an Airbrush, but the coolest part for artists is the choice of natural media brushes, including oils, watercolours and pastels. It's not about to challenge PaintShop Pro's stablemate Painter for media, but it's versatile enough.

You can customise brushes and save them as new presets, but not with anything approaching the versatility of

> ❝You'll leave many of its tools untouched – until the day you realise that one is just what you need❞

Photographic tools like the new Interactive Gradient Fill should prove useful to artists making the finishing touches to their images.

Edit is the most Photoshop-like work area, with a brush selection that includes natural media, and palettes and layers.

Photoshop. It's worth noting, though, that you can import Photoshop-compatible brushes.

Layers are the other prerequisite of any decent painting software, of course, and PaintShop Pro has a good layer system, complete with blend modes for easy effects. You can add a mask as its own layer, which is less flexible than Photoshop's approach but probably easier to grasp for beginners.

The other working area is Adjust, which is designed for working with photos but is still of some use to artists. You load your image, then make universal changes to it, either through sliders or by picking an Instant Effect, one of dozens of ready-made looks.

It's tools like this that help make a good argument for PaintShop Pro as

a companion program to Painter: create your artwork in Painter, with its full complement of natural media tools, then bring it into PaintShop Pro to make last-minute overall tweaks and prepare it for use. PaintShop's Project Templates, for example, mean that you can quickly take your image into a pre-designed business card or greeting card.

There's a lot more to PaintShop Pro X9 besides. It's in the nature of wide-ranging programs like this that you'll leave many of its tools untouched – until the day you realise that one is just what you need to address a creative problem. Photoshop remains the more powerful choice and has better art brushes, but PaintShop Pro certainly gets the job done.

Photoshop CC

Web www.adobe.com
Price From £9/$10 per month

The market-leading image-editing program for Windows and Mac is much more affordable than it used to be, if you subscribe to the Creative Cloud Photography plan.

Painter

Web www.painterartist.com
Price £315/$429

PaintShop Pro's stablemate is the definitive painting software for Windows and Mac, with a superb array of natural media tools. PaintShop Pro makes a decent companion program for artists wanting to publish their art in print or online.

Affinity Photo

Web www.affinity.serif.com
Price £40/$50

An exciting 2015 launch on Mac, this powerful and affordable image editor is coming to Windows shortly, although at the moment its photo manipulation prowess far outstrips its painting tools.

In her video, April Connors encourages you to bring out the character behind the model's pose.
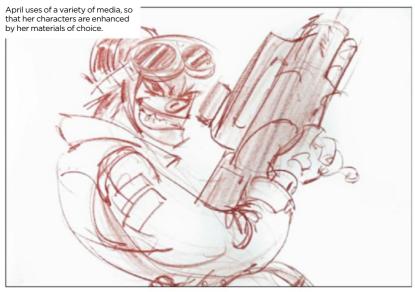
April uses of a variety of media, so that her characters are enhanced by her materials of choice.

Animation influences come to the fore in this sketch, which becomes a sci-fi action shot.

Developing Storytelling Skills From Life

DRESS FOR SUCCESS Artist and teacher April Connors gets you to let loose in a quest to find the character lurking inside your drawings

Whether they're held at an evening class or at college, most life-drawing classes follow a familiar pattern of students grouped around a model, busily measuring proportions and trying to ensure that their drawing is as close as possible to what they see. If that's what you're used to, April Connors' video for The Gnomon Workshop will shake up your approach and techniques.

April works here with a single, fully dressed model with a couple of costumes: a Ghostbuster-like jumpsuit with a rifle; and a vampiric gothic number with a sword. Rather than trying to reproduce what she sees, though, April feels her way through each of the model's poses, creating an image that brings out attitude and personality. Drawings of the sci-fi solider become cartoony and energetic, while those of the vampire are more ethereal and glamorous. In both cases, it's April's response to the character, not her imposing her pre-defined style on the picture.

The techniques April employs come from various creative genres: proof that it's perfectly acceptable to mix and match to form your own artistic vision. One minute she's using charcoal to establish mood and movement before laying down lines, like a fine artist; the next she's talking about finding the main gesture lines in the pose, just as an animator would. The confidence of April's narration comes from years of teaching: you'll feel like you're in good hands, no matter how novel these ideas are to you.

