New

Fantasy Art essentials

131 PAGES OF ESSENTIAL ART TIPS

Learn to paint

Traditional & digital art

Step-by-step tutorials from legendary artists, including **Asia Ladowska, Marta Dahlig** and more!

Inside

Learn new art techniques

GET INSPIRED AND CREATE BETTER CHARACTERS AND CREATURE ART!

LEARN FROM...

Luis Royo
H.R Giger
Dan Scott
Brian Froud
Mélanie Delon
John Kearney
Frank Frazetta
Rodney Matthews
Jason Rainville
Svetlin Velinov
Boris Vallejo &
Julie Bell

Digital Edition

FUTURE

THIRTEENTH EDITION

WORKSHOPS & INTERVIEWS Learn to paint like the fantasy art masters

Welcome to

Fantasy Art essentials

Whether you're an admirer of fantasy art, or you want to get to grips with its techniques in your own work, this ultimate guide is for you. Featuring galleries of inspirational imagery and classic interviews with undisputed luminaries of the fantasy art world like Rodney Matthews, Boris Vallejo, Brian Froud and many more, it's packed with incredible artwork that shows off the talents of some of the world's most famous fantasy artists. And that's not all; each interview is backed by a guide to the styles and techniques in question.

There are even artists who'll show you some of the secrets of the late and much-lamented Frank Frazetta, or the magic of faerie illustration. Plus, there's a Core Skills section at the back that's packed with the essentials you need to learn to create beautiful, evocative fantasy art. You'll learn how to manage skin and hair, costume details, environments, materials and more, with expert advice from professional artists.

FUTURE

Fantasy Art essentials

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Be inspired by the legendary artists behind some of fantasy's most iconic images

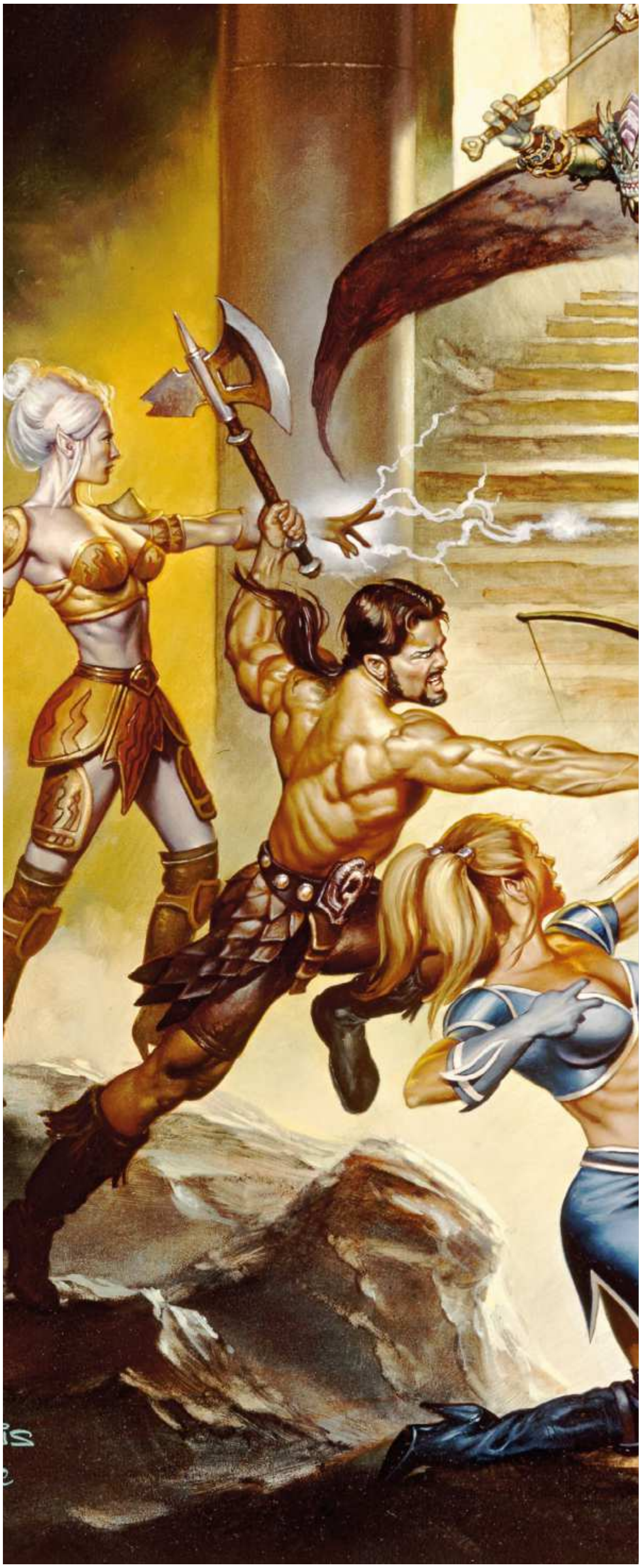
Boris Vallejo and Julie Bell

The Peruvian prodigy Boris Vallejo, a professional artist since the age of 16, was amongst the core number of artists that defined the 'classic' fantasy art of the 1960s, making his name with his illustrations of Tarzan, Conan The Barbarian and Doc Savage.

In the 1990s bodybuilder, model and painter Julie Bell married Boris, and since then they've produced a prolific body of hyperrealist fantasy art, that celebrates the fantastical body beautiful with dynamic heroines and mythical creatures galore.

With a slew of art books and calendars to their names, the couple continue to push each other on, working together for a variety of commissions, from ad campaigns to Meat Loaf's *Bat Out of Hell 3* cover.

www.imaginistix.com

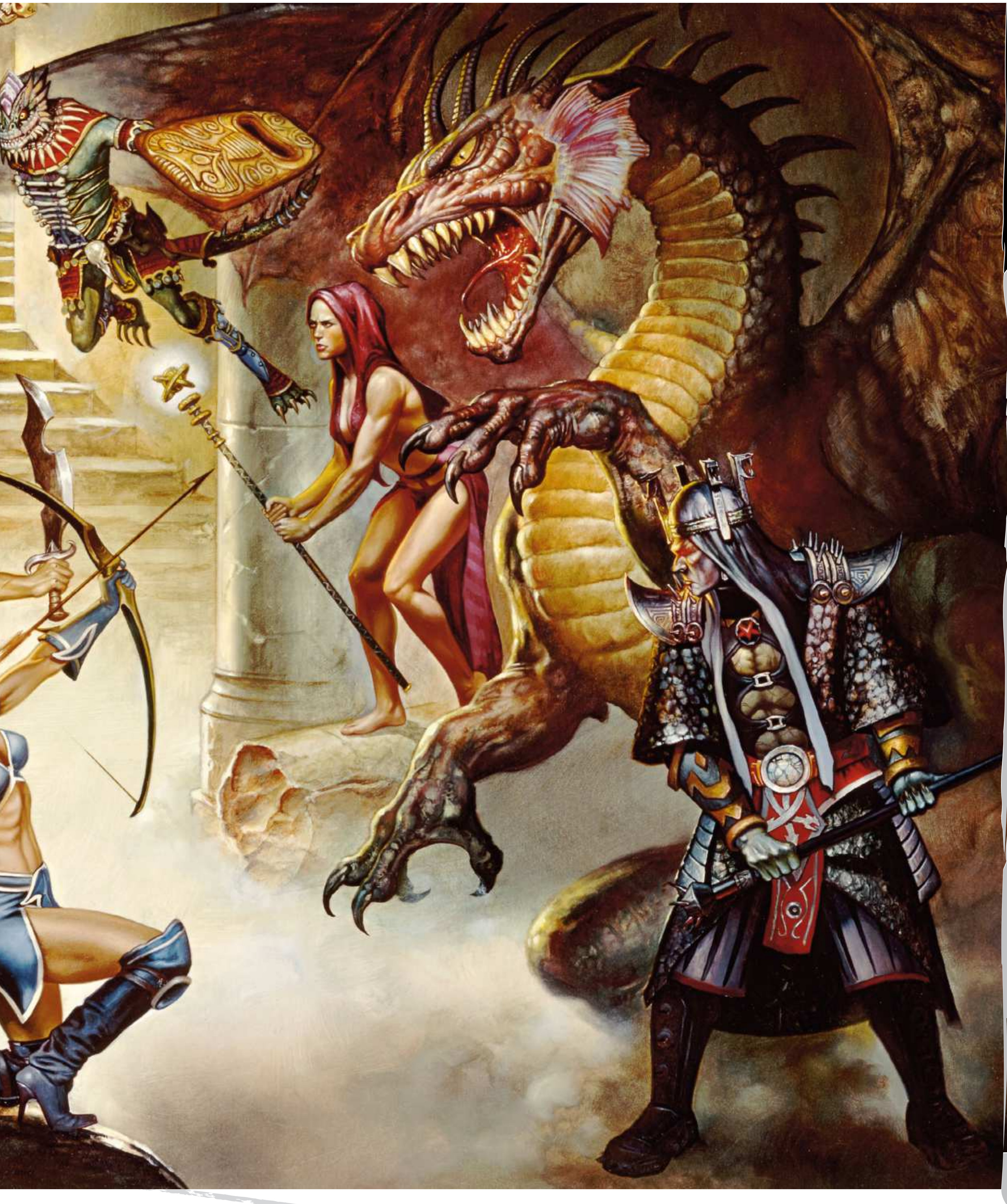


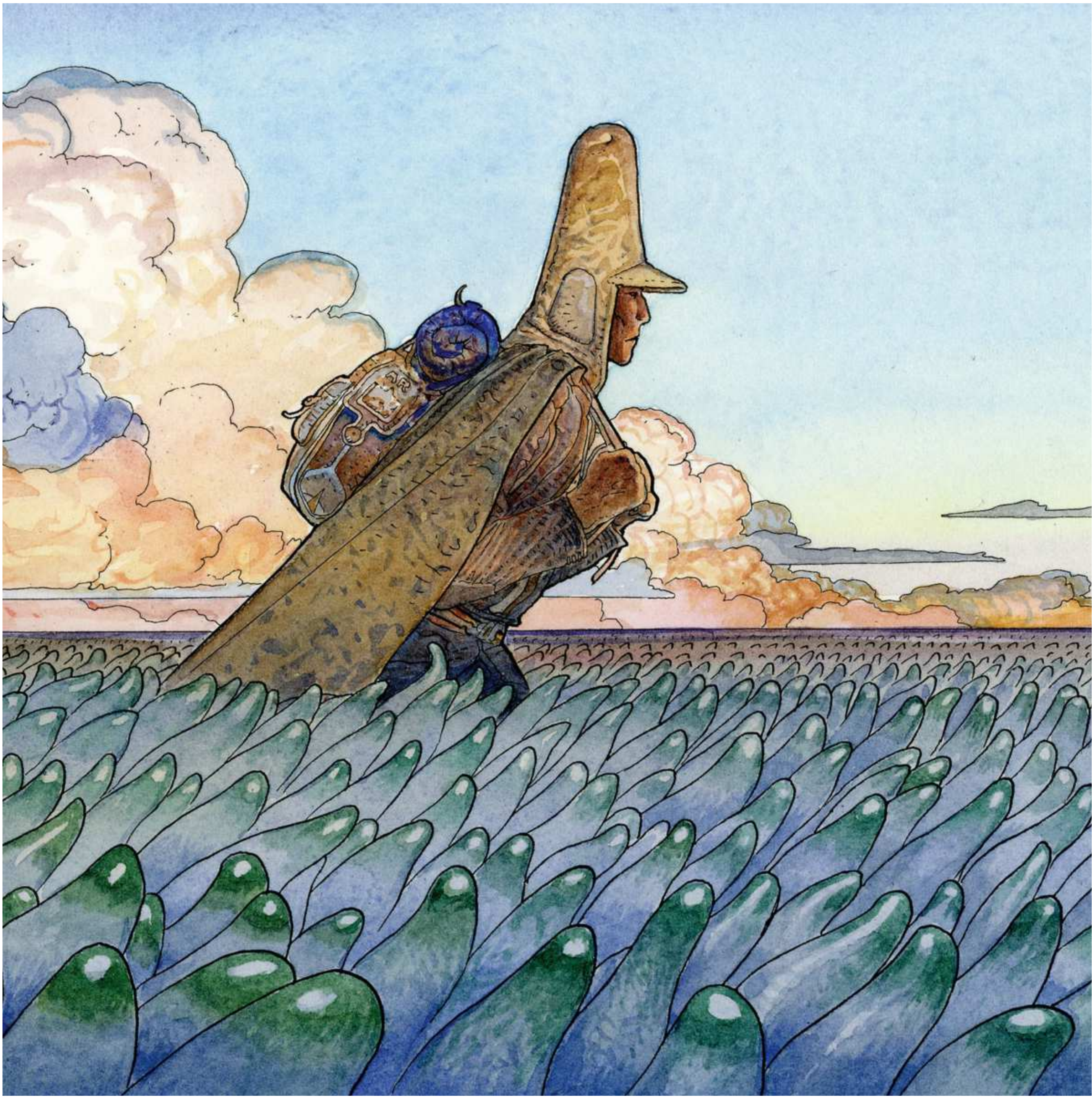
> “We very much inspire each other, our minds work similarly in all kinds of ways. We spend 24 hours a day together and not only do we do it with ease, but we love it that way”

Wise words

PERFECT THE BODY

“By drawing, you're keeping your own little file in your head, of the human body and every time you draw from life you're just adding to it and reinforcing it.”



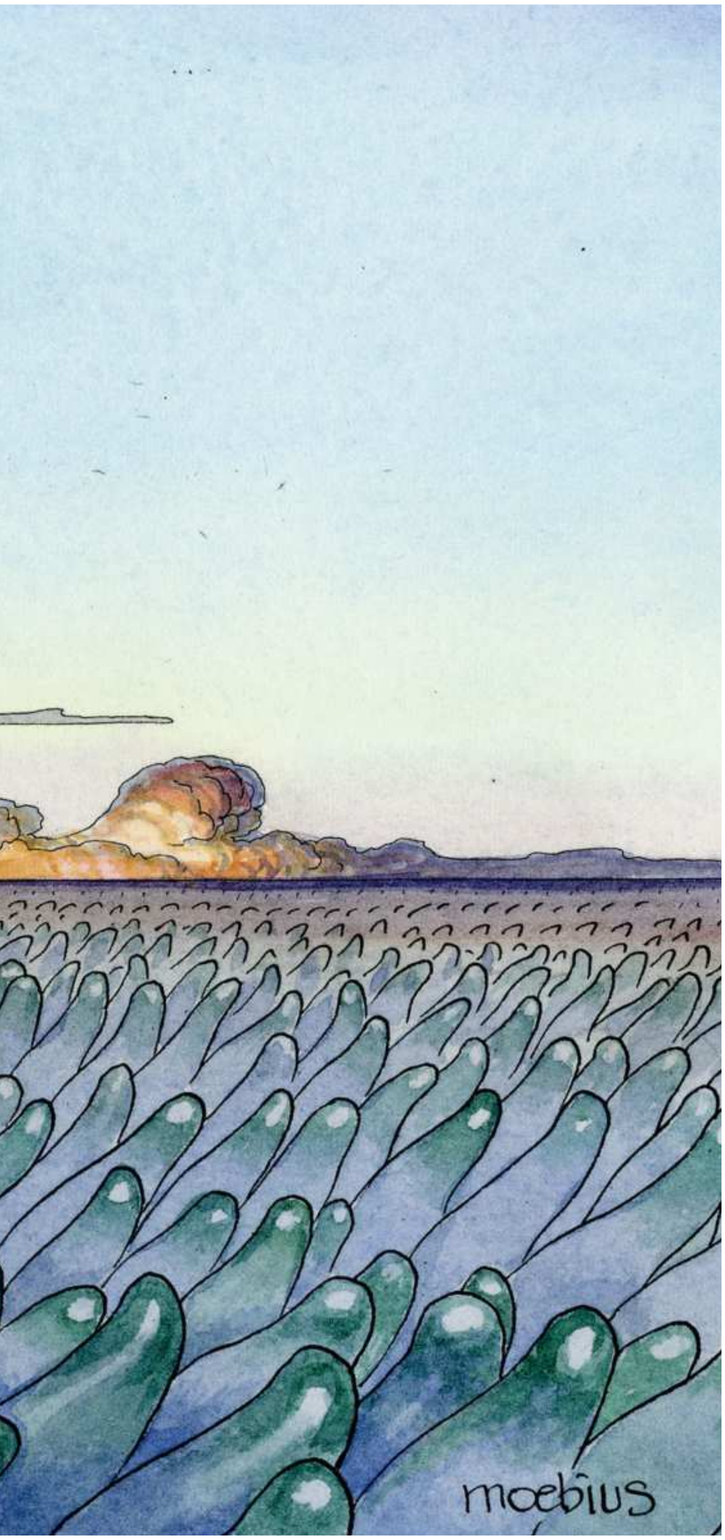


Jean 'Moebius' Giraud

Wise words

FORGET PERFECTION

Learn from the master and shun the idea of achieving a distinct style: "In France, the artist wants to be known and recognised. They're not interested in perfection or examination; they look for style. I search for truth."



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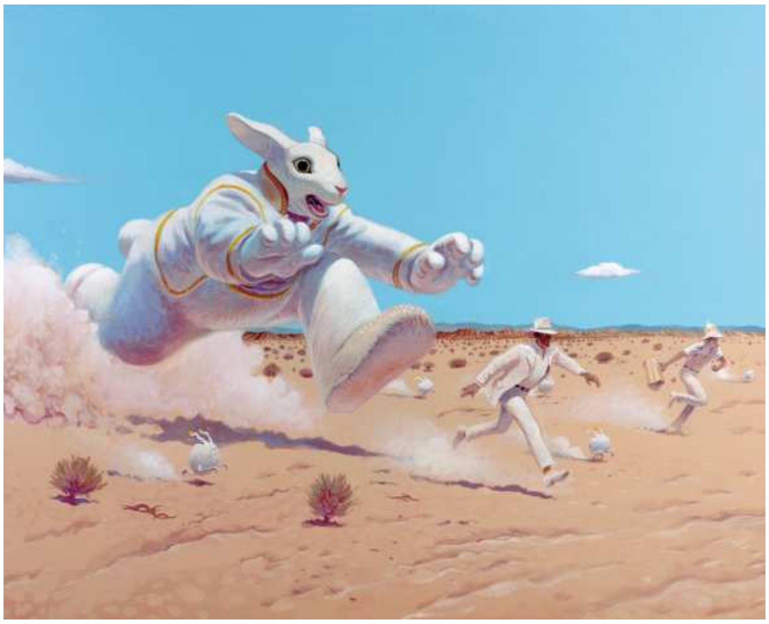

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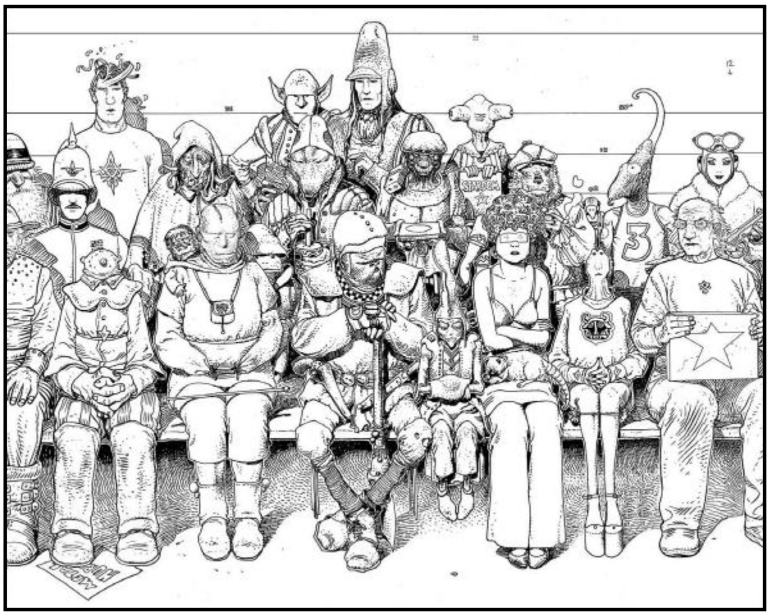

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> “When I started, I set myself a direction – a trajectory like a rocket in the sky. At the end I will blow up, but **I don't know where**”

It's easy to forget the influence the man behind fantasy's most famous alias has had on comics and sci-fi art. Having plucked the name Moebius out of the air at 22, Jean took comics into a new world touched by the surreal and led by the metaphysical. He then went on to help epitomise the face of modern sci-fi.

Making his name with the 1960s comic strip *Blueberry* (initially using the pseudonym Gri), Jean then formed the United Humanoids in the 1970s, a group responsible for the original *Heavy Metal* magazine. With *Arzach*, Moebius popularised a text-free, non-linear comic style. He was then hired as a concept artist for the films *Alien* and *TRON*. Moebius died in 2012, but his distinctive art legacy is assured.

www.moebius.fr

HR Giger

Whether you love or loathe his darkly stylised art, if you've the slightest interest in digital art, the chances are you'll recognise at least some, of HR Giger's work.

From the 1970s onwards he transformed himself from an obscure Swiss surrealist to mainstream Academy Award-winning artist for his iconic work on *Alien*.

Commonly combining themes of elemental eroticism with an aesthetic that involves biomechanical mixtures of machine and alien flesh, his unique style has inspired countless artists.

1998 saw the creation of the Giger museum, at Château St. Germain in the ancient walled city of Gruyères, south-west Switzerland. With this venture Giger signalled a change in his attention towards sculpture and architectural design, which he studied at university.

Giger retired in 2008, and put painting to one side in favour of overseeing his bar and museum. The artist and sculptor died at his Zurich home in 2014, but his extraordinary artistic visions live on.