These are the sort of exercises that are either great for loosening up before a long session, or for exploring new directions in your art. And, of course, you're not excluded just because you don't have ready access to a model willing to play dress-up. Just pull up some fashion photos or film stills from the internet, and see where the mood takes you.

DETAILS

Topics covered
- Warm-up sketches
- Finding the gesture
- Expression and body language
- Characterisation
- Working with mixed media
- Conveying mood
- Linking media to character
- Materials

Length
186 minutes

Rating

ARTIST PROFILE

APRIL CONNORS

April is a figure-drawing instructor and freelance illustrator. She teaches both privately and through institutions, to artists at different levels and from varying disciplines. April has taught private classes in Mexico and impromptu drawing demos in Hong Kong, countries in which her art has been exhibited as part of solo and group shows. Her studio was previously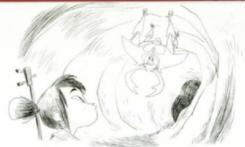 part of the Keystone Art Space complex, where she hosted costumed figure drawing workshops and traditional media classes.

The Art of Kubo and the Two Strings

SAMURAI SAGA Concept art from Laika's new animation, set in ancient Japan, takes centre stage in this stunning artbook

Author Emily Haynes **Publisher** Chronicle Books **Price** £25 **Web** www.chroniclebooks.com **Available** Now

Kubo and the Two Strings, the latest animation from Laika, is set in ancient Japan and follows the adventures of a boy on the run from a vengeful spirit. This book offers a fascinating look behind the scenes of its making, illustrated by acres and acres of lush concept art.

Following a foreword by Laika president Travis Knight and an introduction by author Emily Haynes, the book begins by explaining The Woodblock Effect, the source of the signature look Laika has given this film. This expressive texture is, we learn, drawn from the work of Kyoshi Saitō, a woodblock printmaker in the Sōsaku-hanga art movement of 20th century Japan.

The book is divided into three main sections that follow the chronology of the film's story: Home, Quest and Return. You're greeted by a constant stream of incredible concept art, including character and environment

For the sets, artists attempted to capture the spirit of wabi-sabi, which translates as imperfect beauty.

> **The vibrant colours and intricate details are all reproduced beautifully**

David Vandervoort found depicting Kubo "particularly challenging". Eyes show our emotions, but the protagonist only had one visible.

designs, each credited to the individual artists (a point so many film art books, sadly, fall down on).

There's also reference material, rough sketches and storyboards, along with some CG models and in-studio photography showing the production of props and puppets. (That said, if the stop-motion/film-making aspect is your sole interest, this isn't really the book for you.)

While the book is more of a visual feast than a heavy textual read, there's a fair amount of exposition on the page, typically from film production leads rather than concept artists. For example, David Vandervoort, lead 2D facial animation designer, explains how sketching a full range of emotions for

Kubo was a challenge because of his overflowing hair and eye patch. Director of photography Frank Passingham details the challenge posed by casting a white monkey against a snowy background, while assistant art director Phil Brotherton explains how the interior design of Beetle's cave reflects his internal conflict between pack-rat bug and noble warrior.

The main event here, though, is the (mainly digital) concept art. Ean McNamara's epic evocation of Kubo's mother, looking lost on a cliff's edge; the thrilling magnificence of Kubo's trek towards Hanzo's fortress, depicted by August Hall; Trevor Dalmer's menacing Hall of Bones painting; Andy Schuler's breathtaking underwater scene, and beyond... the vibrant colours and intricate details are all reproduced beautifully.

RATING ✍✍✍✍✍

The Art of Loish

ARTIST PERSPECTIVE The popular animator and illustrator shares her art and some fascinating insights into her process

A freelance animator and illustrator from the Netherlands with more than a million Facebook followers, this is Lois van Baarle's first art book. But it's by no means just a collection of her work.

This 156-page coffee table book, which began as a Kickstarter project, carefully traces this talented artist's process and evolution, beginning with her first drawings as a child, through to early digital experiments and student projects, and on to her present-day

Lois says she paints with "stylised foundations and cartoony proportions."
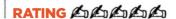
client creations. Her evocative portraits of wide-eyed young women in particular take your breath away, with a combination of softness and intensity that makes her style truly unique.

All this amazing art is accompanied with notes from Lois on her inspirations, her process, and even where things could have been done better. Packed with more practical advice than even some 'How to' books we've seen, she shares tips on everything from choosing colours to sketching characters, and much else in-between.