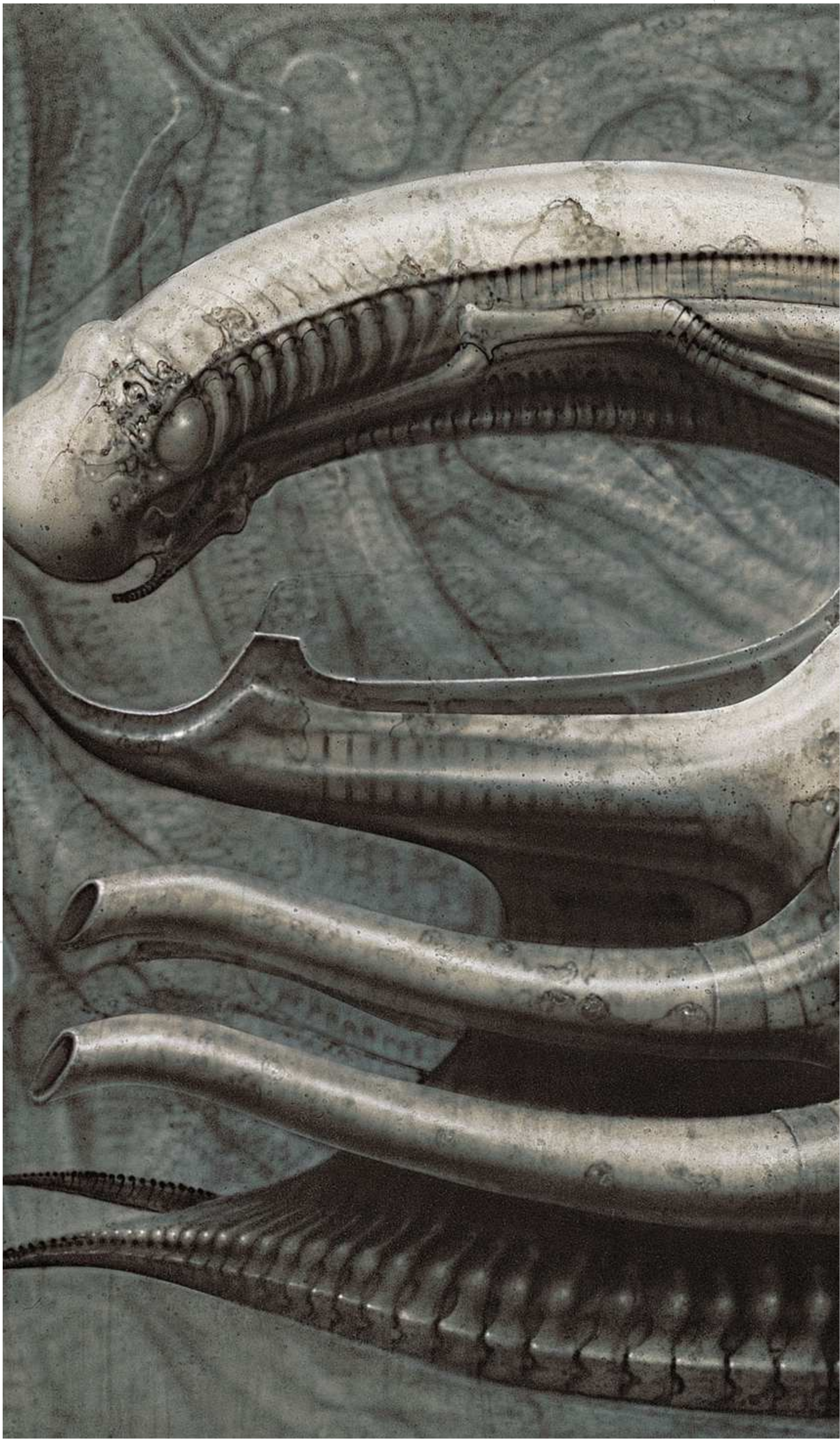
www.hrgiger.com

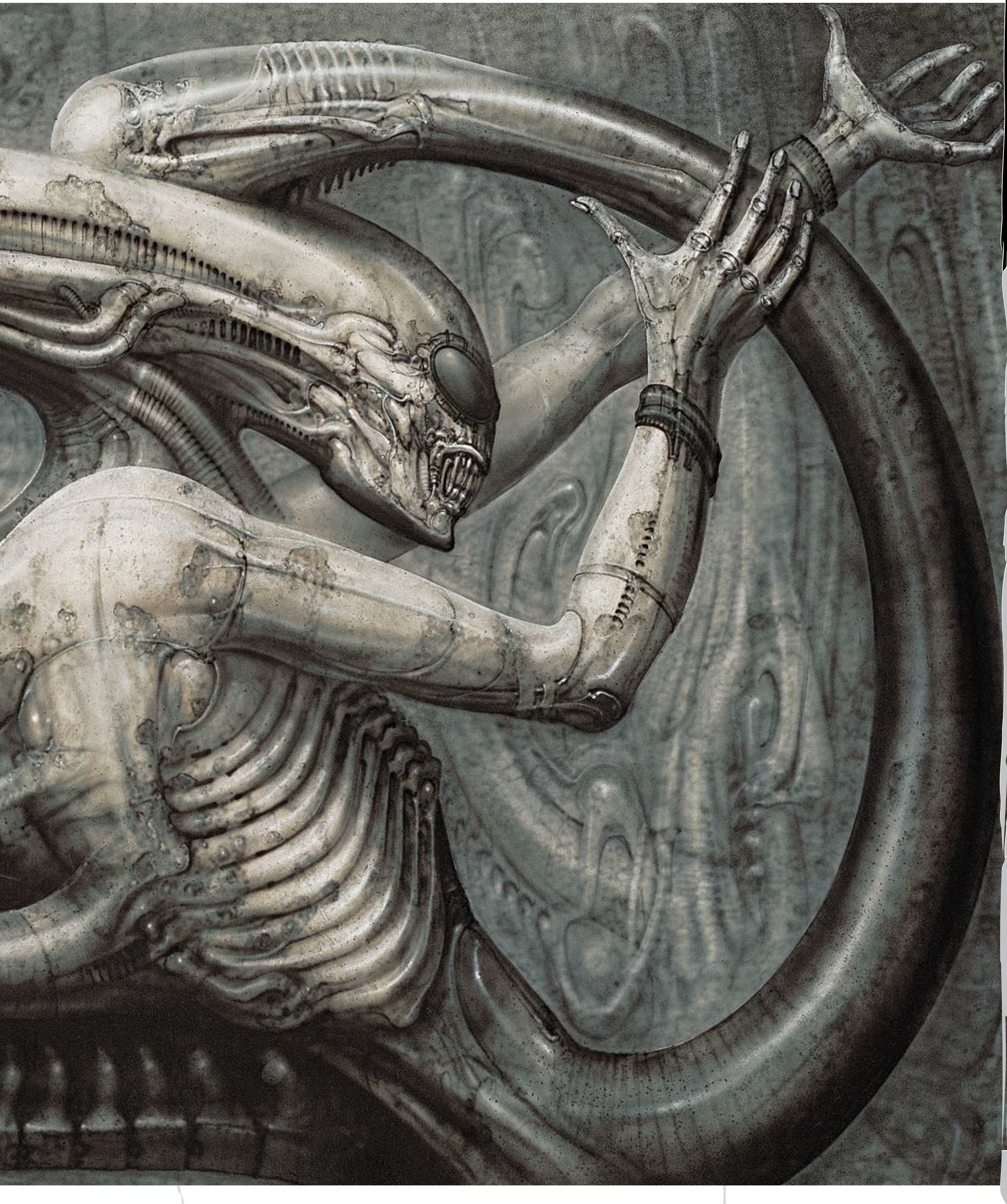
> “In the beginning I had no idea what I was doing. I just did some clouds, then I would add an eye…”

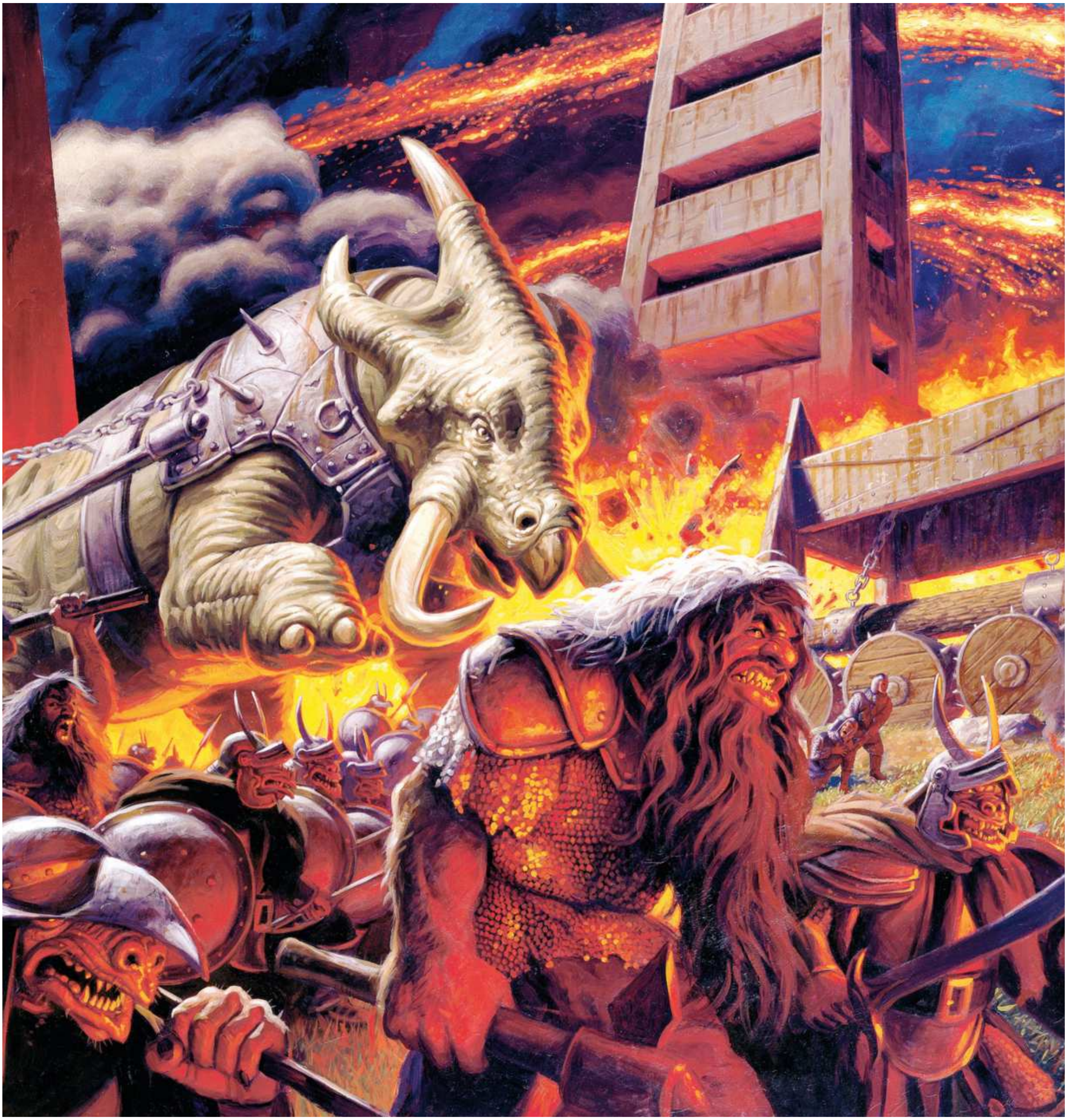
Wise words

MAKING MOVIES

“When I worked on *Alien* I was in the studio for seven months. If you want to do something really good, you have to travel and work with the film makers.”



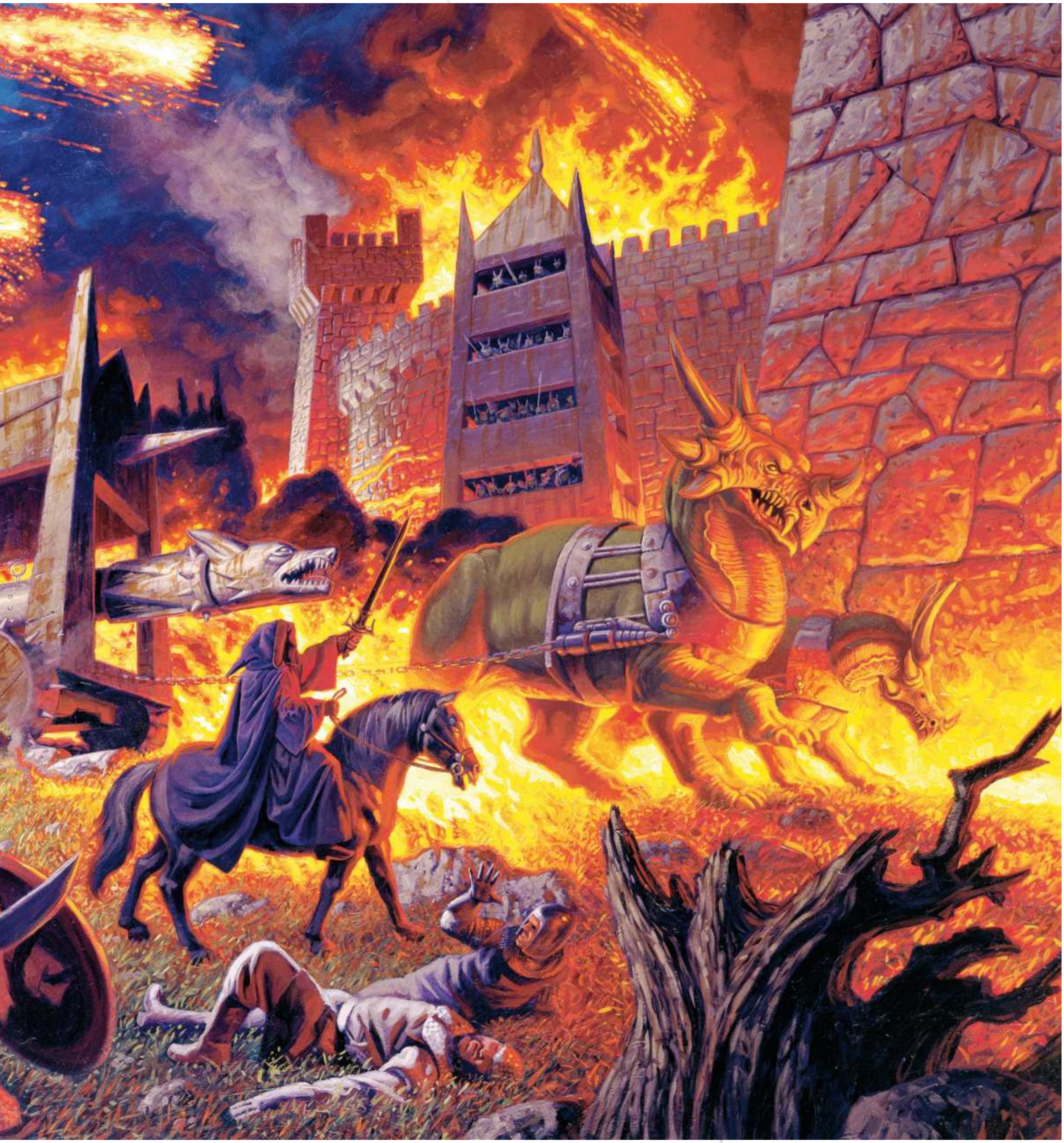




Brothers Hildebrandt

The twin brothers Tim and Greg Hildebrandt may have found fame within the fantasy art world with their classic promotional *Star Wars* poster, but the two had been professional artists and recognised by industry artists for 20 years before.

Bred on Golden Age comics and Disney, the brothers wanted to be animators. After working in that field on industrial and commercial films, in 1969 they switched to illustrating children's books for six years. Then came along a competition to paint a



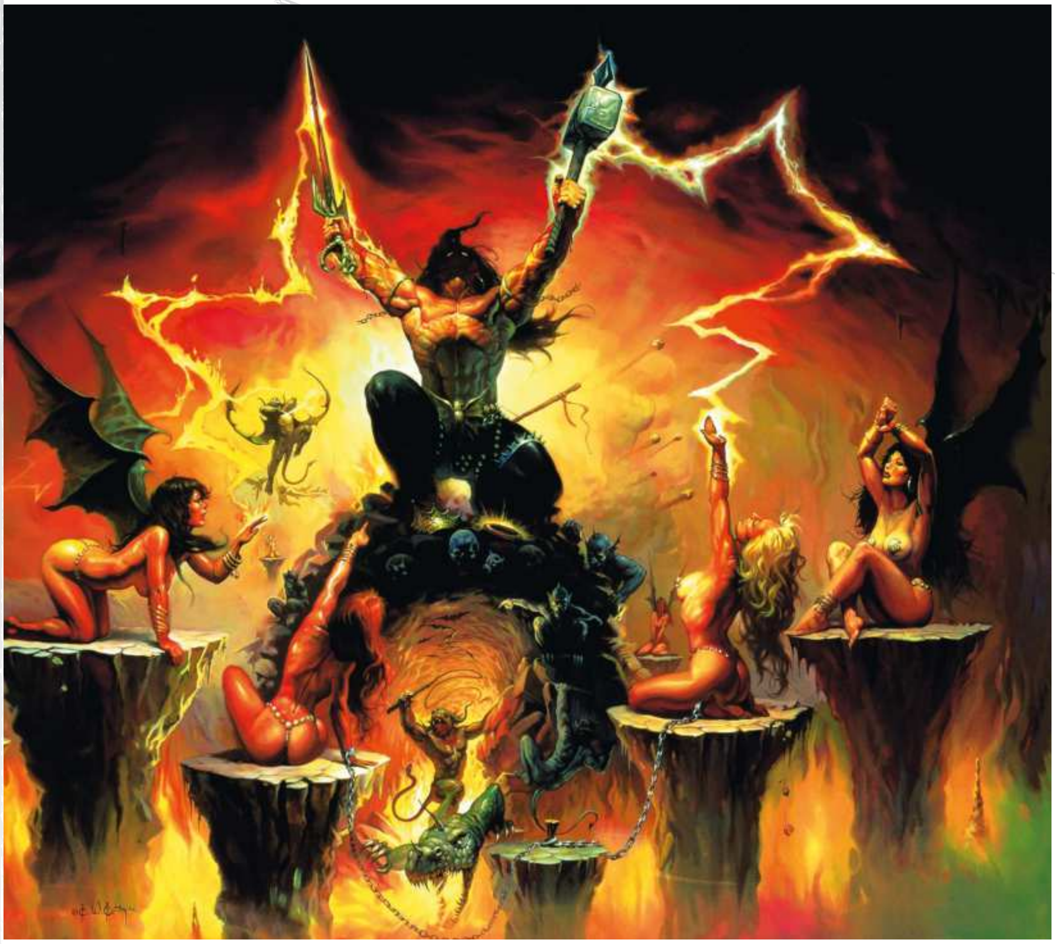
Lord of the Rings calendar. The brothers' winning paintings made a strong impression, and the third in the calendar series sold more than a million. Later, asked to paint a *Star Wars* poster eight days before the film's release, their image became an instant classic. A career in comics, ads, D&D and *Star Wars* books has spread the brothers' self-tutored style far and wide.

Tim died in 2006, but Greg still paints, and his American Beauties pin-up art is widely recognised.
www.brothershildebrandt.com

GREG HILDEBRANDT, BE A TWIN

"I'm amazed by any artist as an individual who manages to complete anything. In the early days we'd have these freakouts, throw the art in the corner and say 'I quit'. Then the other one would say, 'Well, unless you get back in here, I'm quitting too,' and that would be the end of the freakout."

> “To me Conan wasn't a fictitious cover of a book. He was once a living entity”



Ken Kelly

Ken developed his art chops working on horror comics, but it was his work on the cover of rock band KISS's first platinum album *Destroyer* that fired him into the big time, introducing him to a whole new world of fans.

More than 40 years later, Ken's KISS artwork is still popular on his website. But before the iconic rock images, his work on horror comic titles like *Eerie*, *Creepy* and *Vampirella* was shown alongside art by Frank Frazetta and Neal Adams. Frank was Ken's tutor in commercial artistry and even reworked Ken's first commissioned piece.

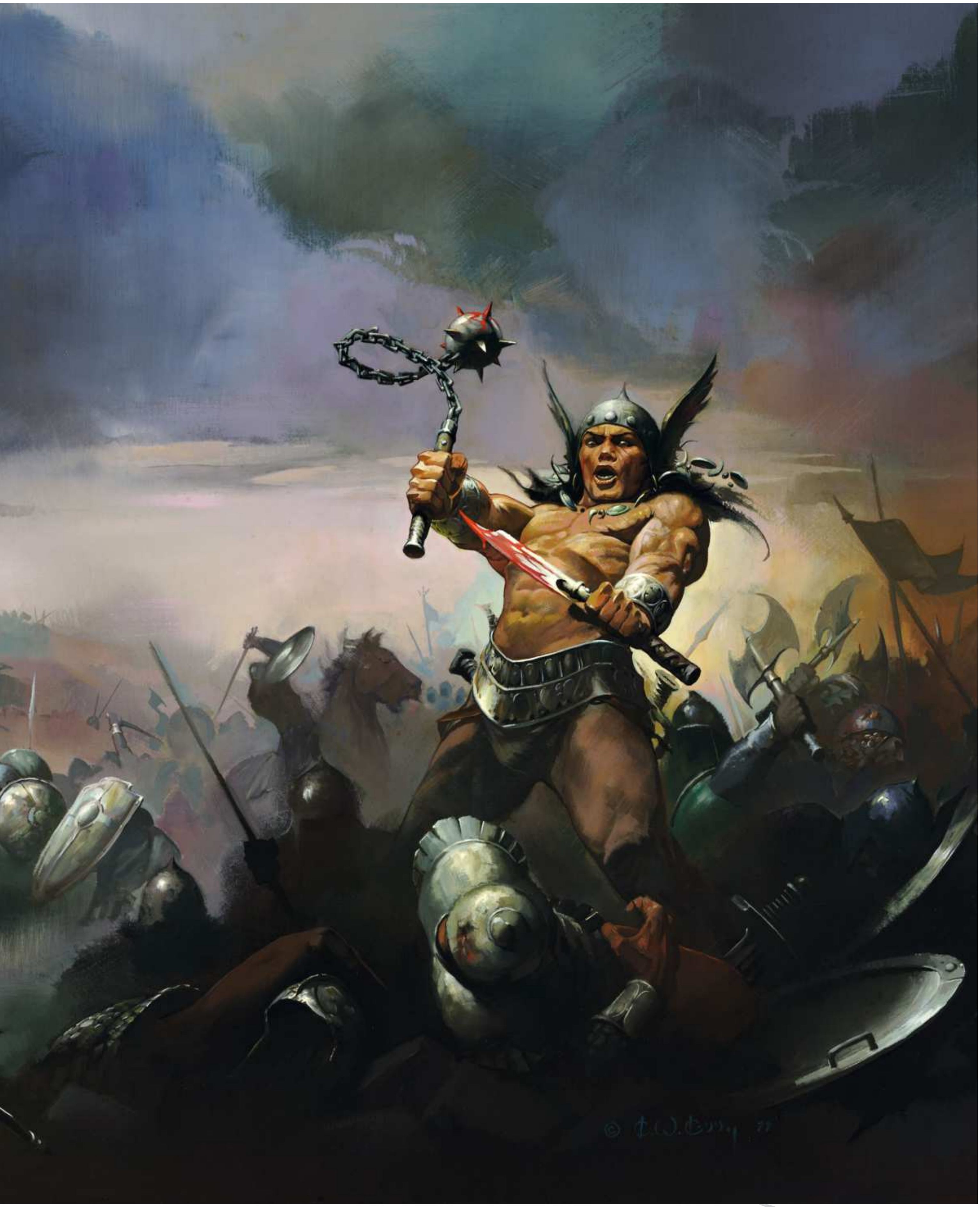
As KISS became superstars, Ken was making his name as a book artist great, producing a series of timeless *Conan the Barbarian* images for the likes of Robert E Howard and Robert Adams.

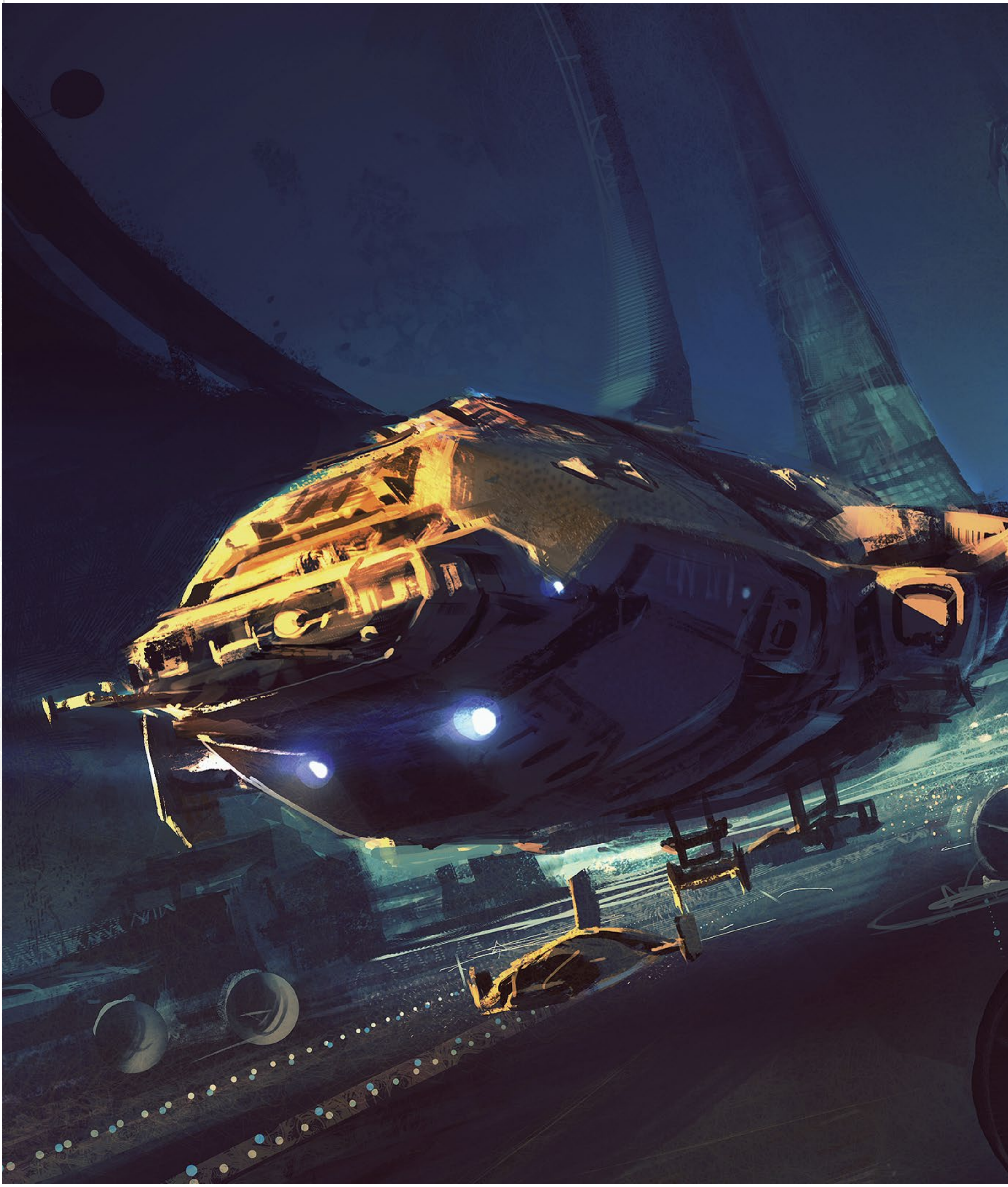
With a spate of dynamic Dark Horse *Star Wars* comic covers in the 1990s, Ken has continued to produce great art for rock bands, and has even gone full circle, painting covers for the revamped *Creepy* series.

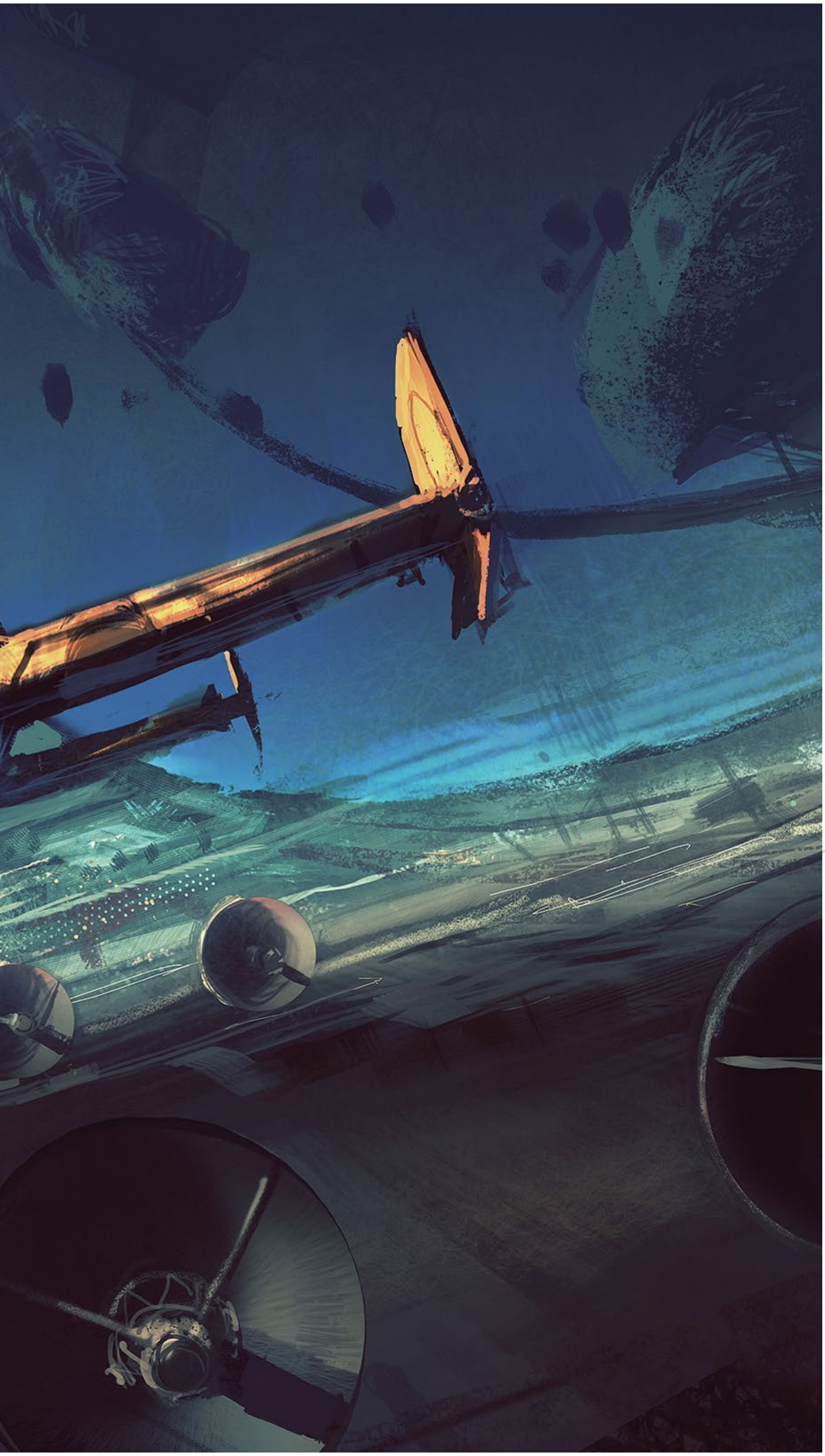
www.kenkellyfantasyart.com

BE BASIC

“I'm more Neanderthal than anything. I have a very crude painting style. I go for realistic as far as backgrounds, but I tend to exaggerate main characters and lean towards the dramatic as far as lighting and painting style.”







Nicolas 'Sparth' Bouvier

Since 2001 French artist Sparth has exclusively worked in digital. "Going 100 per cent digital greatly helped me to shape my vision," he says, and his army of fans around the world would agree.

Yet Sparth's visions of the future have definite links to the past, and he sees himself as part of the *Star Wars* generation, with his architect-accurate vistas and sci-fi epics echoing the worlds of Chris Foss and Greg Hildebrandt.

Working for 343 Industries, Sparth helped visualise the computer game franchise *Halo*, and he's produced more than 50 book cover illustrations since 2004. Inspired by utilitarian styles of architecture, Sparth's images linger in the imagination because as awe-inspiring and vast as they are, they're glimpses of a future that you can imagine inhabiting.

www.sparth.com

> "The biggest challenge in sci-fi art is to avoid repeating the same concepts as so much has already been done… But there are still so many doors that haven't been opened yet"

Wise words

ACT NOW, THINK LATER

"I think I'm more effective at getting straight to the point instead of planning an image long term. Most of the time when I do so I end up having an average image."

Luis Royo

Although brandishing the technical skills of a hyperrealist, Spaniard Luis Royo classes himself squarely as a fantasy artist, saying: "I'm not looking for reality… My goal isn't to reflect today's environment or real life."

Luis honed his craft as a draftsman then entered the world of comics in the 1980s, but he is perhaps best known for his 20-odd art books. From the 1990s onwards, he has released 'best of' compilations, as well as erotically charged collections, and also project-specific books, like *Dome*, which documents his commissioned painting of a huge fresco in a Russian castle.

Seduced by the aesthetics of the female form, nearly all of Luis's art involves the depiction of women. And although his immersive approach to art doesn't involve digital tools, he remains an inspiration to many in the modern medium.

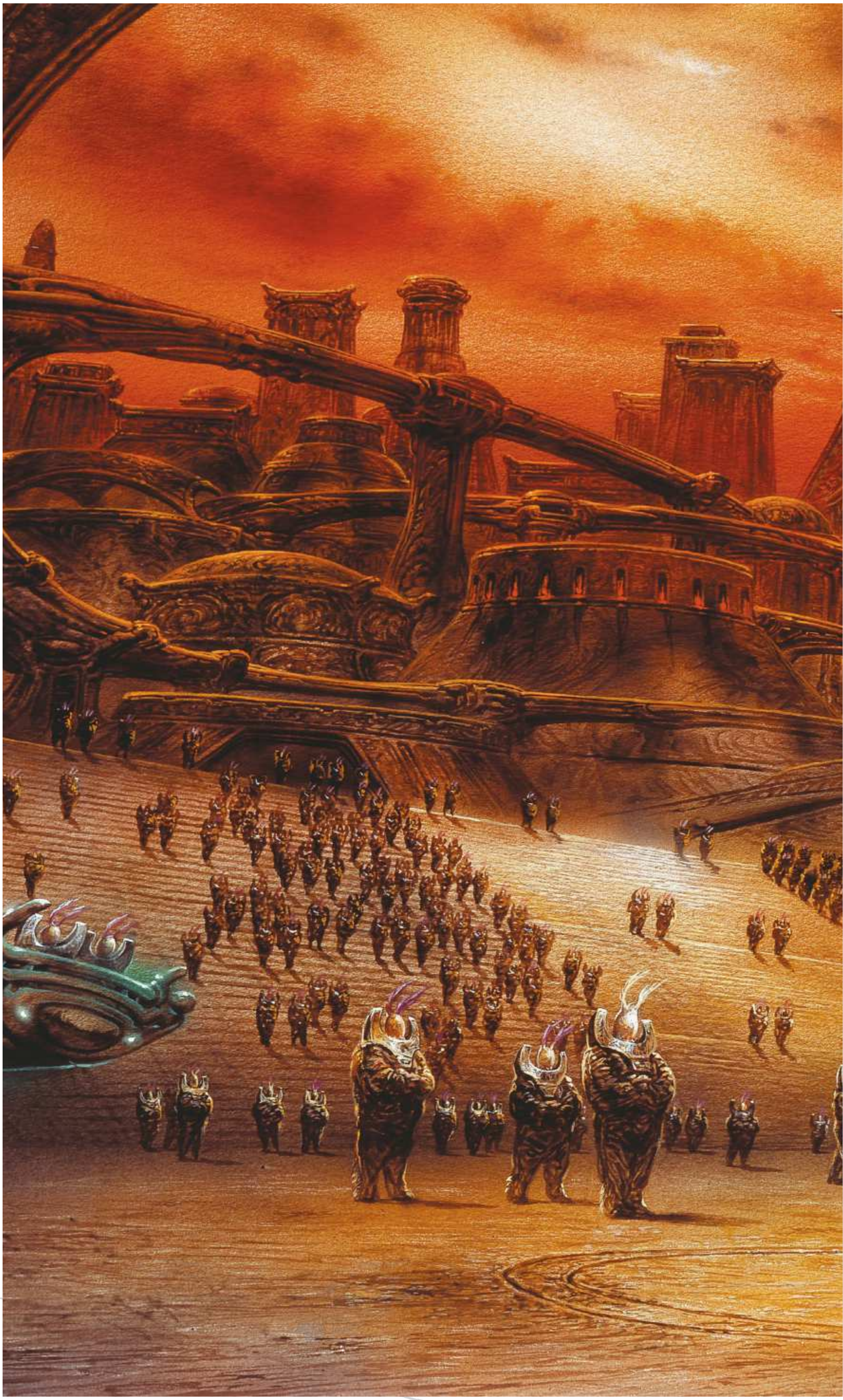
www.luisroyofantasy.com

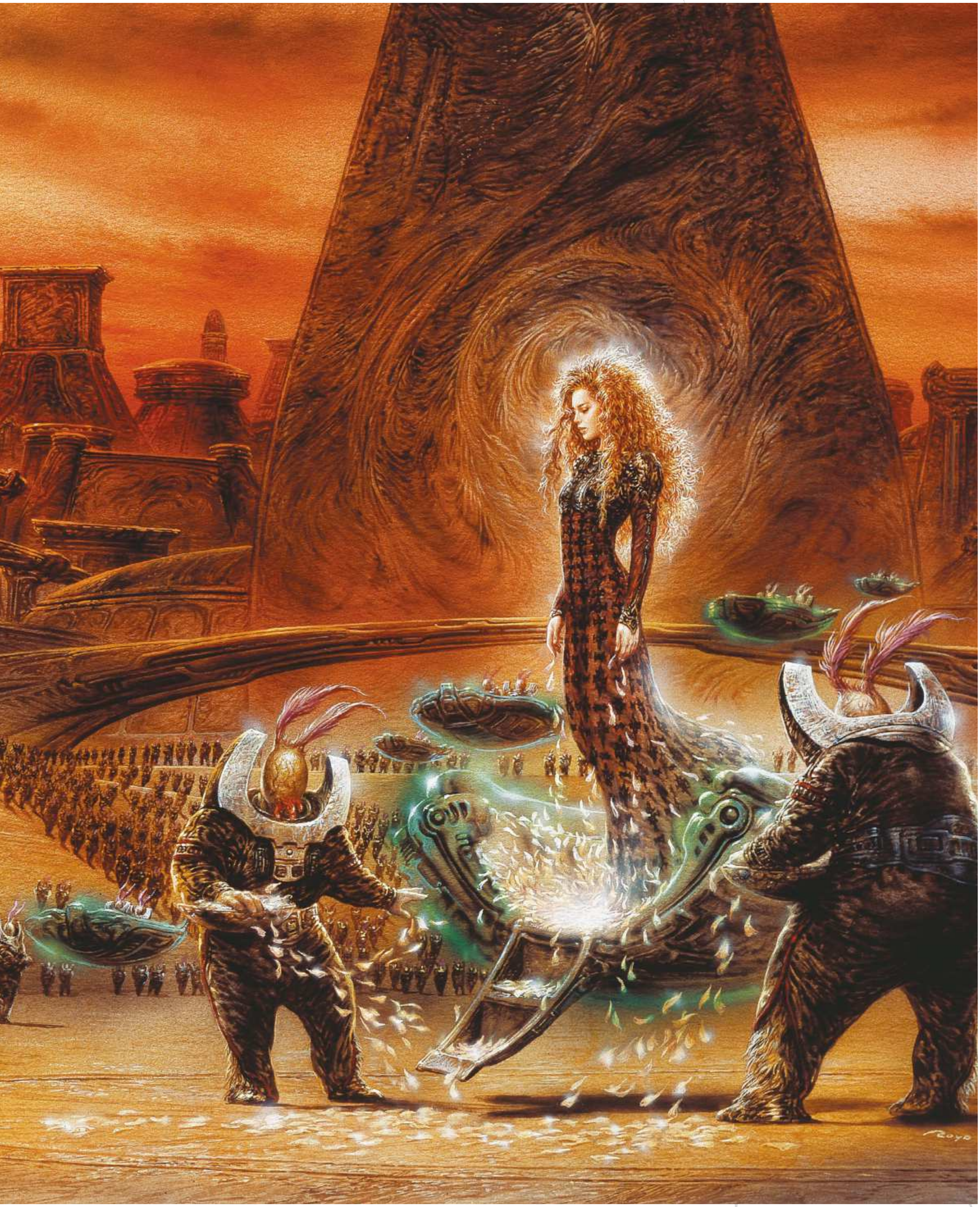
> "It's not only the female form that attracts me. I also feel attracted by everything that revolves around the feminine universe"