And of course, there's lots of eye-catching artwork, including early sketches, works-in-progress, storyboards and finished creations. Beautifully produced on matte paper and protected in a bespoke cardboard sleeve, this is a book to be treasured.

RATING ✍✍✍✍✍

Warcraft: Behind the Dark Portal

CONFLICT CREATIONS This 'Making of' isn't actually an art book, but there's plenty of incredible creations on show nonetheless

W hen 1990s PC game World of Warcraft was re-released online in 2004 it quickly became the biggest subscription-based MMORPG on the planet. Distinctively, it enables you to play as either of two sides, Hordes or Alliance: there are no 'good' or 'bad' guys here.

This idea that there are two sides to every story was also central to Duncan Jones' film, and suitably enough, this Making of book is split into two parts. There's even a separate cover

Karazhan, an infamous location from the game, was painted with the aid of scale models.

for each side. As you reach the halfway point, the rest of the content appears upside-down.

Such novelties aside, this is a solid tribute to a visually ambitious film, spread across 156 pages. Packed with information and interviews, this large-format book tells the story of how the film was conceived, planned and put into production. Strictly speaking, though, it's not really an art book. None of the art is credited and none of the

artists interviewed (or even named). But it does contain a ton of solid concept art for the movie, including landscapes, characters and weapons, along with film stills, unit photography, and details of the production design and VFX. So there's still plenty for ImagineFX readers to love poring over here, particularly if you're a fan of the game or the film.

RATING ✍✍✍

INSPIRATION AND ADVICE FROM THE WORLD'S BEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX
PRESENTS

FANTASY
illustrator

This issue:

HOW TO CREATE
COLOURING
BOOK LINE ART
Kev Crossley produces detailed art based on
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland **Page 106**

December 2016 **ImagineFX** 101

Karolina Larienne Heikura

LOCATION: Poland
WEB: www.larienne.deviantart.com
EMAIL: larienne@vp.pl
MEDIA: Markers, watercolours

Karolina, a freelance illustrator and concept artist, sounds like our kind of girl: "While I work, I always have to keep a cup of tea around," she tells us, clearly knowing about the ImagineFX team's love for tea.

Bringing people's concepts to life and being able to establish a link between her work and the audience is the most satisfying part of her job: "What I love most is telling stories with my art, either via symbolism or using composition." Her main sources of inspiration lie in the world of Disney, fantasy, conceptual art, elves and the universe.

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"While the art style takes its influence from manga, it's great to see Karolina tackling the subject with traditional media, which adds a visual texture that's so often missing from its digital equivalent."
Daniel Vincent,
Art Editor

1 HEART OF GOLD
Markers and watercolours on paper, 210x297mm
"In this illustration I wanted to portray the idea that sometimes we're kind towards people who don't deserve it, and sometimes there are people who care for us whom we don't notice."

2 NOBLE MAIDEN FAIR
Markers and watercolours on paper, 210x297mm
"I created this piece as a tribute to the legacy of Disney, with which I grew up. I wanted to give this painting that Celtic feeling Merida's known for and present her in my own vision. I included the bear as the symbol of motherly love."

Email your submissions to fxpose@imaginefx.com

Vivian Mineker

LOCATION: Slovenia
WEB: www.vivianmineker.com
EMAIL: minekervivian@gmail.com
MEDIA: Watercolour, gouache, acrylic, graphite

For now, Vivian's based in Slovenia, but the artist has also lived in Taipei and Portland. She works primarily in traditional media, and reveals that "I focus on conveying emotions and the underlying narrative of each piece, employing media such as watercolours or graphite, for the physical connection with the work that I create."

1 FAT CAT
Fabriano paper, watercolour and ballpoint pen, 9x12 inches
"Inspiration comes to me often while I'm between waking and sleeping, and this is a product of one of such occasion. An image popped into my head one night while falling asleep, and I thought that I must draw this because it amused me. Who doesn't love a fat cat getting into peculiar situations?"

2 ARMADILLO
Fabriano paper, watercolour and ballpoint pen, 11x14 inches
"The start of my alphabetical animals series. I wanted to create images of animals in surreal situations along with plants that they would interact with in real life, but in an unusual way."

3 CAPYBARA CLOWNFISH
Fabriano paper, watercolour and ballpoint pen, 9x9 inches.
"I wanted both capybaras and clownfish for the letter C of my alphabetical animals series, so I combined the two. Capybaras are famous for being docile and friendly to other animals, allowing others to sit on them – so much so that there are blogs about this fact."