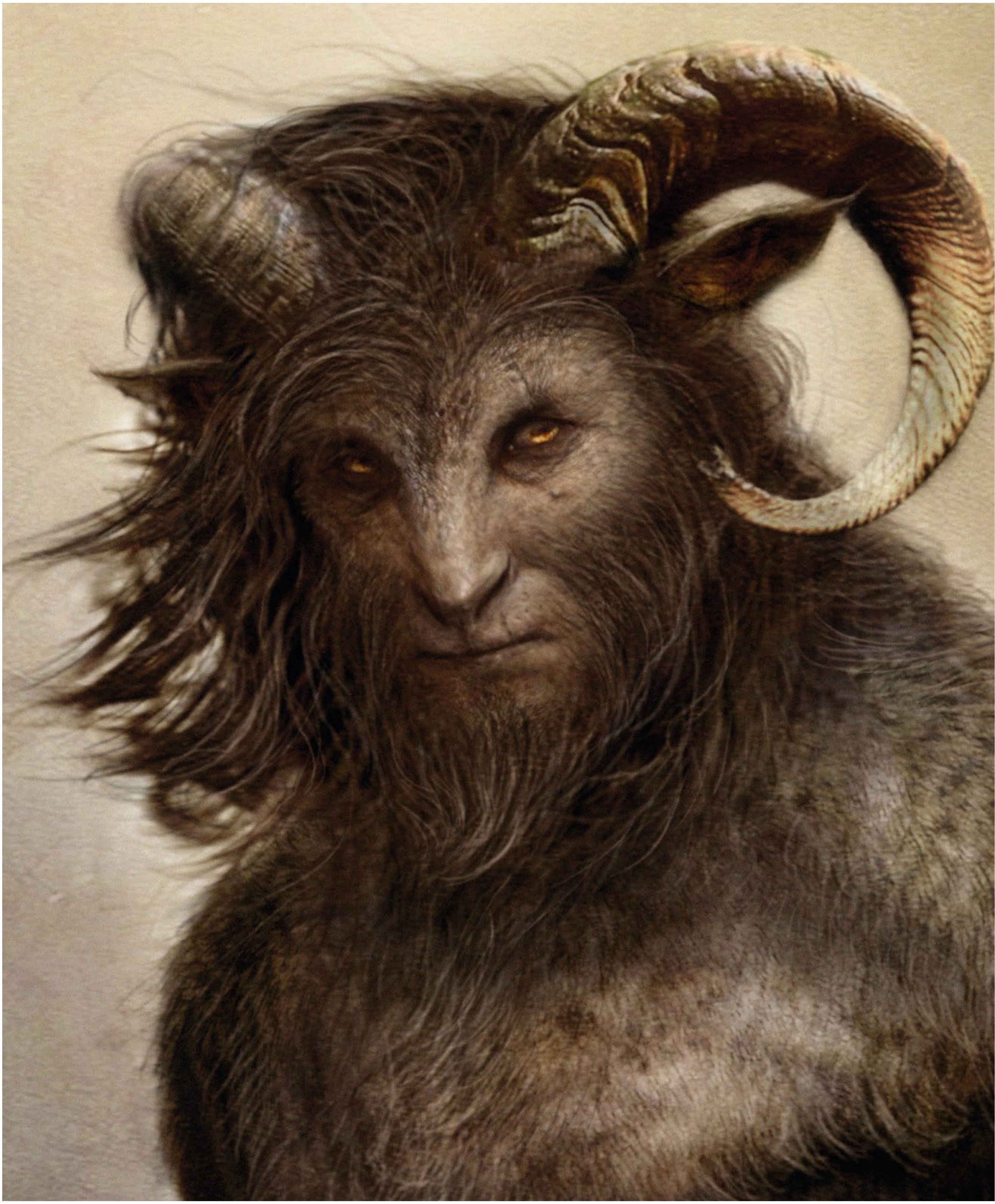
Wise words

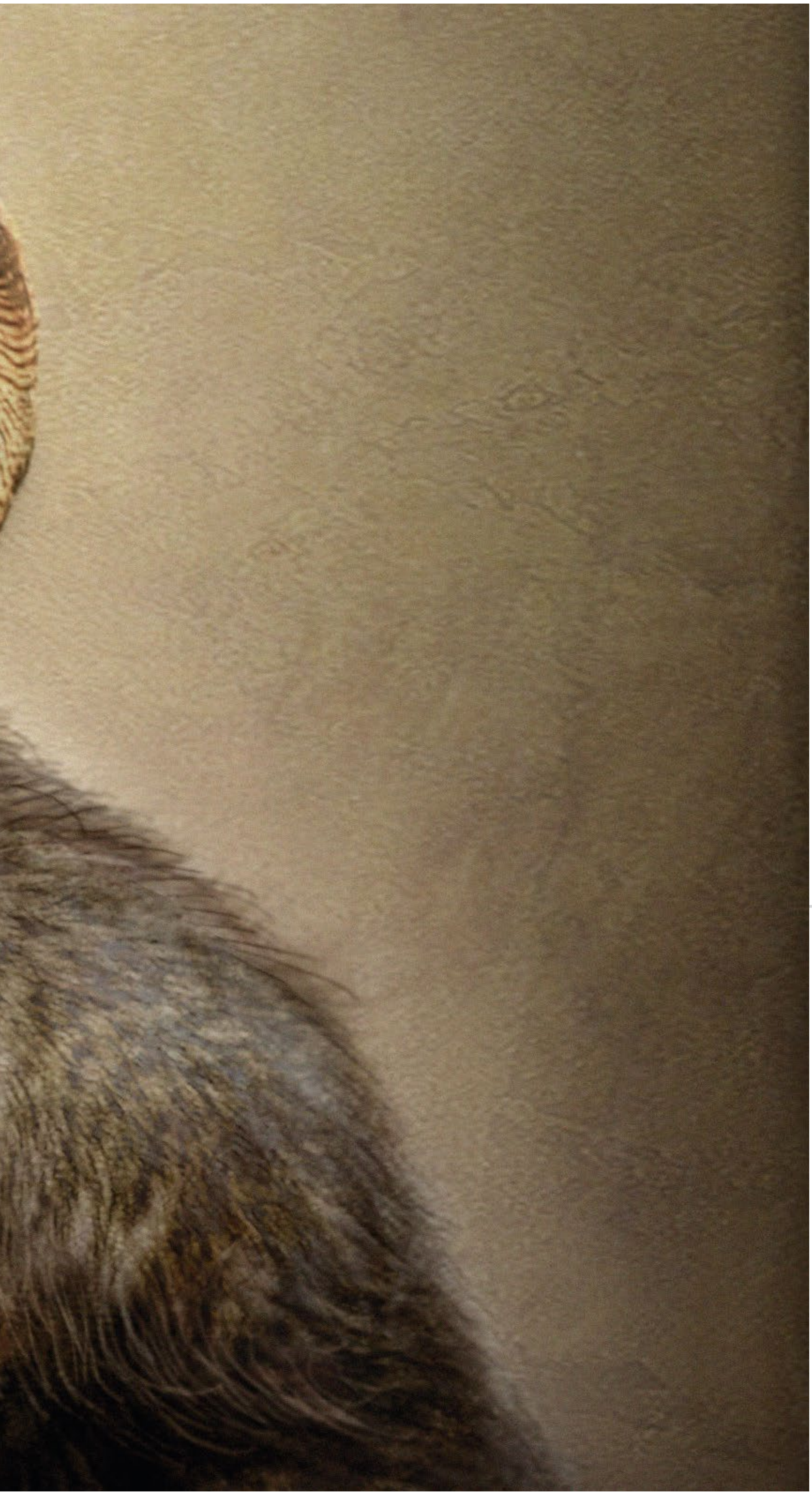
EMBRACE YOUR MISTAKES

Once he's set on a final idea, Luis often makes several 'finals' that never see the light of day. "About the mistakes," he says, "there are a lot, but when you've left them behind they're very helpful in strengthening your ideas."




Royo





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Aaron Sims

He's worked on some of the biggest Hollywood effects films in recent years, including *A.I. Artificial Intelligence, The Incredible Hulk, The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor, I Am Legend, Clash of the Titans, The Thing* and *The Amazing Spider-Man*. He also specialises in creature design beast-fests.

Aaron was a makeup artist in the 1980s, but switched to special effect for films like *Batman Forever, Gremlins 2* and *Men in Black*. Riding the digital art wave into the 1990s, Aaron worked with visual effects legend Stan Winston and continued to innovate in the world of digital concept art and creature design. He has made his name by visualising the creatures that directors imagine, in both 2D and 3D. Aaron saves the producers money by creating a concept so accurately that the finished designs are used exactly as they are in the film.

www.aaron-sims.com

> "What's changed from when I was doing this in pencil or clay, is that now I render out a final image that the client can sign off and say: 'This is what it'll look like in the movie'"

Wise words

SELF HELP

"There are so many educational devices that train people what to do. I've done many DVDs through Gnomon, which is a visual effects school. Educating yourself on those, I think, is really good."

ART LEGENDS

Advice and techniques from iconic artists

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Legends of D&D art are interviewed and showcase their iconic art, including Larry Elmore, Ralf Horsley and Todd Lockwood

Interview

Frank Frazetta

An icon, a legend and an inspiration – we pay tribute to ***Frank Frazetta****, the godfather of fantasy art*

Frank Frazetta, the artist who defined the Golden Era of fantasy art and brought about new respect for the genre, sadly died of a stroke on 10 May 2010, in Fort Myers, Florida, US. He was 82.

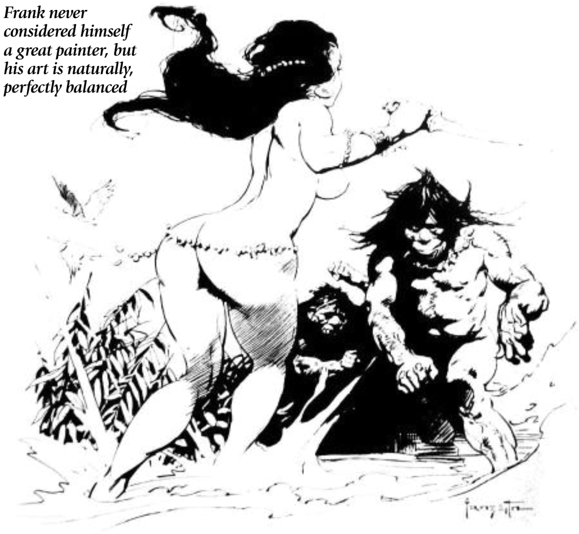
To say Frank was an inspiration is to understate his impact, not just on art, but on popular culture in its widest sense. His visions of barbarians, fantastical creatures and the female form brought a new realism and boldness to fantasy art that cast an influence as far wide as books, comics, film and music. He mixed art theory and tradition with fantasy and drama.

The man himself was more humble. Of his career and his art he told *ImagineFX* in issue 28, back in 2008, that, "I'm not pretending I'm a great painter. I don't think I am. What I think I'll be remembered for is my imagination, for my sense of drama, and for not being afraid to take a chance."

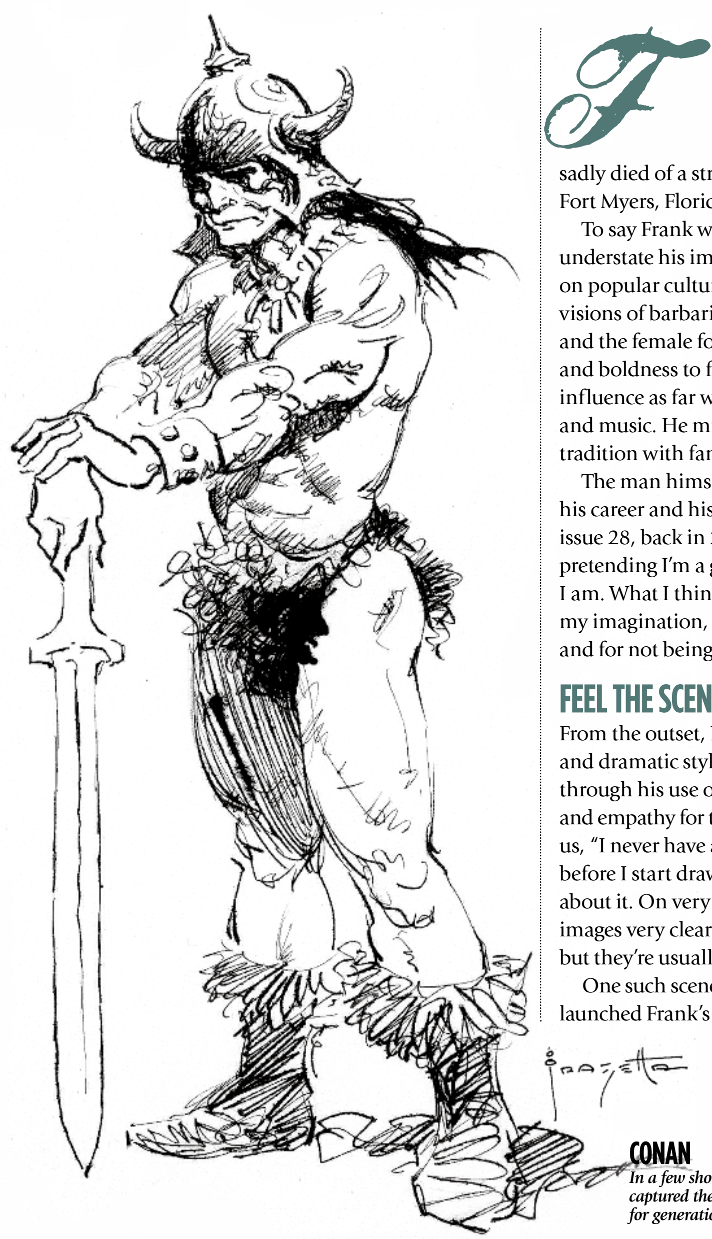
FEEL THE SCENE

From the outset, Frank had a loose, yet bold and dramatic style. His images came to life through his use of aggressive brush strokes and empathy for the subject. In 2008 he told us, "I never have a solid image in my head before I start drawing, just a certain feeling about it. On very rare occasions I see the images very clearly once I start sketching, but they're usually just very simple scenes."

One such scene was the image that truly launched Frank's career. In 1965, after

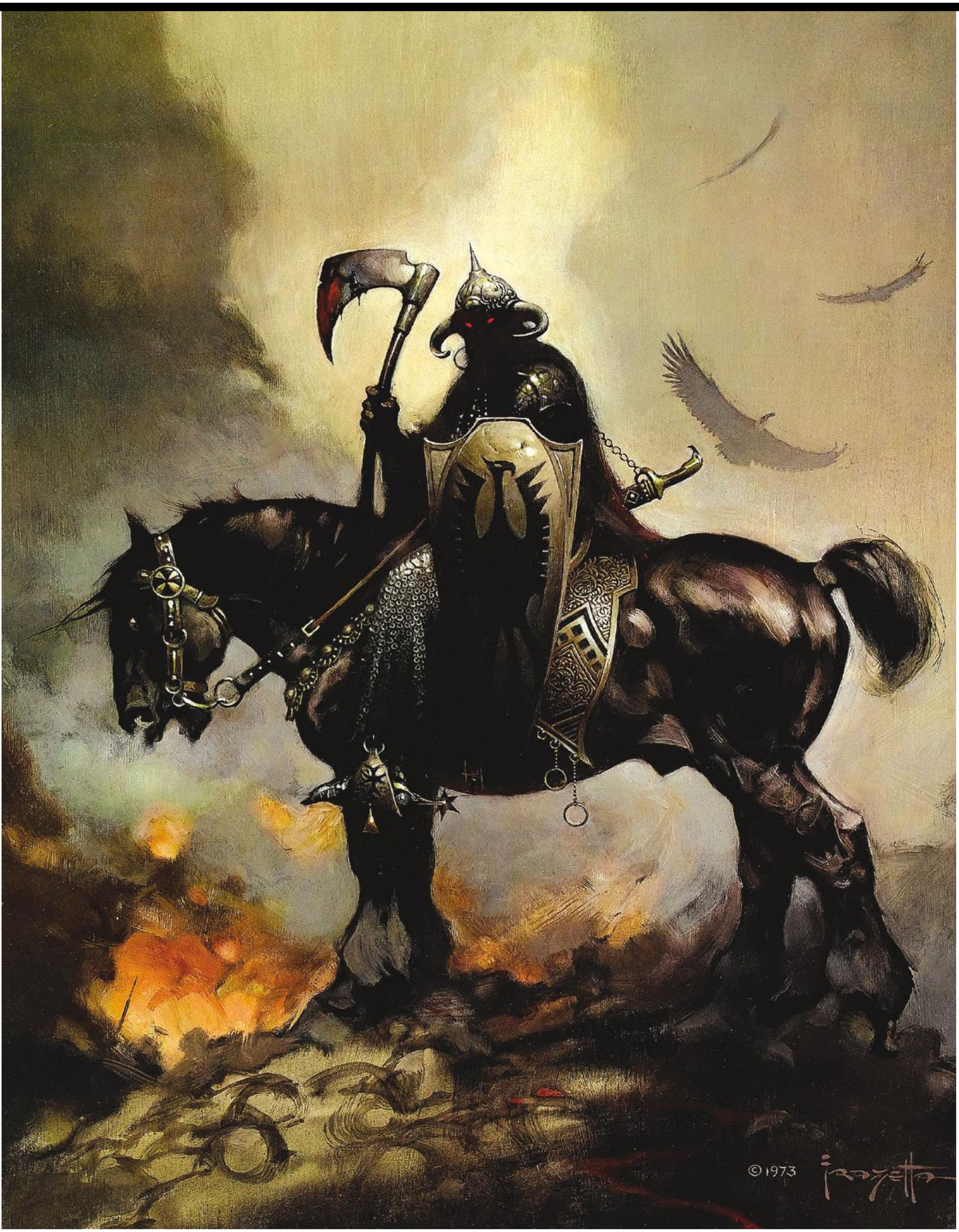


IMAGINATION
Frank never considered himself a great painter, but his art is naturally, perfectly balanced

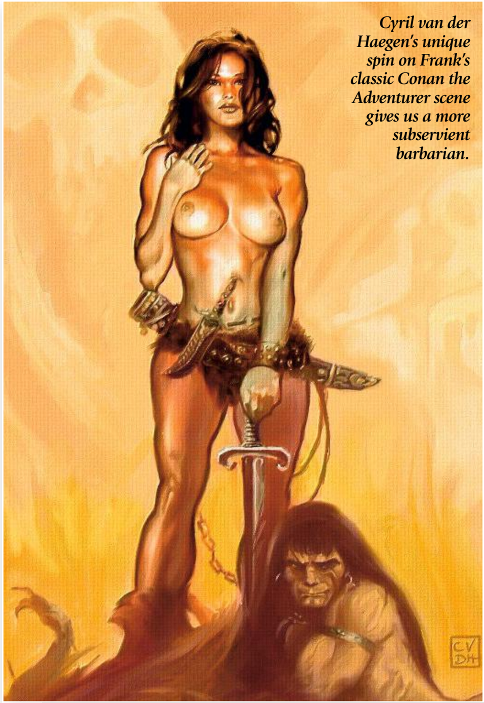


CONAN
In a few short pencil strokes Frank Frazetta captured the essence of Conan the Barbarian for generations of fans

THE DEATH DEALER
Painted in 1973, this is a painting that inspired its own comic series



©1973
Frazetta

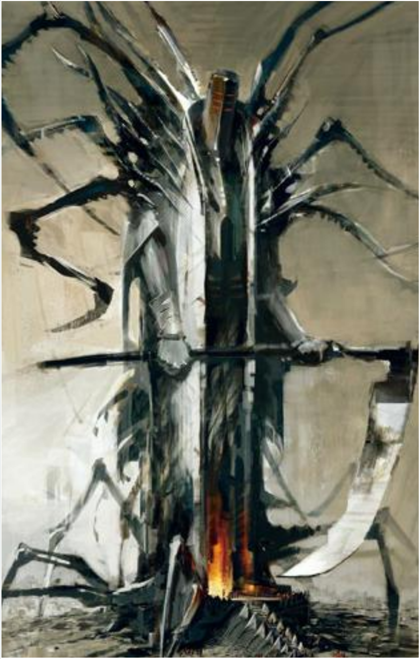


Cyril van der Haegen's unique spin on Frank's classic Conan the Adventurer scene gives us a more subservient barbarian.

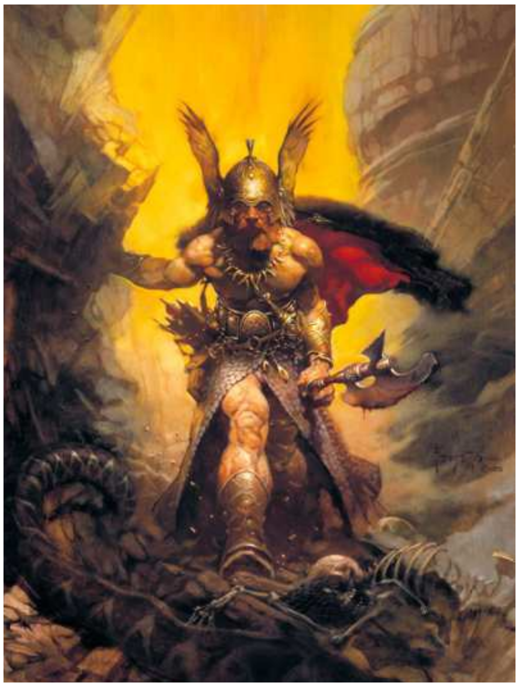
FRANK AT 80

In 2008, the leading fantasy art magazine *ImagineFX* celebrated Frank Frazetta's 80th birthday with the world's art community

The magazine partnered with 80 artists, including Rodney Matthews, Daniel Dociu and Raymond Swanland, and asked them to create their own take on a Frank Frazetta scene. The end result was a collection of exceptional illustrations, in a variety of styles and media. It proved that Frank's influence spreads to every corner of modern fantasy art, from concept artists to book illustrators and matte painters.



Daniel Dociu puts a digital spin on a classic Frazetta character and re-imagines Death Dealer in his own style



Dark Kingdom, painted in 1976, is typical of Frank's masterful use of composition and contrasting light, that drags you towards his warrior's pose

years working in comics, painting covers for the jungle adventure *Thun'da*, *Dan Brand* and *Buck Rogers*, Frank was offered a contract to paint the cover of Robert E Howard's *Conan The Adventurer*. The cover featured a dark, brooding barbarian, standing on a heaped pile of dead bodies, a naked slave girl wrapped around his legs and the glow of a burning village crowning the frame. It was visceral, iconic and exploded the preconception of what fantasy art should be.

"Frank Frazetta was the undisputed daddy of heroic fantasy art, an inspiration to artists across the globe," says Simon Brewer, recalling his love of the artist's work and that famous cover. "His high-impact style is much copied yet rarely replicated, such was his skill in communicating energy, dynamism and classic fantasy mood. Frank may have passed on but his legacy will long continue."

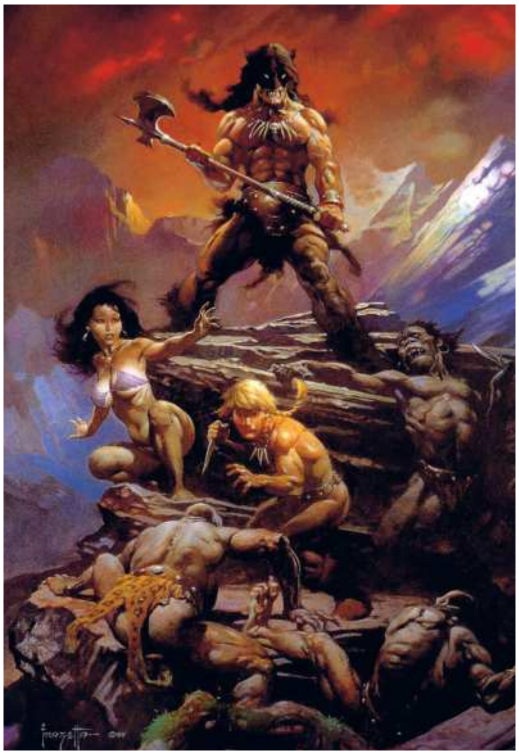
It's all the more impressive when you dig deeper into Frank's working process. Paintings such as that first Conan cover, or indeed his later work on *Tarzan* and *John Carter of Mars*, began life from an emotional source. "I don't see detail, just a certain atmosphere," he once told us. "That it's warm or cold, that it's terrible or eerie. I see something, but nothing distinct."

> “What I think I'll be remembered for is my imagination, for my sense of drama, and for not being afraid to take a chance” **FRANK FRAZETTA**

It's that emotional connection, above all, that was Frank's gift. He qualified his feelings for an image through bold strokes, a vibrant colour palette and imaginative character design that seemed to grow from the paint itself. The impact of the first Conan cover was equally emotional. Frank soared to the top of the industry. Publishers craved both him and anything to do with Robert E Howard.

Thanks to Frank's powerful illustrations of warriors and sexualised savagery, long-forgotten pulp characters became contemporary bestsellers. With them, Frank became one of the most influential illustrators of the 20th century.

"When you're struck by the work of an artist, the day remains engraved in your psyche," reflects John Howe. "I may well have grown up and now be working in the profession I hoped I might, but somewhere, I'll always be 14, visiting every used paperback shop within cycling distance, searching for book



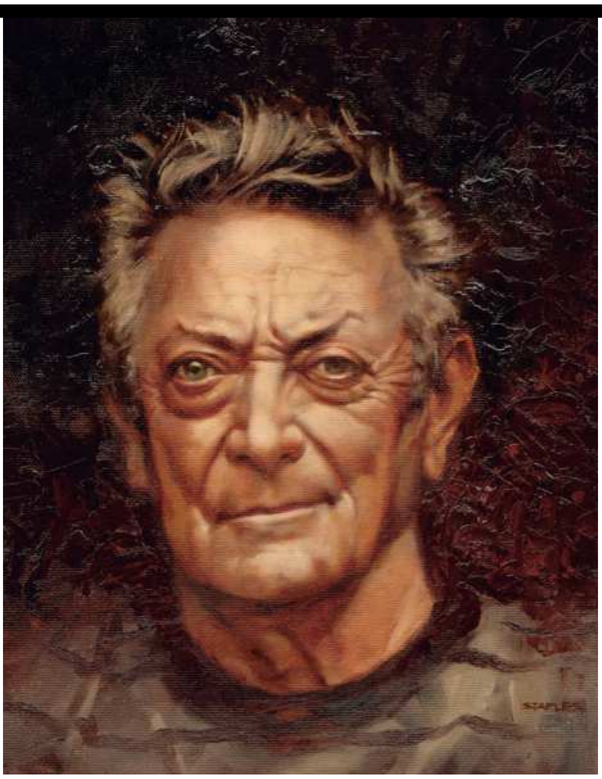
The 1983 movie Fire and Ice was pure Frazetta in motion. Frank created the characters and their world, drafted the script and painted this image, the movie's promotional poster covers by Frank Frazetta. Buried treasure couldn't have lured or enchanted me more." Such was Frank's impact, you have to wonder: did anyone ever read *Conan*? John recalls the dilemma fondly. "I made horrible copies of them [the illustrations] all in oil pastel. Perhaps I even read some of the books behind those coveted covers. If halcyon days can have a face and a name, it would be Frazetta's."

HARD GRAFT

The *Conan* cover was the impetus for Frank's most productive period. Between 1965 and 1973, Frank produced most of his more famous illustrations, including Cat Girl, Silver Warrior and the iconic Death Dealer. Frank's success (*Conan The Adventurer* sold 10 million copies) spawned imitators, and soon barbarians and buxom women were appearing on many book sleeves. Frank stayed ahead of the pack by working at a frenzied pace. He once completed three cover illustrations for Ace Books in two days.

Frank's workrate was again linked to his process. He'd often regarded himself as painting "by instinct" and would "draw almost unconsciously", letting his hand wander the canvas, building shapes and masses. As he told us, "It's like my mind is one place and my hand is another… somehow it all starts to come together."

Taking this at face value would be to deny Frank's gift for composition. Every image is built from an energetic focal point, shapes interact and the pyramid structure holds his paintings together. When working on an image, Frank would look for interesting patterns and work with loose blobs of colour to visualise spaces and shapes, building a hierarchy of importance and positioning. To prevent an image looking too forced, he occasionally introduced a new element, forcing it into the composition to sweep across the hierarchy and set the mind racing.



> "When I finally bought my first Frazetta book when I was 24, I honestly couldn't believe what I was seeing. It wasn't necessarily his painting technique. Frankly I felt there are some who could paint technically just as well, but it was the power and energy that hit me like a lightning bolt! His subjects were alive on the page, his women made of real flesh, his people moved… this was not the fantasy art I was expecting. Everything he touched, worked…"
>
> GREG STAPLES

"Once I'm happy with the composition, I'll work on the forward figures first: they're the most important," said Frank when he spoke to *ImagineFX* for his 80th birthday celebration. "Above all, there's always an interaction of shapes that provides a feeling of stillness. I think that's why people react to my art, even if they can't figure out why the hell they're reacting to it. It's not posed and fake."

Part of Frank's inspiration to artists was his devotion to learning the craft. While he was a gifted child, having started drawing at age three and enrolled in the Michele Falanga's Brooklyn Academy of Fine Arts when he was eight, he was instinctive, not technical. Commenting in the 2003 documentary *Frazetta: Painting With Fire*, he said, "When I was in school with Falanga, the emphasis was on feeling, not on the nuts and bolts." When working in comics in the late 1940s and 1950s, Frank was mentored by Ralph Mayo. "When Ralph took over, he pulled me aside and said, 'Frank, your stuff is great, but you need to learn some anatomy.' I really didn't understand what he meant by anatomy." That night Frank went home and studied an anatomy book Ralph had lent him, and in typically frenzied fashion, he began on page one and redrew the entire human body from the skeleton up.

SUPERSTAR SKETCHER

It's these stories that help define Frank as a legendary artists' artist. He worked hard at his craft, and was himself inspired by other artists, such as Howard Pyle and NC Wyeth, picking up on their use of light to punctuate the darker brooding colours of a scene. He turned those influences into his own style, built on instinct, imagination and hard work. Looking back at Frank's early work, his signifying influences, references and details can be seen no matter what the subject. The stylised foliage, the impression of space, the obsession with powerful beasts such as panthers and wolves, and of course, no matter what the scenario, Frank's women were unclothed, buxom and beautiful. Robert E Howard's Conan was funnelled through Frank's vision, not the other way around. In doing so, he stepped over the line that separates a jobbing illustrator from an artist.

"Frazetta revitalised the field of fantasy art with a fresh sense of the iconic image, drawn from his own vivid feeling for drama and conflict," says James Gurney as he

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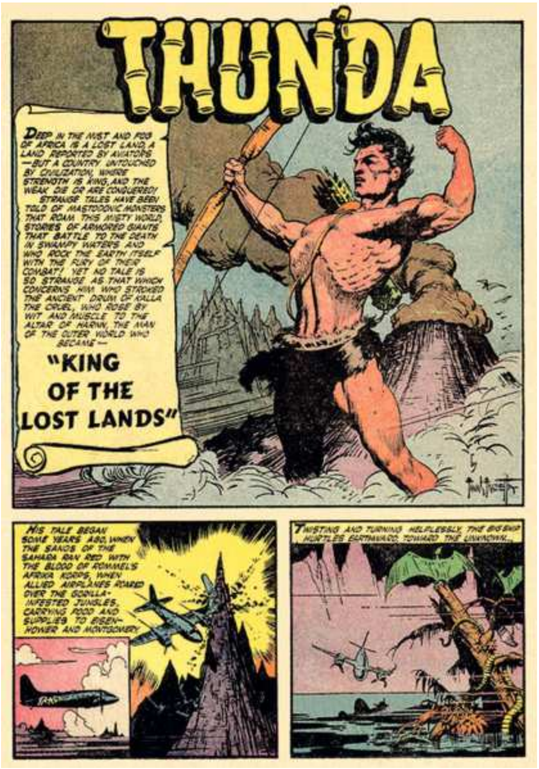
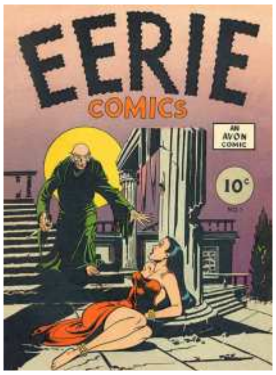
Bob Eggleton and the late Ron Walotsky pictured with Frank in 1997


THUN'DA
DEEP IN THE MIST AND FOG OF AFRICA IS A LOST LAND, A LAND REPORTED BY AVIATORS —BUT A COUNTRY UNTOUCHED BY CIVILIZATION, WHERE STRENGTH IS KING, AND THE WEAK DIE OR ARE CONQUERED! STRANGE TALES HAVE BEEN TOLD OF MASTODONIC MONSTERS THAT ROAM THIS MISTY WORLD, STORIES OF ARMORED GIANTS THAT BATTLE TO THE DEATH IN SWAMPY WATERS AND WHO ROCK THE EARTH ITSELF WITH THE FURY OF THEIR COMBAT! YET NO TALE IS SO STRANGE AS THAT WHICH CONCERNS HIM WHO STROKED THE ANCIENT DRUM OF KALLA THE CRUEL, WHO ROSE BY WIT AND MUSCLE TO THE ALTAR OF HARWN, THE MAN OF THE OUTER WORLD WHO BECAME—
"KING OF THE LOST LANDS"
HIS TALE BEGAN SOME YEARS AGO, WHEN THE SANDS OF THE SAHARA RAN RED WITH THE BLOOD OF ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS, WHEN ALLIED AIRPLANES ROARED OVER THE GORILLA-INFESTED JUNGLES, CARRYING FOOD AND SUPPLIES TO EISENHOWER AND MONTGOMERY
TWISTING AND TURNING HELPLESSLY, THE BIG SHIP HURTLES EARTHWARD, TOWARD THE UNKNOWN...

In the 1950s, Frank worked under the guidance of Ralph Mayo on Thun'Da, the only comic he drew cover to cover


EERIE
COMICS
AN AVON COMIC
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Many young fantasy artists got their first taste for Frank from his work on Eerie and Creepy magazines recalls what impressed him about Frank's work. "His moon maidens,

thundering dragons and sword-wielding barbarians took on a powerful life of their own, which shaped the imagination of many artists working today, me included."

LICENSING BREAKTHROUGH

Frank forged a new kind of relationship between artist and client. His policy of retaining original works and licensing his art, coupled with his wife Ellie setting up a poster business to sell Frank's work, created a business model that has empowered artists to this day. Frank was a 'success'; the professional illustrator admired by his peers, respected by his clients and idolised by his fans. As Liam Sharp says, "Frazetta

gave fantasy art credibility – and its first true superstar."

Frank's status in the 1970s and the impact of his art on popular culture exploded in the 1980s, including work on album covers, T-shirts and films, culminating in the movie *Fire and Ice*. While previous films such as John Milius's *Conan The Barbarian* drew inspiration from Frank for their art direction, *Fire and Ice* was more personal. Long-time friend and animator, Ralph Bakshi, fresh from work on *Lord of the Rings* and *Wizards*, asked Frank to collaborate on the movie. Working closely with Ralph, Frank designed the characters, their world and even sat in on the casting and live-action filming sessions.

"I had the privilege of working as a background painter on *Fire and Ice*," says James Gurney as he remembers time spent with Frank at his studio. "We always tried to get Frank to give the studio a class on figure drawing and composition, but he never did, probably because much of what he did was intuitive. That intuition, combined with a fierce confidence in the power of pure imagination, made his images unforgettable and truly immortal."

After a disappointing reception to *Fire and Ice*, Frank returned to his studio. During the 1980s and 1990s, he continued to paint, creating art for album covers and posters, as well as developing his own themes; he painted new versions of Death Dealer and Cat Woman. Celebrity fans courted him, and included Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and Arnold Schwarzenegger. His value soared and even unfinished sketches would sell for thousands of dollars. Despite this, Frank refused to sell many of his original paintings. Instead, he opened the Frazetta Museum in East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, so that they could be enjoyed by the public.

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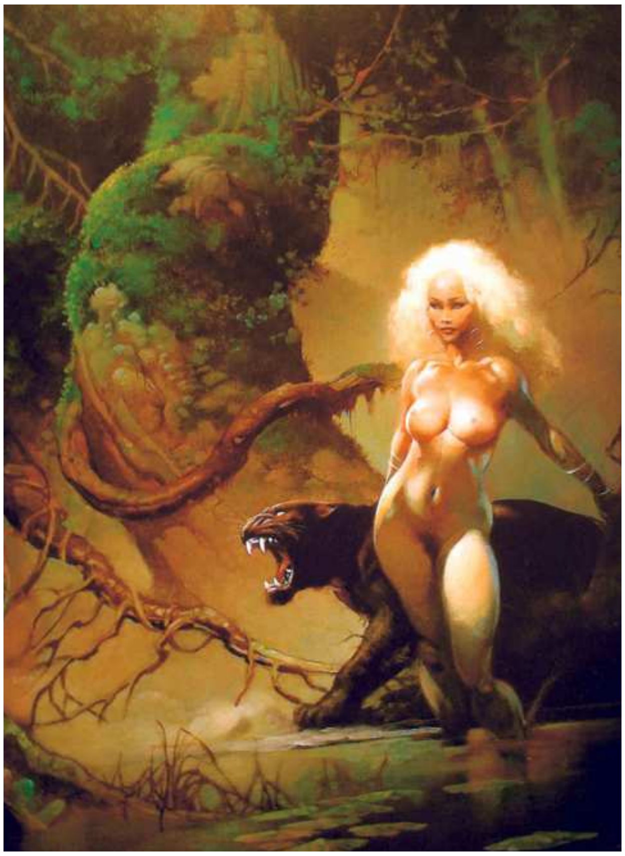
> "I'm constantly asked how I learned to paint. My standard answer is, I taught myself. In reality, I didn't. Frank Frazetta taught me how to paint. I can pinpoint the exact moment when Frank changed my life. It was the day I picked up that copy of *Conan the Conqueror* from the drugstore paperback rack as a child in Hawaii. It was then that I knew what I wanted to be. I literally copied his paintings to teach myself how to paint. Eventually, he taught me that I couldn't be him – I needed to be my own artist"
>
> DAVE DORMAN



Cat Girl II, painted in 1990, was a reworking of his 1984 original and continued Frank's love affair with the female form and powerful, big cats

THE SILVER WARRIOR

Painted in 1972, this is one of Frazetta's most iconic images

Frank said of the museum project that "It was all Ellie's idea. We were always getting calls from the fans asking if they could come see the originals. The best we had done through the years was to have some exhibits at various conventions, but that got to be a hassle. We did the museum for all the people who have had fun with my art over the years. It wasn't for profit – if I wanted to make money I would've sold the originals. My joy is in showing the work."

LATE IN LIFE

Behind the scenes, Frank's health was worsening but, as Bob Eggleton recalls, it didn't prevent him commanding an audience, or painting. "When I met him in

1997, you felt his presence when he entered the room," says Bob. Frank was recovering from a stroke at the time. It had left his drawing hand paralysed, but he had taught himself to draw with his other hand. "He was in great spirits and a very kind man to meet. However, when fellow artist, the late Ron Walotsky and myself met him, and had our picture taken with him, it was such an intimidating experience for us both. Ron aptly titled the photo 'Frank Frazetta and Two Guys'. We'll miss Frank, but his work has left a permanent imprint on not just fantasy art, but the art world as a whole."

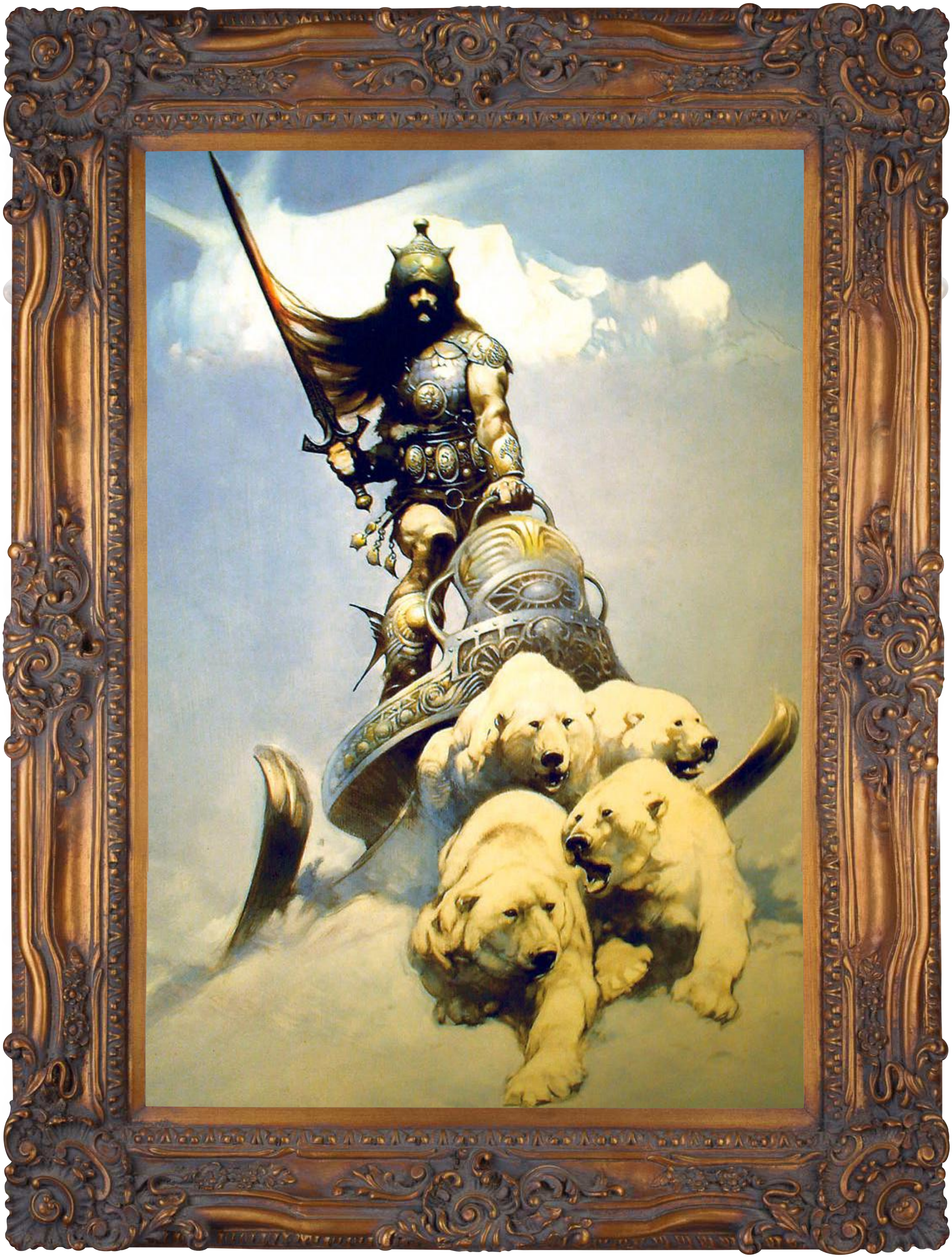
In 2008, the cover illustration for Burroughs' *Escape on Venus* sold for $251,000. In 2009, the original *Conan the Conqueror* painting was sold privately for $1 million. Up until that point, Frank had resolutely refused to sell any of his original Conan illustrations, and it became a contentious issue, which for a time divided the Frazetta family. To this day, it's unclear how much Frank knew of the sale.

It's a testament to Frank's legacy that such unseemly squabbles over his

collection haven't harmed his reputation. His impact stretches further than a valuation could ever reach. As Brom recalls, "I was six years old when I saw my first Frazetta cover. The impact was so great that I can still recall the adrenaline rush. I've spent my life since then trying to capture an ounce of the life and power of his works. My greatest testament to Frank, is the better I become as an artist, the better his art gets."

Frank was a unique talent. He bridged the gap between the traditions of the Golden Age masters and artists of the modern era. As artists of all calibre line up to pay tribute, one thing is clear, Frank Frazetta will live on in his paintings and in the brush strokes of myriad fans and artists, all aspiring to follow in his footsteps.

Turn the page to learn to paint like Frank Frazetta



Photoshop

LOOK TO FRAZETTA FOR INSPIRATION

Tap into Frank Frazetta's iconic style of painting without ending up with a poor copy. **Jean-Sébastien Rossbach** tips his hat to the master artist

I don't know a single fantasy artist who isn't influenced by the art of Frank Frazetta. A combination of his innate sense of movement, the energy, the raw pulse of life he put in his images, and his skills in anatomy and storytelling propelled him to the top of the illustrators' pyramid. I'm going to show you my way of interpreting the legacy this artiste extraordinaire has left us.

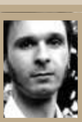
Many have tried to steal his magic potion, but no one has been able to give their art even half the power that Frazetta could. So my goal isn't to copy Frazetta. Instead, I ask myself what elements of the great man's production I like, and see if I can incorporate them into my own workflow. And what better subject could there be than a good old Conan piece?