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

Pencil   Pens   Acrylics   Ink   Photoshop

CREATE LINE ART FOR A COLOURING BOOK
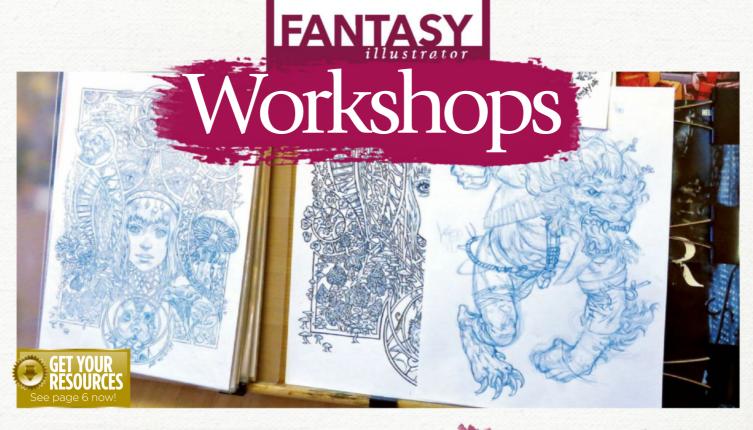
KEV CROSSLEY shows how he produces the detailed line art for a colouring book based on Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Much of the work I do as a professional illustrator is in colour, but my first love is pencil art, and inking over it is a close second. So in this workshop I'll show how I approach the more complicated pieces I like to do.

In 2015 I was asked to illustrate Jonathan Green's adventure game book Alice's Nightmare In Wonderland, which presented a dark and twisted Wonderland populated by nightmarish versions of Lewis Carroll's well-known characters. We produced a colouring-book companion volume, which was received so well, Jonathan decided to do a second volume entitled Through the Looking-Glass and the Horrors Alice Found There. Again, I was asked to illustrate it.

Right away I knew I wanted to indulge in the detail I love so much. To do this for all 23 illustrations for the book would take far too long, so I picked out five drawings to become the stand-out pieces for the book and started to sketch out ideas for each of them.

MATERIALS

- ■ HB and 2H pencils
- ■ Blue Col-erase pencil
- ■ Blue Rotring automatic pencil
- ■ Black Biro pen
- ■ Black drawings pens, various brands and sizes, 0.1 to 0.7
- ■ White paint, acrylic and ink, applied with fine brushes
- ■ White gel pen

Some colouring books are filled with fairly basic line art, but I wanted these illustrations to be almost as fully realised as any other commission I'd done. So, although the finished art had to be clean with limited shading (so it wouldn't hinder the colourer), the development process of the art would be business as usual for me. This involved thumbnail doodles in my sketchbook, followed by pages and pages of ideas, lists of elements and characters I wanted to use, and further rough sketches exploring and experimenting with layout options.

For this sort of illustration, I fill page after page with sketches, often far more than I'll actually need, then I scan them all into my computer and digitally adjust, arrange, then re-arrange them until I have a digital composite sketch that looks good. I then use this guide to build the finished illustration. I don't always work this way, but it is an efficient, creatively rewarding way to work and encapsulates what I love about the way that working traditionally can be augmented digitally.

After 15 years designing video games, Kev became a freelance illustrator and writer. He produced comics for 2000 AD, and text and art for numerous art books. He's written three books on fantasy art. See more of his art at www.kevcrossley.com.
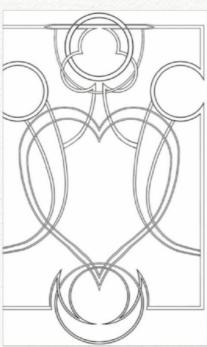
1 *Visualising my ideas in sketch form*

I begin by filling pages in my sketchbook with ideas. For an illustration of this scope I'll need as many ideas as I can muster, and not just characters – interesting shapes, embryonic layout elements and variations are all sketched and gathered. At this stage I'm not certain how things will go together, but I have all the ingredients I'll need.

2 *Developing a rough layout*

After scanning my sketches into Photoshop, the first thing I do is build up a well-balanced layout. I chanced upon an interesting idea in one of the first thumbnails I sketched, so I use this as my starting point, overlaying other doodles and sketches to add definition. I then build a clean, line skeleton over the top of this composite sketch.

3 *Building the composition*

Next I add some characters. Alice will sit in the central 'heart' shape, with the other characters arranged in the other four circular frames around the image. This is one of the parts of my process I enjoy the most, and any version of Photoshop can be used to do this.

4 Introducing more elements

I continue adding elements from my sketchbooks. Some parts are derived from drawings I did for the previous book, such as the clock from the Hare's stomach, and the Cheshire Cat. The latter I copied, flipped, then flattened to create this symmetrical portrait. It looks clumsy and obvious but like the rest of the image it's only for reference.

5 Maintaining balance as the composition becomes more complex

Among the sketches I was particularly happy with were mushrooms with books beneath the caps, but they were tricky to place in the image. Eventually I chose to obscure the right side of the "heart", but this was balanced by the curving book-strip I positioned on the opposite side. I also add white fill into the border lines.

6 The finished digital layout

When I feel that the layout is complete, I desaturate each layer to remove any colour, turning the whole thing into a greyscale image. I adjust the values of each element (darker elements are lightened and lighter ones made darker), balancing the image. Finally I flatten the image and turn it blue. It's almost ready to print! ➨

7 *Tweaking the layout for printing*

The fantastic versatility of working digitally means changes can be made at any stage. Before printing the digital layout out on A4 Bristol art board, I change the positions of the cat and the hare and replace the dormouse head with a new version, itself cobbled together from two digital sketches. Now it feels ready for the next stage.

8 *Pencilling over the digital layout*
 Although I could ink directly over the digital rough, producing a new pencil drawing first is a valuable way of homogenising the various composite parts that went into building the layout. It becomes a single whole piece rather than a collection of parts; details can be added and refined too. The cat, for example, no longer looks so symmetrical.

9 *The finished pencils*
 While the digital layout was a hodge-podge of different parts, this new pencil drawing pulls everything together: the borders and lines flow into the illustrative elements, and anything that might have looked discordant in the digital composite is now solved. I usually send the client a greyscale version to review before I start inking.

PEN TIP
USEFUL PENS
BIC ballpoint pens are an overlooked gem, and a low-cost solution, too. Get your hands on some and then experiment!

10 *Preparing the artwork, ready to inking*
 And so the final stage begins! I print out a light blue version of the image on to smooth art board. (I've included the actual "blue-print" file in the resources.) When inking, once again I always do this traditionally. Many people choose to ink digitally, but I still enjoy the process of working on a physical piece of paper with wet ink.

11 *Inking over the pencil*
 I use whatever pens come to hand when I ink. Although I sometimes use brushes when I'm in a painterly mood, for this illustration I mainly employ the sorts of pens you can buy inexpensively from any stationery store. That said, I did use my refillable Rotring pens for some of the finer line work. They are awesome tools!

12 *The finished inked illustration*
 After around 20 hours, perhaps more, I decide the inking is complete. The line work needs to be clean with minimal shading so there is still paper visible for colouring pencils to cling to, but I don't want to keep the final image free of such detail entirely. Therefore I allow a little extra line definition here and there. ◆

Gouache

STILL LIFE PAINTING TECHNIQUES

PETER CHAN shares his approach to painting indoor still life – a great way to become comfortable with the medium and get you ready for plein air studies

There's nothing I love better than being outdoors painting the world around me, but it was definitely a struggle for me when I first started using gouache. Working with an unfamiliar paint medium, the complexity of the scene and the ever-changing light can be intimidating. And that's why setting up a small-scale, basic still life in the comfort of your home can be a good way to work on the art fundamentals and build up your confidence before heading out

You'll know better than anyone the variety of props with different shapes and colours that are in your home, and for some artists like myself they provide a constant source of inspiration. Working on these still life exercises under a consistent light source means you can take your time to work on your observational skills, noticing the relationships between shapes, light and colours, which is crucial for painting outdoors.