If you look closely at early Frazetta pieces you'll see how he likes to draw human figures like animals. His guys can look like gorillas. I want to draw a Conan thrusting his chest out like a gorilla. You'll also often find him at the top of a triangle composition, with an axe or sword in his hands. I like this a lot because it's a simple type of composition and puts the focus on the main character, giving him potency and strength. I know I'll add a couple of enemies at his feet, but for now I don't know what they'll look like.

Artist **PROFILE**

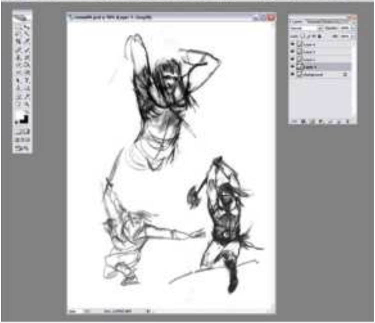
Jean-Sébastien Rossbach

COUNTRY: France



Jean-Sébastien has worked for many major companies including Marvel, Wizards of the Coast and Ubisoft. He's also the author of *Merlin*, an art book that retells the legendary wizard's story.

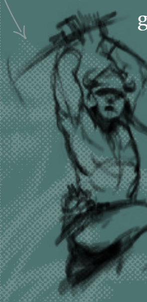
http://livingrope.free.fr



1 The initial sketch

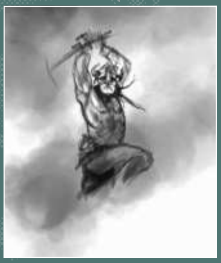
Because the composition is so simple and I'm creating the image in Photoshop (enabling me to correct my composition at any time), I begin drawing Conan directly. I've done a couple of sketches to see what movement would be the most interesting, even though I already have a good idea of what I'm going to end with. I use a bold diamond brush – a personal favourite – for starting to draw the shapes and anatomy. It means I can wander around the canvas without having to be too precise.

2 Focus on movement



The aim is to first nail the movement of the body, so I don't pay much attention to the muscles and volumes. I'd do the same at a life-drawing session, and begin with a big charcoal or graphite pencil. Big brushes are easy-going – they allow the shapes to appear in front of your eyes. Afterwards I'll rescale anything that's too big or small, and sculpt the shapes more precisely with the eraser.

3 Add a background

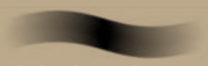


Now that I have an idea of my character's gesture I begin to add some background to the piece. Again, the main character is the focus of the painting, so I'll only use fog and clouds, but the clouds are important and they'll help me build my composition. From the very beginning I knew that I'd put my Conan on top of a small promontory.

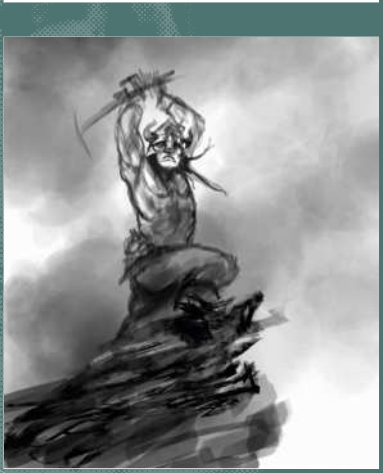
WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

DIAMOND BRUSH



The brush I use the most is a big diamond brush. It's very useful for roughing out the first sketches. I also like the marks it makes when you simply paint a subject.



4 Generate energy

My composition now appears clearly. It's a triangle, and inside this triangle I'll use curvy lines that rise and fall from to the bottom left of the plane to the upper right. These wavy lines will bring a sense of energy and movement to my image. I didn't do a proper thumbnail of the composition in the beginning because I knew where I was going, but I strongly recommend that you do so before starting a painting. The composition is the most important step in the construction of an image.

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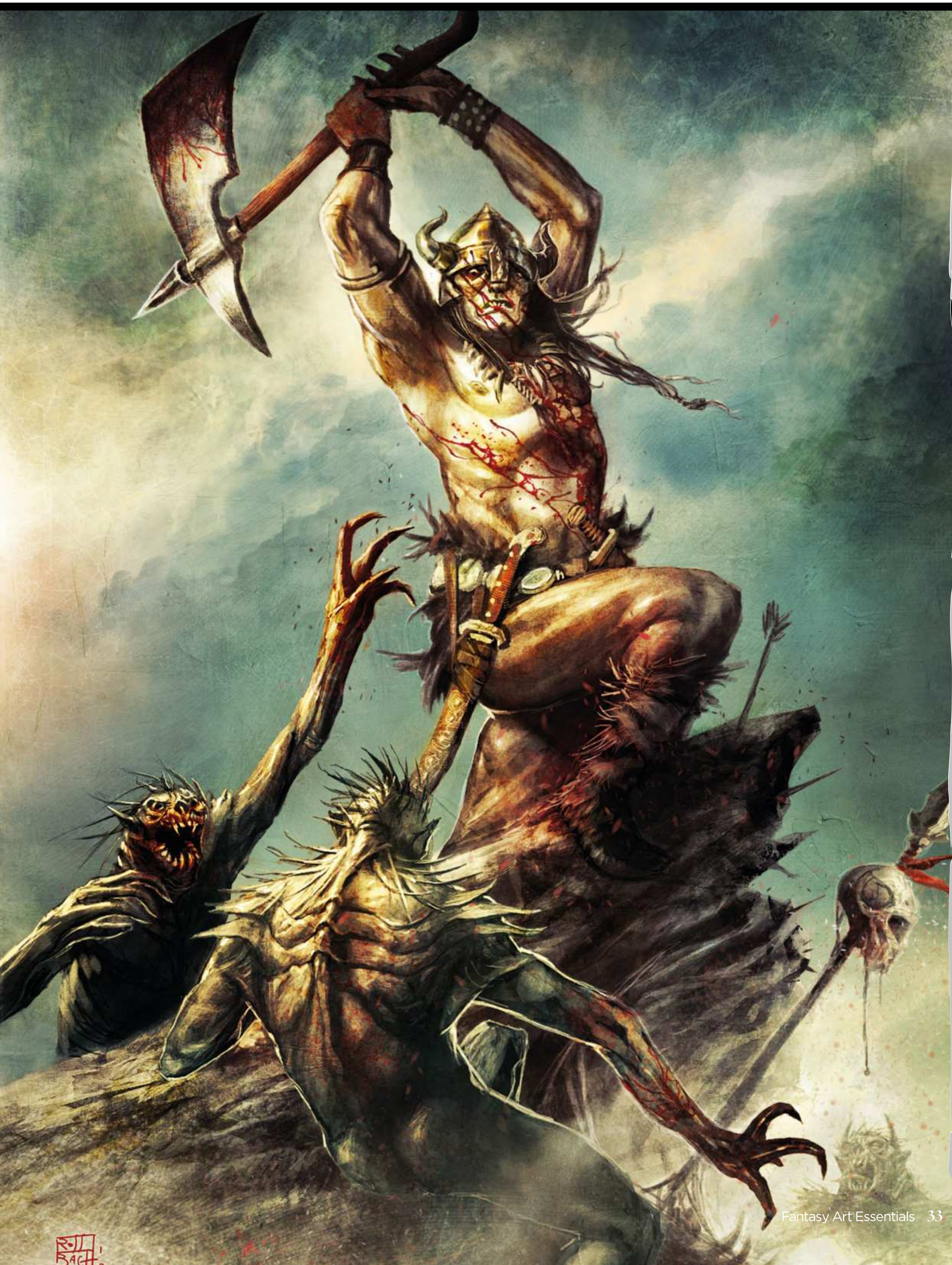
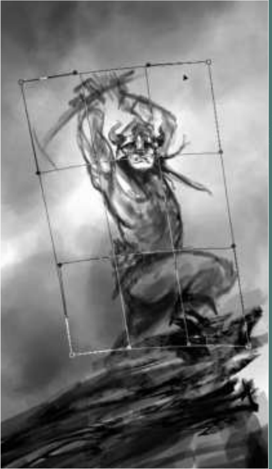


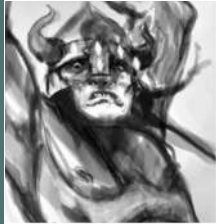


5 Build the anatomy

Now that I've blocked the movement of my character and have a good idea of what my composition will be, I can begin to refine the anatomy. This is the main problem to solve in an image like this. If you're not too comfortable with anatomy I recommend that you use a photo reference. In fact, this is what I do now: because I'm not sure what his arms and hands should look like I take a naked photo of myself (Don't even think about asking me to show it – my woman would kill me!). It helps me to see where the elbow is in relation to the head, for example. I then use Photoshop's Warp tool to adjust his pose.

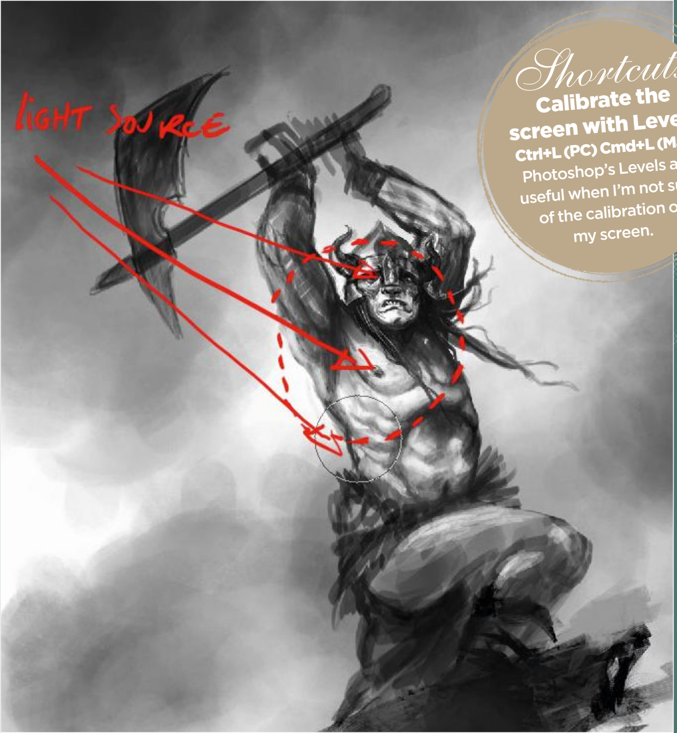
6 The beast within

Here I'm focusing on Conan's chest because it's what I want to express: the beast inside the man! I don't want to make him look too smart either, so I begin to draw his eyes bulging. He's also biting his lip because of the effort involved (this is a technique you often see in Simon Bisley's art, for example). The man-animal is appearing slowly in front of me.



7 Shine a light

Now I need to identify the light sources. Light is a powerful tool that helps create atmosphere, and a character will look different if you throw a light on them from the bottom or from the top. I decide to put a narrow, yet diffuse, spot on Conan's chest; because it's the focal point of the image. I keep part of his face in shadow so that his eyes appear bright and mad-looking. His axe is almost completely treated like a shadow puppet, to emphasise the threat that it represents.



Shortcuts

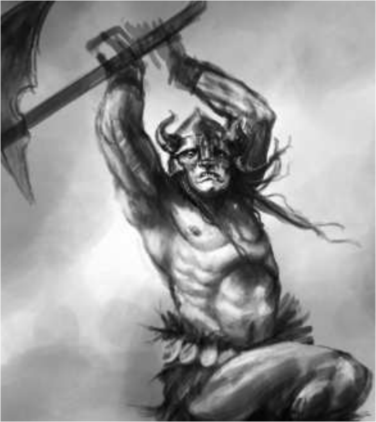
Calibrate the screen with Levels

Ctrl+L (PC) Cmd+L (Mac)

Photoshop's Levels are useful when I'm not sure of the calibration of my screen.

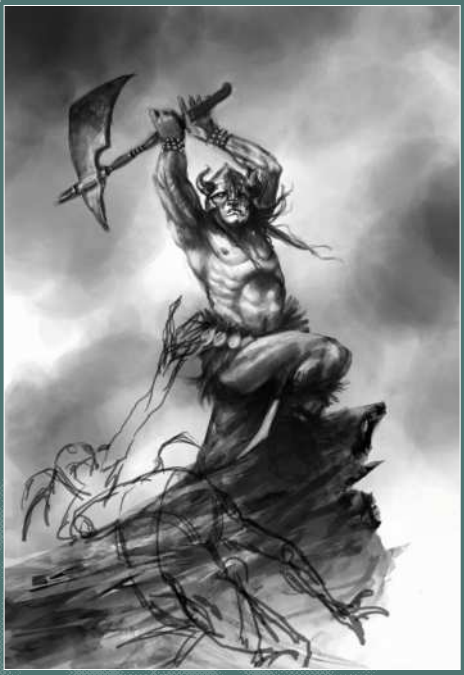
8 Turn up the volume

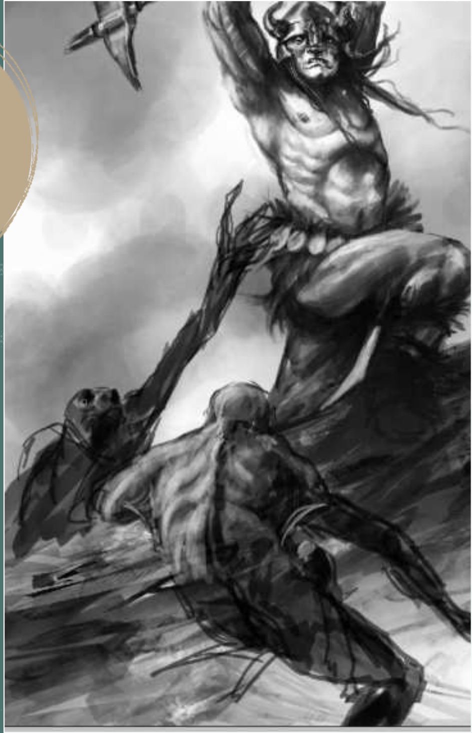
Each part of the body, each muscle and each item of clothing must be treated according to the light source. This is what will help you build the volumes in the piece. In addition, you won't become lost in your image, not knowing what to do next. You can see that I'm working in black and white here. I'll add colour later, but first I want to focus on the values of grey. Using this technique I have greater control of the full and empty spaces I have in my image. If I'd used colours from the beginning, they may have distracted me, and I don't want that to happen.



9 Make enemies

At this point my Conan looks rather stupid with his axe raised and not a single head to crush in front of him. He screams for battle: "Crom! Where are my enemies?" To be perfectly honest, right now I still don't have a clue what his opponents will look like. But the composition seen from the abstract angle will help me in my task. Let's say that they're humanoids, reptile-like with long arms and maybe something of a toad or a lizard in their faces. I begin to draw their shapes very loosely – something between a reptile and a man. The good thing with monsters is that you don't have to worry too much about their anatomy; the more odd they are, the cooler they look!





10 Keep to your composition

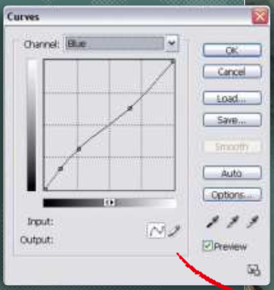
The main thing I want to focus on is my composition, so I try to sit the enemies on strong lines that complement my initial wavy composition, without breaking it. I first draw shadows and then build the lights slowly. As I paint, I decide on the necessary details. The ribcage of the first monster in the foreground is very defined; I want to see his bones under the skin. The arms are very long and the hands have only four hooked fingers. I flip the image horizontally to see where I've made mistakes.

11 Pay tribute to the master artist

The guy in the foreground is a tribute to Frazetta, in the way that he's bending his body over. I also chose to show his backside, which is something that you only see in Frazetta pieces. It reflects the freedom the creative minds had back in the 70s. Finally, I end up adding spikes on their heads and shoulders, and a thin carapace over their flesh. Not anything too Frazetta-ish this time, but more to my personal taste.

12 Separate shapes

While I'm refining the details, I decide to add a backlight to the monster in the foreground. This will help separate his shape from the texture of the promontory behind him. It's always good to add a second light source that comes from the back of the characters. It's used to outline the silhouette and make it pop to the foreground.



Curves

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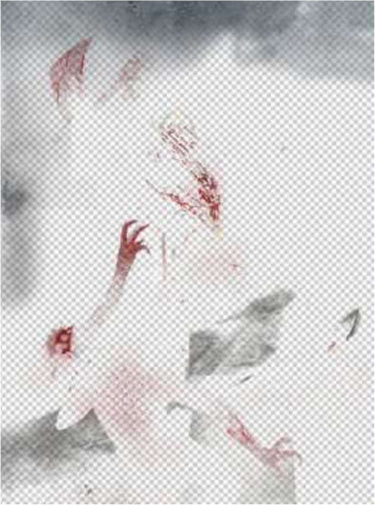
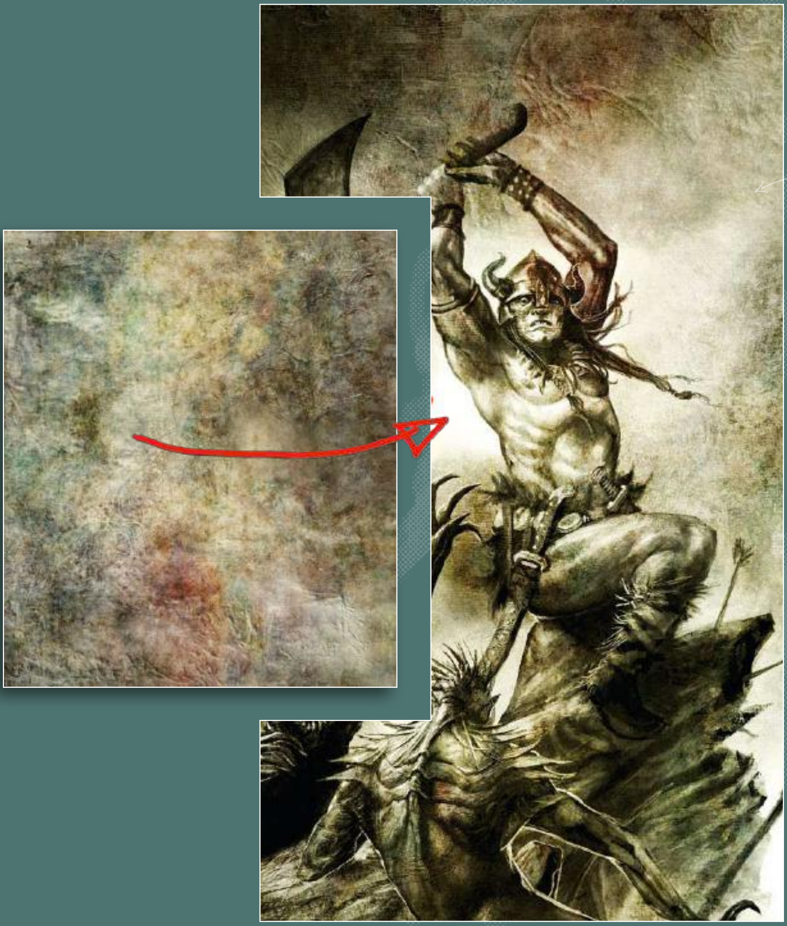
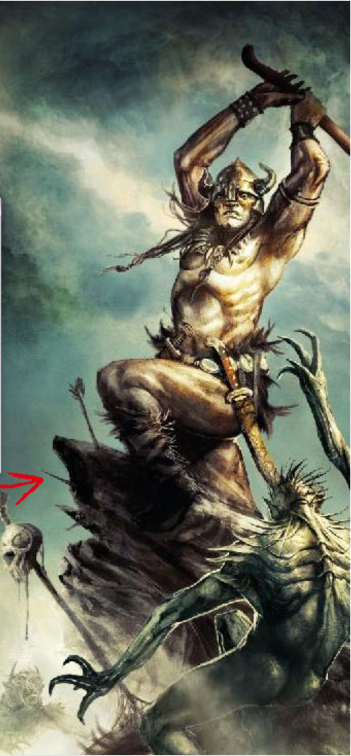
☑ Preview



13 Add colour

There are many ways to colour an image in Photoshop. You can use the Colour Balance tool, create a Curves layer, apply colours with an Overlay layer and so on. I decide to use a handful of methods, starting with a coloured texture that I created earlier. I'm using it as an Overlay layer that enables me to add a painted texture to my image as well as some colour indications. After that, I use the Colour Balance tool to give a yellowish tint to the whole image. Usually, I use blue and cyan for the dark values, and yellow and red for highlights.





14 Celebrate curves

If, like me, you want to keep the fun flowing, try the Curves tool. I'm not too fond of the colours straight out of the tube – blue for the sky, pink for the flesh, that kind of thing. Using Curves is a great way to achieve results that you would never have imagined, because it acts directly on the RGB channels. And most of the time you'll produce interesting and surprising results. Finally, I'm adding colours on an overlay layer.

15 The painted touch

I've lost count of how many times someone has asked me what my secret is for making an illustration look like it's 'painted'. I do paint my images digitally, but of course they mean real oil paint! Again, there are a couple of simple techniques to achieve this. You can make a pass on Painter and add some digital varnish to your image, or you can also import it into ArtRage and paint over some areas to add the painted touch here and there (I do this sometimes). You can also search for painted textures online and apply them to your image on an Overlay layer, which is what I've done here. Don't hesitate to grab online textures for everything: clouds for the sky, rusted metal for the armour, fish scales for your dragons, concrete or stone for your mountains… Textures are a time-saver, but remember to use them only for the finishing touch, to add the kind of detail that will make a difference. Don't begin an image with the details – start with the overall composition!

PRO SECRETS

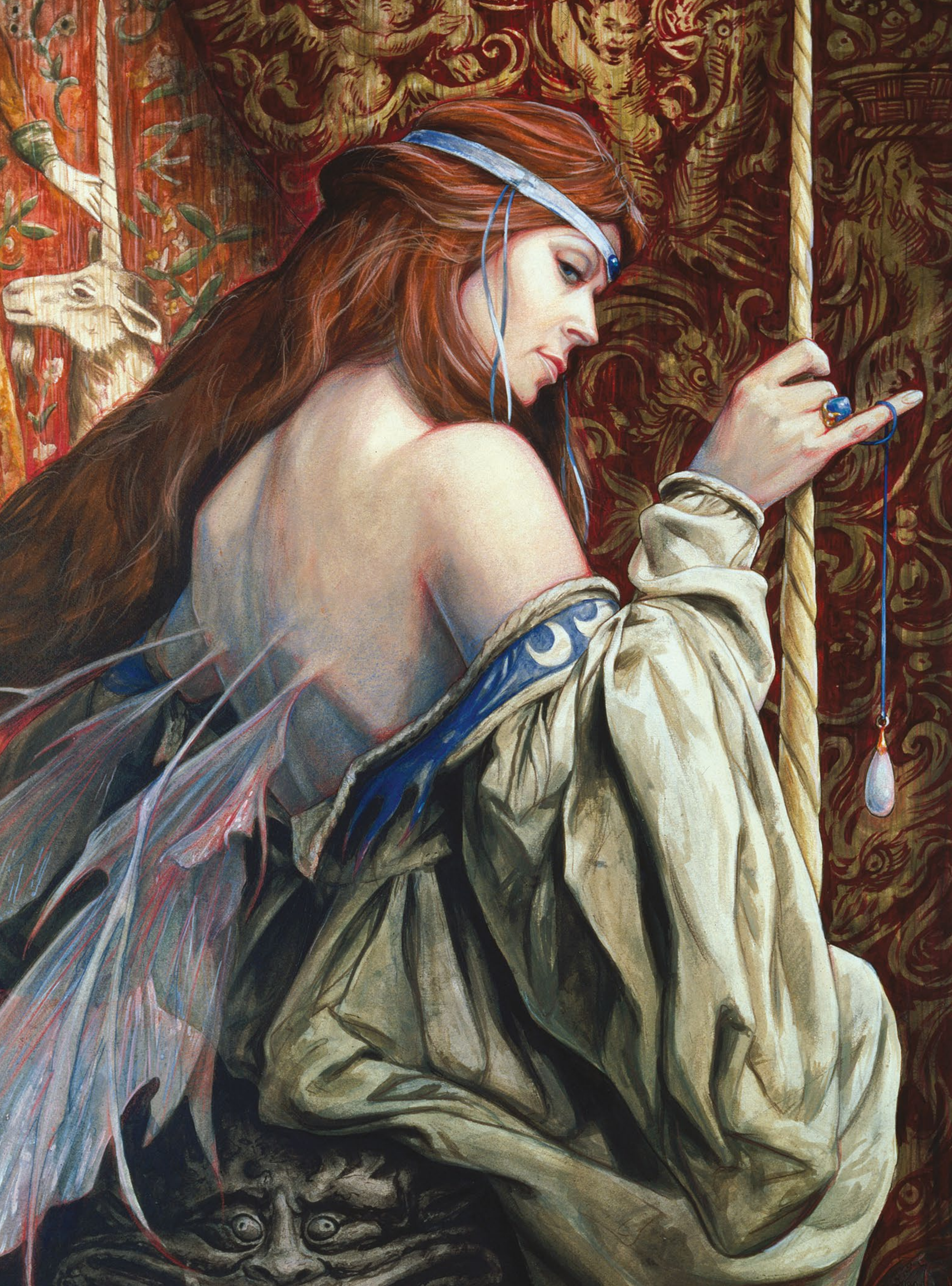
The Curves layer

At the bottom of the Layers bar is a round icon labelled Create New Fill Or Adjustment Layer. Select this icon, choose Curves and play with the red, green and blue values to achieve some surprising colour results. This Adjustment layer is also interesting because it acts like a mask, enabling you to erase unwanted areas with the Brush tool.

PRO SECRETS

Compose your image

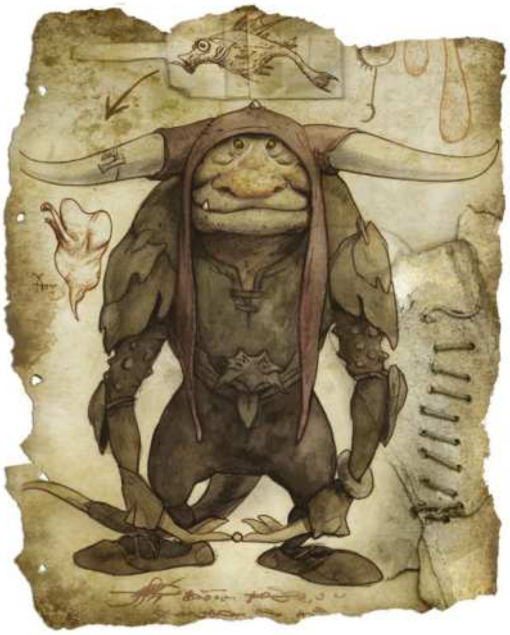
I know, this sounds very basic, but even pros tend to forget this simple yet mandatory step. Don't be too quick – take the time to think about your composition. What big shape will you use to build your scene? A triangle, a square or a circle maybe? And inside this big shape, what lines of movement will you choose? Composition is the first step and the most important decision you will have to make.



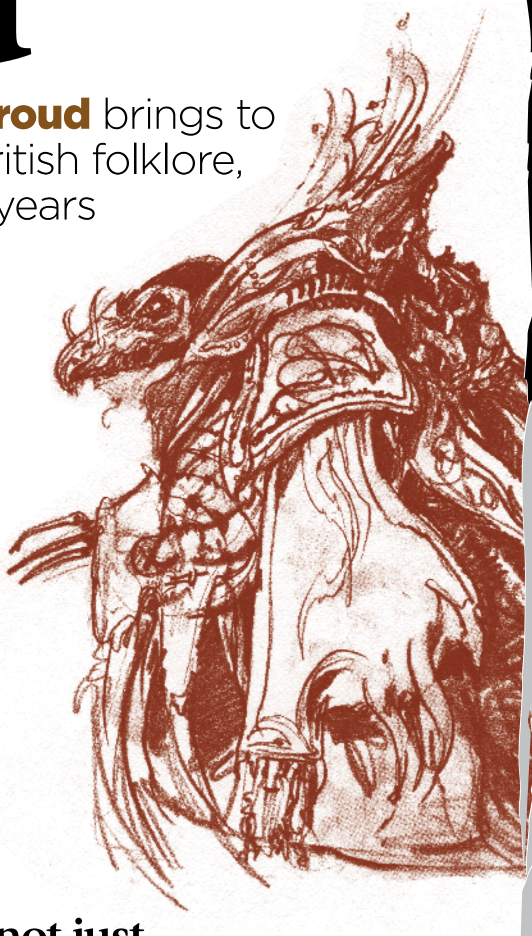
Interview

Brian Froud

With every painting, the artist **Brian Froud** brings to life characters and creatures from British folklore, reaching back thousands of years



UNICORN
Faerie artwork has been a mainstay of Brian Froud's career and this illustration (left) is from his book Brian Froud's World of Faerie



Don't believe everything you hear about faeries. They aren't always cute and kindly like a Disneyfied Tinker Bell. They're not made-up, fluffy nonsense that should be confined to the nursery. Instead of living in faerieland, they're inhabitants of this world, part of its fabric and spirit.

If you've had the chance to take in the artwork of the great Brian Froud at any time, you might have an idea of what we're getting at. For more than 30 years, this British painter has made himself an expert conduit between faerietale creatures and human beings. Faeries, trolls and goblins are some of his favourite subjects and he has a keen understanding of their characteristics and their meaning.

STRONG IMAGINATION

Brian has many books to his name – *The Land of Froud*, *Faeries*, Good Faeries… *Bad Faeries* and *Lady Cottington's Pressed Fairy Book* to name a handful. He's also worked with Jim Henson, bringing many wonderful creatures and characters to life in the films *The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*. Here's a man with a vivid imagination, which he's shared with his fans through paintings, books and the big screen.

> “Talking to Brian, it's clearly not just about imagination. He sees his work as being something that starts in reality”

Talking to Brian, though, it's clearly not just about imagination. He sees his work as being something that starts in reality, looking at the natural world. One of his early influences was Arthur Rackham. ➤

Artist
PROFILE

Brian Froud

Brian Froud is one of the world's most respected folklore artists. His illustrated book, *Brian Froud's Faeries' Tales*, created with his wife Wendy, is now available to buy.
www.worldoffroud.com

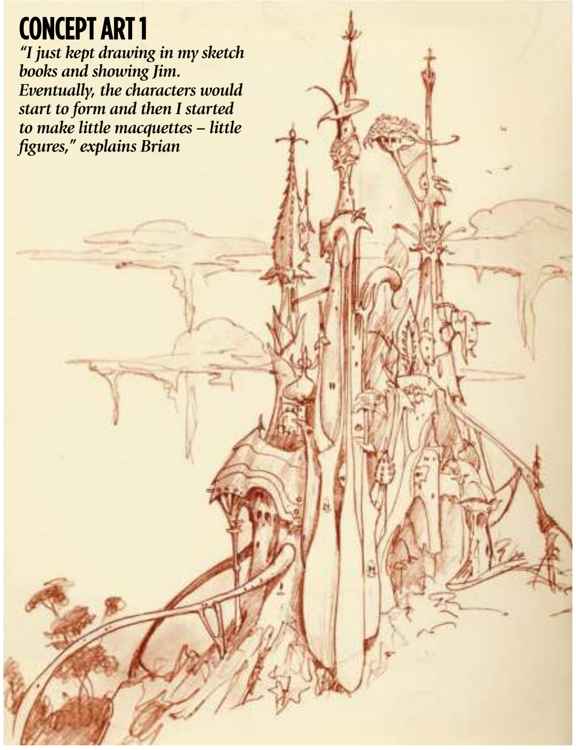
THE DARK CHRYSALIS?

A funny thing happened on the way to the cinema

One of the many highlights in Brian Froud's career was his work with Jim Henson for the movie *The Dark Crystal*. Cited by many artists and fantasy lovers as an inspiring film, it could easily have been called *The Dark Chrysalis*.

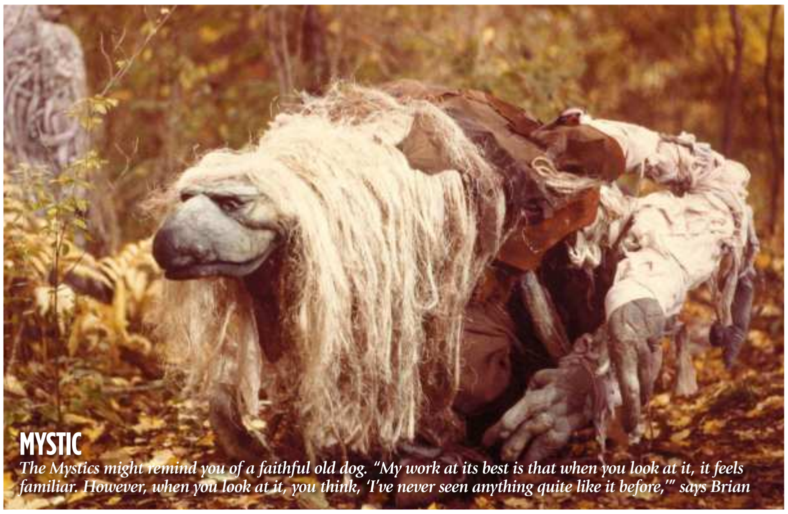
"Fairly early on, he (Henson) had this idea of…well I didn't know quite what, because for a long time I was drawing these 'crystals'," says Brian. "He kept saying crystals and we did that and I said, 'It needs more drama.' So, I suggested 'dark' because that's a dramatic name. He thought it was great. I was drawing and drawing, and after a while he said, 'What's this crystal?' And I said, 'That's what you said. Crystal.' He said, 'No, I said chrysalis.' He was thinking the film was about transformation, which indeed it is, but I'd misheard him and was drawing crystals. We said, 'No, the crystal's good.'"

Brian's work on the film wasn't all happy accident, though. For five years he created the concepts for the bird/dinosaur Skeksis, the friendly dog-like Mystics as well as the Gelflings. It was while collaborating with the artists and puppeteers on *The Dark Crystal* that he met his wife Wendy, who helped create many of the physical puppets for the film.



CONCEPT ART 1

"I just kept drawing in my sketch books and showing Jim. Eventually, the characters would start to form and then I started to make little macquettes – little figures," explains Brian

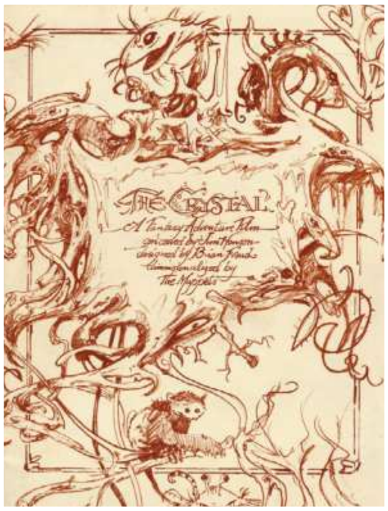


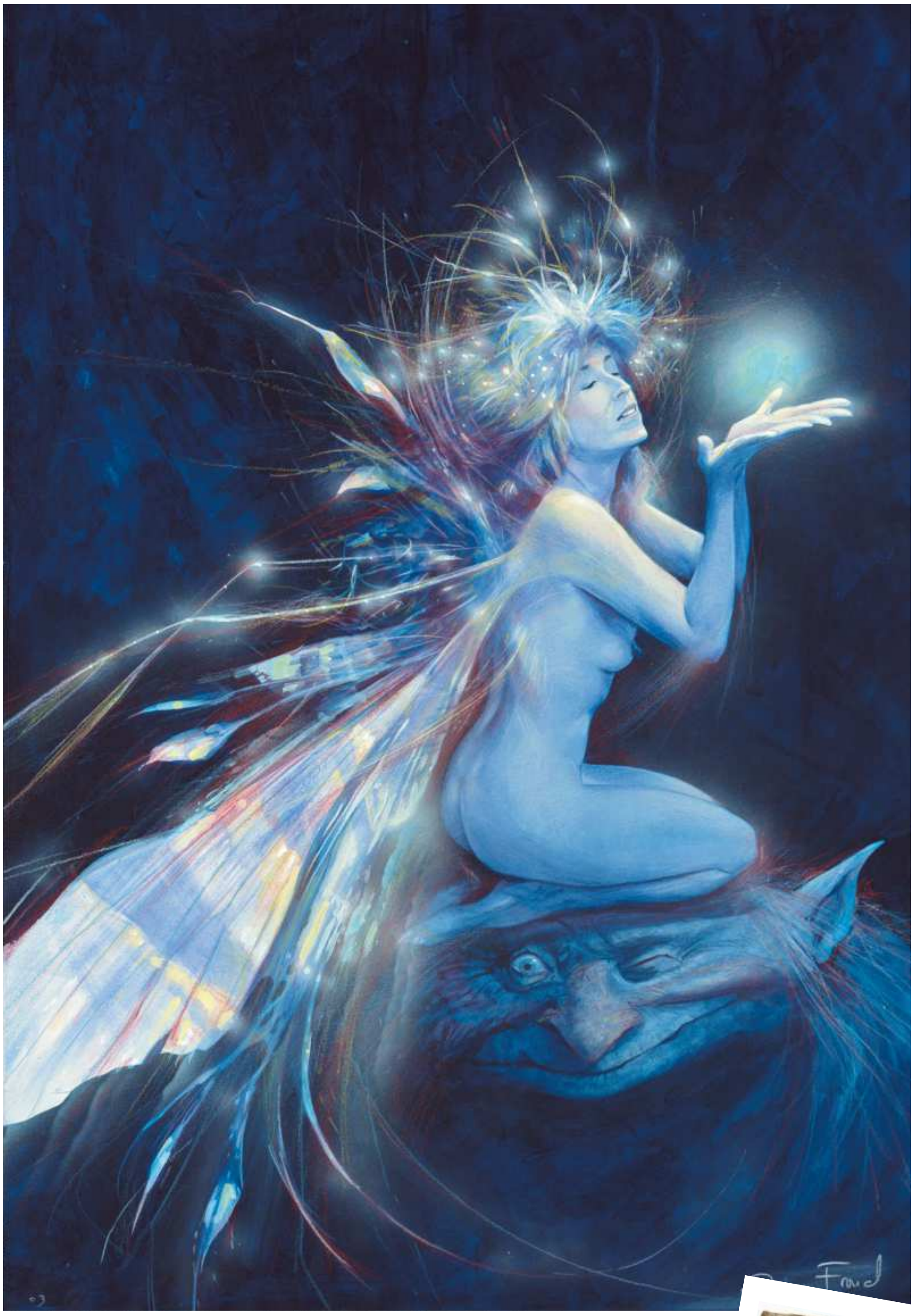
MYSTIC

The Mystics might remind you of a faithful old dog. "My work at its best is that when you look at it, it feels familiar. However, when you look at it, you think, 'I've never seen anything quite like it before,'" says Brian

CONCEPT ART 2

Brian on The Dark Crystal: "We actually made the film we wanted to see ourselves. It never occurred to us that we were going to scare kids. Over the years, I've found out how many kids were scared"





LIGHT AND DARK

Brian Froud's faerie paintings are layered with mystique, magic, emotion and hidden meaning. His compositions often employ classical proportions like the golden section which bestows them with cosmic geometry. There's usually more to them than meets the eye

"I loved his drawings of trees," says Brian. "They were very expressive but they also had faces in them. It was a shock of recognition, because as a child I was always up a tree, always climbing trees, always exploring woods. When I saw Rackham's stuff it reminded me of how I felt about nature. I felt that nature had a hidden life to it, that everything had a soul, a personality."

PAINTING TROLLS

Brian moved to Dartmoor in the mid-1970s after spending several years as an illustrator in London. He began painting trolls and other fairytale creatures that appeared in books of British illustration. Soon he was asked to put together a collection of his own work, which was released as *The Land of Froud*, and then with fellow artist Alan Lee he worked on *Faeries*, a book released as a follow-up to the popular *Gnomes*.

Great lovers of folklore and mythology from around the British Isles, Brian and Alan retreated to their own libraries and researched all they could about fairies. By referring to Irish, Welsh, Scottish and English myths and legends, they seemed to get the real low-down on faerie creatures. Accurately following descriptions of these mischievous and sometimes rather dark-hearted creatures, the pair gave their publishers a bit of a shock. Characters such as Jenny Greenteeth – who dragged children off into rivers and devoured them – were not the expectation of publishers who thought faerieland meant cute, sweet, pink and fluffy.

"It was really a reinstatement of the power of faeries," says Brian. "It had been for a long, long time relegated to the nursery. It was thought to be a childish thing, the idea that they were fairytales and nonsense. Here we went back to the sources, such as Yates's *The Celtic Twilight* book, and tried to portray them as they really are, with their power. Faeries were dangerous beings that you had to placate. You had to leave little gifts of food, you had to live with them really and be nice to them. If you weren't, they'd do dreadful things to you."

This approach, of going back to folklore and then painting links Brian's work with people deep in the past, who saw faeries and various other creatures as part of nature and the land around them. Brian himself loves England for its history, the layers of old stories and the sense that there are mysteries beneath your feet. He connects to this and understands it through what he paints.

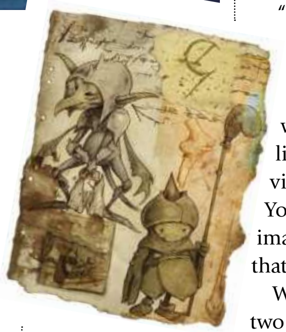
REAL-LIFE FANTASY

As you might have gathered by now, painting is not a literal process for Brian. Whatever he's working on, he wants to convey life, reality and feeling. "I'm always amazed when I look at American fantasy art. It's what I would call over-rendered. Every surface is shiny. It means to me that your eye skids off the art. But not only does your eye skid off it, your emotions also skid off it," says Brian.

"What I try to do is I leave out certain bits of information, so when you view it you have to add bits to it to complete it. The completing of it, it imbues it with life, because it means that it has a little bit of you in it and each time you view it, you've changed and it changes. You enter into a relationship with the image. That's what we do in the art, and that's what we try to do in the graphics."