One of the ways I like to set up my still life is finding objects with a clear difference in value structure and put them under a single light source, such as a desk lamp. In this article I have my toy figure with about a medium value, a small black speaker which is my darkest value and a white piece of board as my highest value element, with some additional objects in the background. These simple objects establish a varied value structure for me to paint an interesting image.
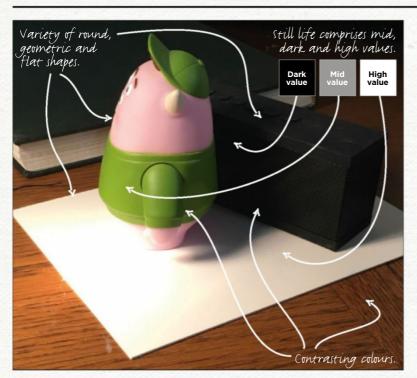
The most important concept to keep in mind in this still life exercise is to observe these object as not what they are, but as abstract shape elements. The more you train your eye to see and paint them this way, the easier painting the complexity of outdoor sceneries will become.

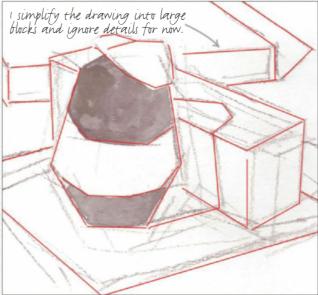*Peter is originally from Taiwan, but now lives in Los Angeles where he works at Sony Pictures Animation. Previously he was at Pandemic Studios as a concept artist, and at DreamWorks Animation where he was a visual developer. You can see more of his work on his blog, www.pixelp.tumblr.com.*

MATERIALS

- Gouache paint
- Canson art board
- Desk lamp
- Variety of flat brushes

Variety of round, geometric and flat shapes.

still life comprises mid, dark and high values.

| Dark value | Mid value | High value |

Contrasting colours.

I simplify the drawing into large blocks and ignore details for now.

1 Selecting objects to paint

Try not to think about finding "cool" objects to paint. Instead, consider their contrasting properties when they're put together. In my setup, I have the contrast of the colourful, round-shaped toy next to the dark, geometric speaker sitting on the flat white board. Thinking abstractly this way will help you become better at depicting the fundamentals of design, value and colour.

ARTIST INSIGHT
KEEP THINGS SIMPLE AND ABSTRACT
Don't place too much focus on capturing the likeness and details of the object, but rather their abstract shapes, values and colours.
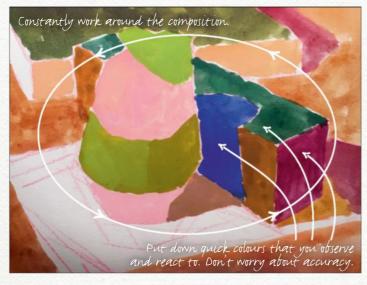
2 Making use of a simple underdrawing

I like to think of the underdrawing almost as a simple note-taking stage. I quickly sketch in the important elements, such as proportions of objects and the general composition. The loose drawing enables me to be more flexible when painting, and not be a slave to the line work.

Constantly work around the composition.

Put down quick colours that you observe and react to. Don't worry about accuracy.

Break down the form into simple, accurate value and colour shapes. Don't worry about blending at this stage.

Look for warm and cool colours in the light and shadows.

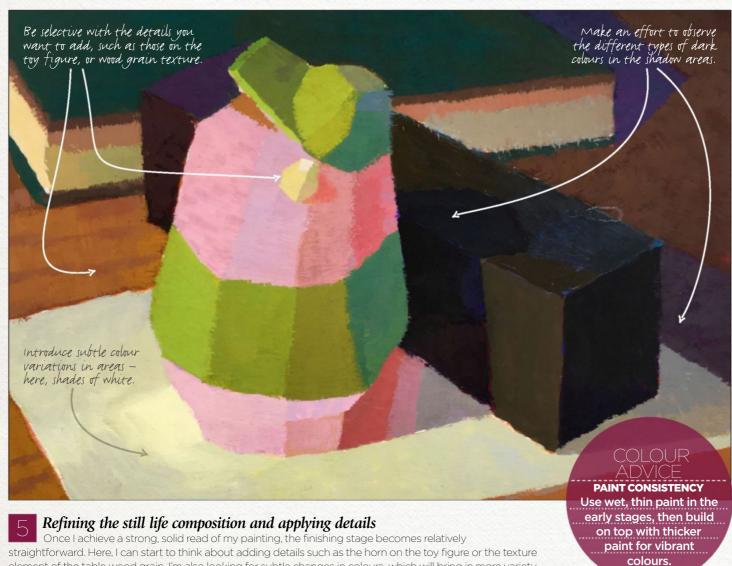Push the difference in values to make the objects read clearly.

3 Overall colour block-in

During the early block-in stage I put down rough colour notes of what I see. I like to start in the centre of my image and work my way around the whole composition. I do this often throughout the whole painting process so I don't linger in one area for too long. I also paint loosely and more wet during this stage, as I would with watercolours.

4 Breaking down the complexity

The middle stage is all about breaking down the complexity of your objects into more simple colour shapes and more accurate colour mixing. I push the warms colours in the light and cool colours in the shadows. I start to layer on thicker paint, but don't think so much in terms of blending – instead, I sculpt simple planes with my brush strokes.

Be selective with the details you want to add, such as those on the toy figure, or wood grain texture.

Make an effort to observe the different types of dark colours in the shadow areas.

Introduce subtle colour variations in areas – here, shades of white.

5 Refining the still life composition and applying details

Once I achieve a strong, solid read of my painting, the finishing stage becomes relatively straightforward. Here, I can start to think about adding details such as the horn on the toy figure or the texture element of the table wood grain. I'm also looking for subtle changes in colours, which will bring in more variety to my painting. For example, in my white board area I add subtle changes of yellowish and greyish white.

COLOUR ADVICE
PAINT CONSISTENCY
Use wet, thin paint in the early stages, then build on top with thicker paint for vibrant colours.

First Impressions

Erik Gist

Watching horror films when he was a child set this artist on an illustrious path

Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?
I grew up in Alpine, a small rural town in the mountains about 40 minutes east of San Diego. I don't know that it influenced my art, aside from growing up in a small town tends to foster the imagination, and the fact that the 18-year-old who worked at the local video rental store let me and my friends rent horror movies when we were too young.

You're a child, you see a painting or drawing that changes everything… where are you and what are you looking at, and what effect did it have?
I was at a book store and it was reprint of an old Doc Savage novel – the cover was painted by James Bama. I can't say it changed everything, but it was definitely the first time a painted illustration lit up my imagination. The paintings that really changed everything for me were the pulp covers that Glen Orbik and Laurel Blechman did for DC, and the Phil Hale Swamp Thing covers. But I was an adult by then.

DEATH HEAD
"Death Head was a fun project I worked on for Dark Horse. It had a nice 70s horror vibe to it."

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> ❝ Tell enough story to entice, but provide enough mystery to get them to read the book ❞

DEATHSTROKE
"This was a horror variant for Deathstroke from DC. I mashed him up with an 80s slasher."

© 2016 DC Comics

Next month
Stephen Hickman

What was your next step in art? Did other interests vie for your attention? What was the deciding factor?
Art was always my first love, but I didn't really learn that you could make a living at it until I was older. The deciding factor for me was the first time that I attended San Diego Comic-Con in 1992.
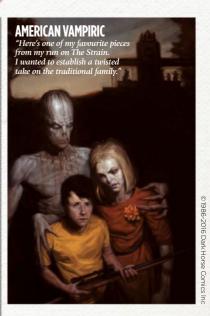
What was your first paid commission, and does it stand as a representation of your talent?
My first paid commission was for a trading card game from Wizards of the Coast called Hecatomb. I'm still proud of much of the work I did for it. But no, I'm much better now.

What's the last piece that you finished, and how do the two differ?
The last piece I finished was for a personal project I'm working on. In many ways there are a lot of similarities.

AMERICAN VAMPIRIC
"Here's one of my favourite pieces from my run on The Strain. I wanted to establish a twisted take on the traditional family."

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But I'm much more proficient technically, if nothing else.

So what's the secret to painting a great book cover?
For me, mood and storytelling. You have to tell enough story to entice the viewer, but provide enough mood and mystery to get them to read the book.

You're well known for your horror art. What's the attraction?
I think it's the lack of a true hero. Stories get a little stale when you have the heroic protagonist, who too often does the right thing at the right time for the right reason. I like seeing someone pushed to their limits, not because they're self-sacrificing, but simply to survive. That, and I like that it's the only genre which is at odds with the audience. People go to a comedy to laugh, a romance to be touched emotionally, and so on. When people go to a horror it's a challenge, as if they're saying, "You can't scare me."

What's the most important thing that you've taught someone at Watts Atelier?
To live the life they want.

Why is the fantasy art industry still the best place to be working?
Simply because I just can't imagine doing anything else.

Erik works on video games, book covers, TCGs, and also teaches at Watts Atelier. You can see more of his art at www.erikgist.com.

lara

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