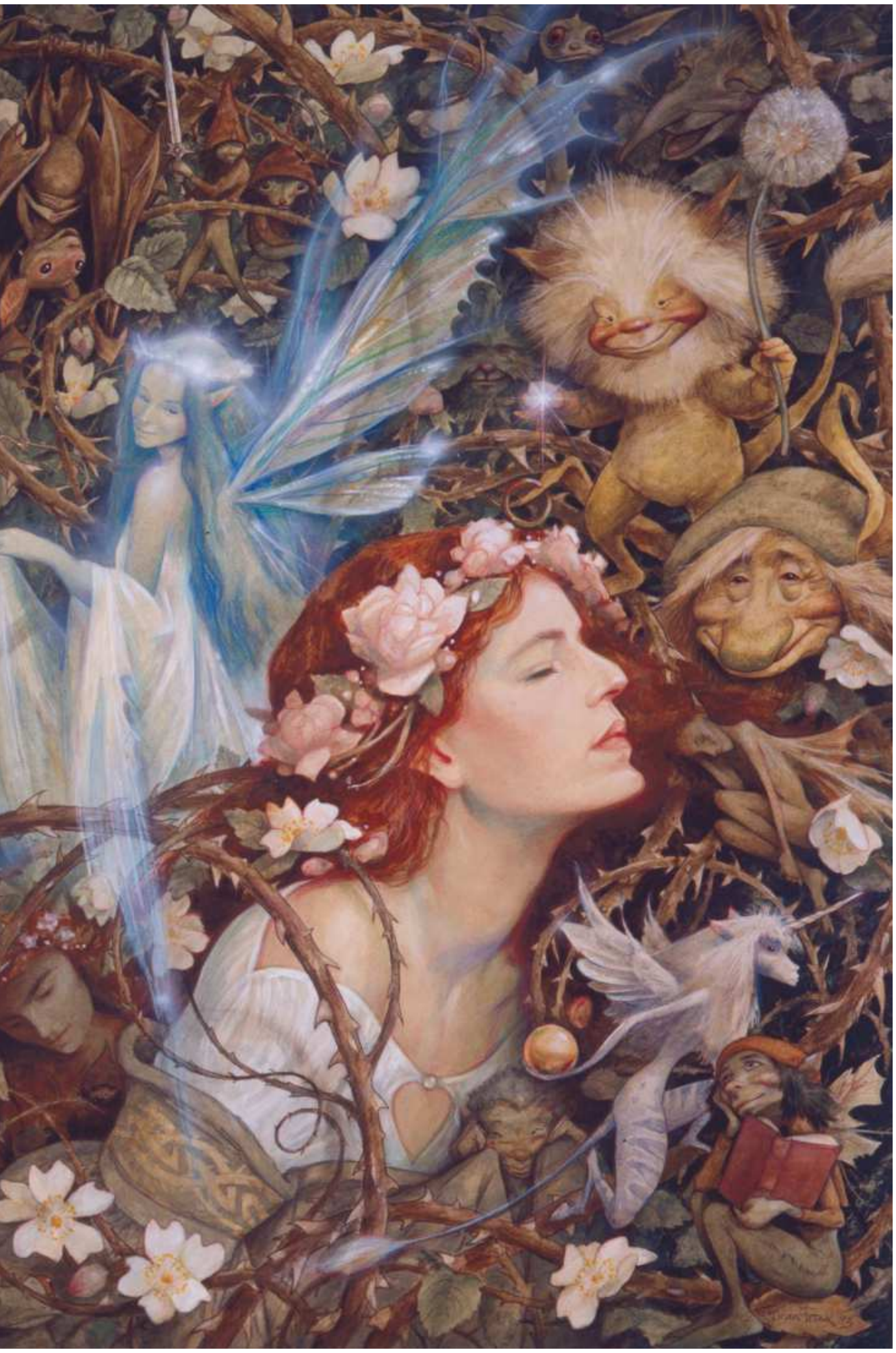
With his books, Brian has gone a stage or two further towards the goal of engaging the viewer or reader with the characters and the story. His secret is to make the book itself both a physical and an emotional

➸

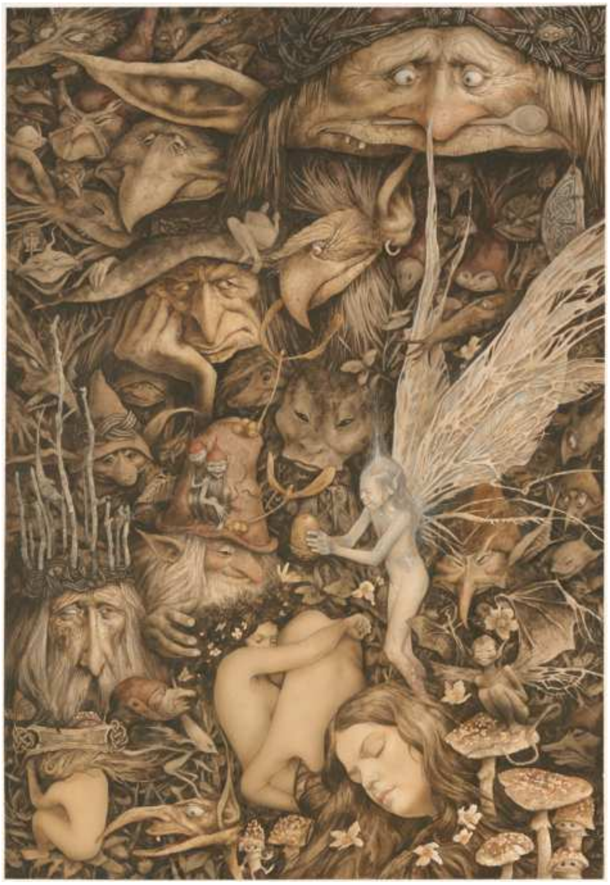


GOBLINS

Naughty they may have been, but Brian's goblins were never pure evil



SLEEPING BEAUTY
Another illustration from Brian Froud's new book, this one captures the classic faerie tale



PAINTING
Some of Brian's creations are crammed with characters, faces and writhing forms from the World of Faerie

experience. With a normal book, you pick it up, open it, page or read through it, reach the end and then close it. But *Good Faeries… Bad Faeries*, for instance, has two front covers. You can start by reading from the *Good Faeries* cover, then turn it over and flip it around and start reading about the bad ones. Your journey through it can start at either end.

PRESSED FAERIES

There's no better example of the physicality of a Brian Froud book than *Lady Cottington's Pressed Fairy Book*. First published in 1991, with Terry Jones of *Monty Python* fame (also *Labyrinth*, see the box opposite), it has become a successful series. The way it's painted and bound enables the reader to pretend to catch faeries by clapping the book closed and pressing them, just like the main character Angelica Cottington does throughout the book. This fun, physical idea is what helped Brian to convince Terry to write the book, and has played a major role in its popularity, which has been steady since first publication.

"The book was a huge success, but it's about belief," says Brian. "It's meant to be funny; the idea is that when you meet people who don't believe in faeries, as soon as you talk about squashing a faerie, and you bang the book closed, they cringe! And I say, 'See, you've changed! Now you're believing.' It's about allowing people to believe about faeries."

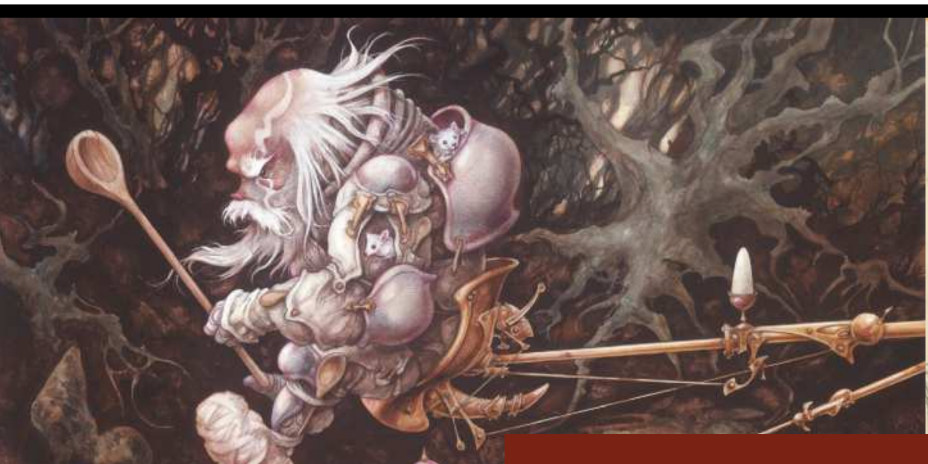
NEW BOOK

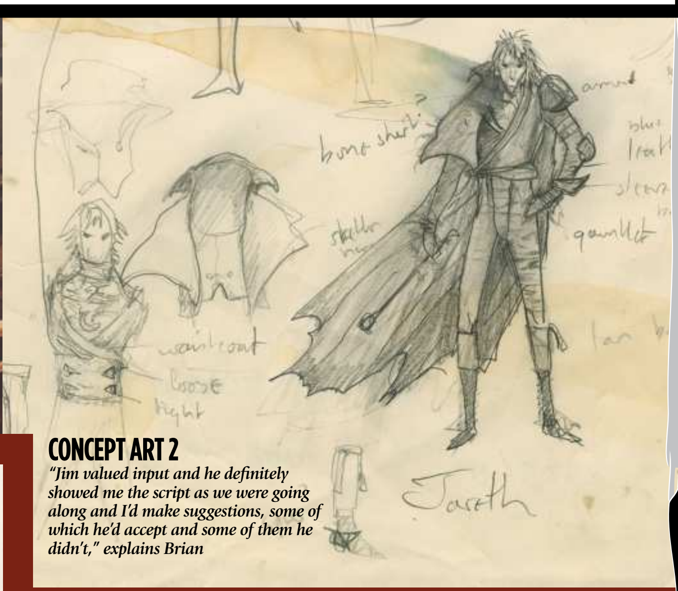
Brian released his latest book in 2014, called *Brian Froud's Faeries' Tales*. This new book, like 2010's *The Heart of the Faerie Oracle*, was illustrated by Brian but written by his wife Wendy. "Brian's work speaks to people," she says of their collaborations. "Each picture has something to say."

The book tells the story of the Dusters, a family of faeries who roam among human, collecting their memories. These faeries are puppets created by Wendy, with the rest of the book filled with Brian's art of the various other inhabitants of the faerie world, complete with their own stories.

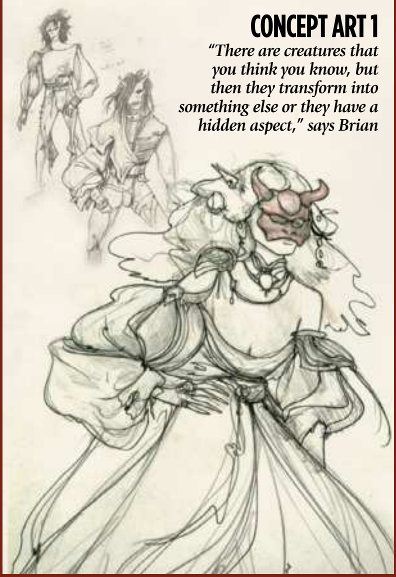
Brian and Wendy's work certainly has a magical touch. Is it charged with faerie energy or just that spark of genius all great art has? Perhaps you just have to believe?

Turn the page to learn to paint like Brian Froud





CONCEPT ART 2
"Jim valued input and he definitely showed me the script as we were going along and I'd make suggestions, some of which he'd accept and some of them he didn't," explains Brian



CONCEPT ART 1
"There are creatures that you think you know, but then they transform into something else or they have a hidden aspect," says Brian

LABYRINTH

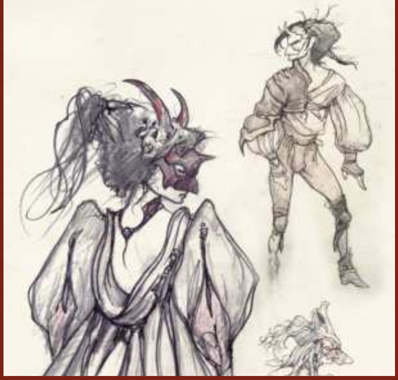
How Brian Froud gave Jim Henson the original concept for this fantasy flick

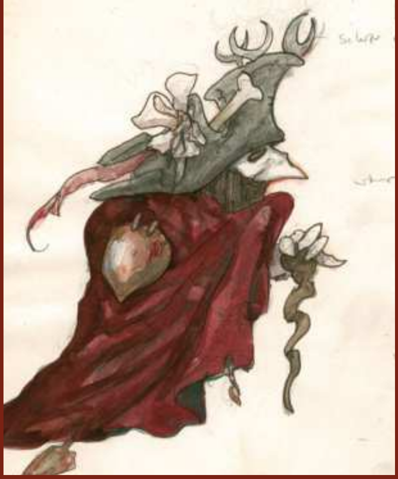
After a screening and gala dinner celebrating the launch of *The Dark Crystal*, Brian and Wendy Froud found themselves in a limo with Jim Henson, who suggested they do it all over again and make another film. According to Brian, Jim had the idea of basing it on Hindu gods and beings.

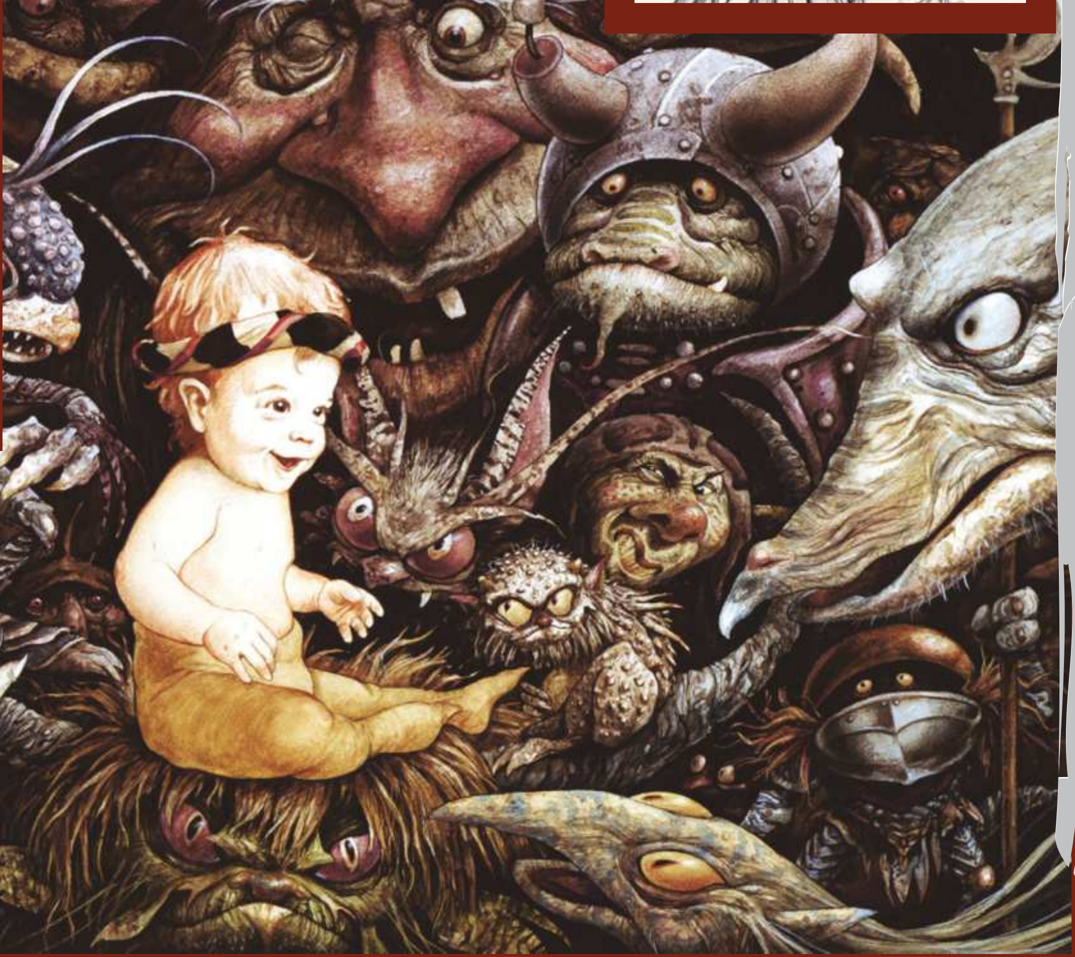
Brian had other ideas and suggested one of his favourite topics: goblins. He went on to suggest the basic image of a baby surrounded by goblins. "I said it would be a great juxtaposition," says Brian.

Jim loved it and, once back in the UK, Brian painted a picture of a baby in the midst of a troop of goblins, which he passed on to his director. Soon he was painting further conceptual images for the film, they began building prototype creatures and the script was developed. Jim called on Terry Jones, of the *Monty Python* troupe, to tweak the script.

"Terry looked at my sketchbooks and kept finding little characters in the corner. He said, 'Hey, that's great, I'm going to write about that.' He sort of rewrote a lot of the script and introduced a whole host of new characters that we hastily had to build," explains Brian.







TOBY & GOBLINS
Juxtaposing innocence with gnarled, ill-willed goblins, this painting inspired Jim Henson to make Labyrinth

Artist insight

THE NATURE OF FAERIE ART

Folklorist and faerie artist **Marc Potts** reveals his 21 tips to get inspired, and admits that in his area of specialism it helps to be just the tiniest bit loopy

Okay, so this isn't a workshop on how to paint faeries and it's certainly not a bunch of tips on artistic technique. I paint art based on folklore and mythology – witches, dragons, gods and goddesses – but I'm mainly known as a painter of faeries. A bit of a girly subject? Not at all.

Faerie folklore is steeped in pagan mythology, and if you look into it you soon realise that you could be reading about the pre-Christian deities of old. You'd also realise that faeries aren't all pretty and lovely. In fact, more often than not, faeries can be dark, sinister and sometimes plain nasty. I personally find it much more fun to paint the dark, the wicked and the downright bizarre.

The advice that follows is more about my inspiration, sources of ideas and how I approach my faerie art. I hope it helps to inspire you, too.

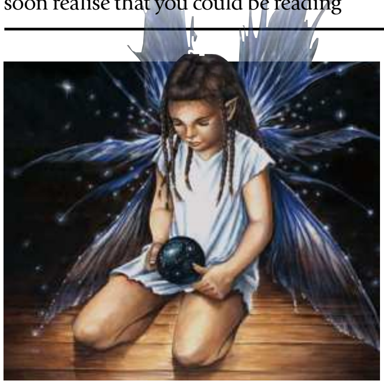
Artist PROFILE

Marc Potts

COUNTRY: England

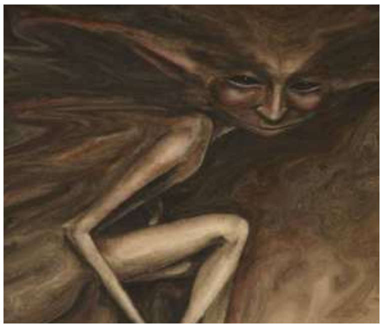
Marc is a folklorist, occasional author and faerie artist, best known for his darker, pagan twist on faerie art. The elementals, nature-spirits, gods and goddesses of myth and the imagination are his main subjects.

www.marcpotts.com



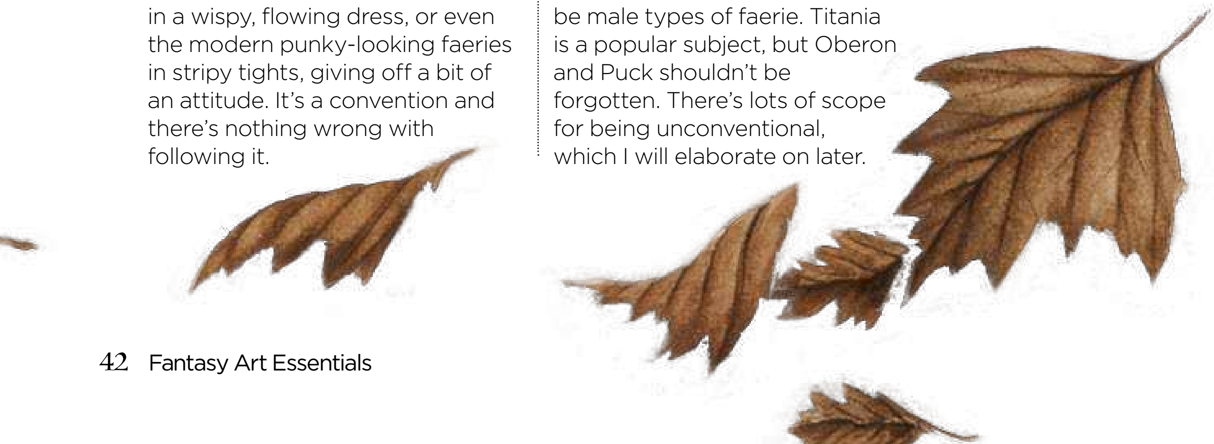
1 DO FAERIES WEAR STRIPY TIGHTS?

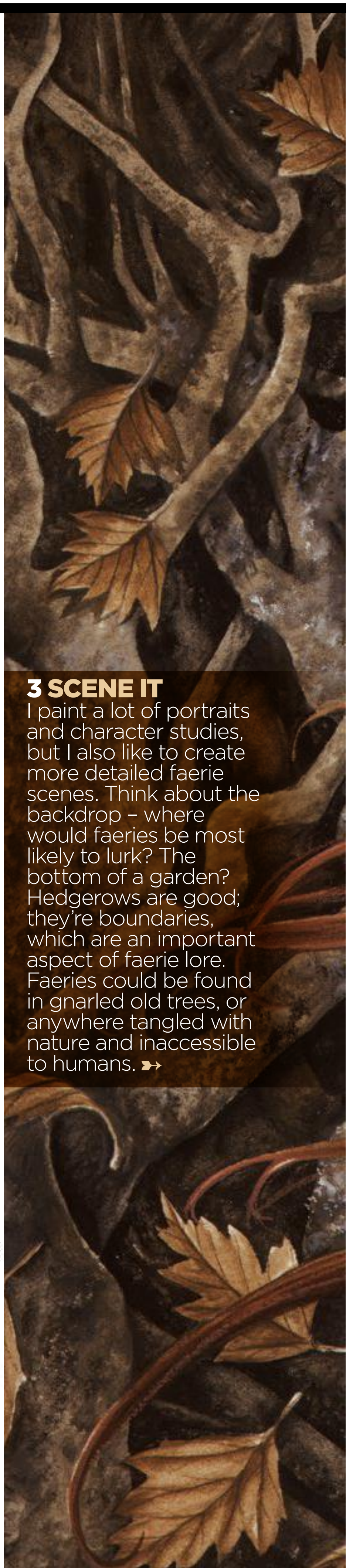
There's definitely a market for the pretty Victorian image of a faerie in a wispy, flowing dress, or even the modern punky-looking faeries in stripy tights, giving off a bit of an attitude. It's a convention and there's nothing wrong with following it.



2 NOT ALL FAERIES ARE GIRLS

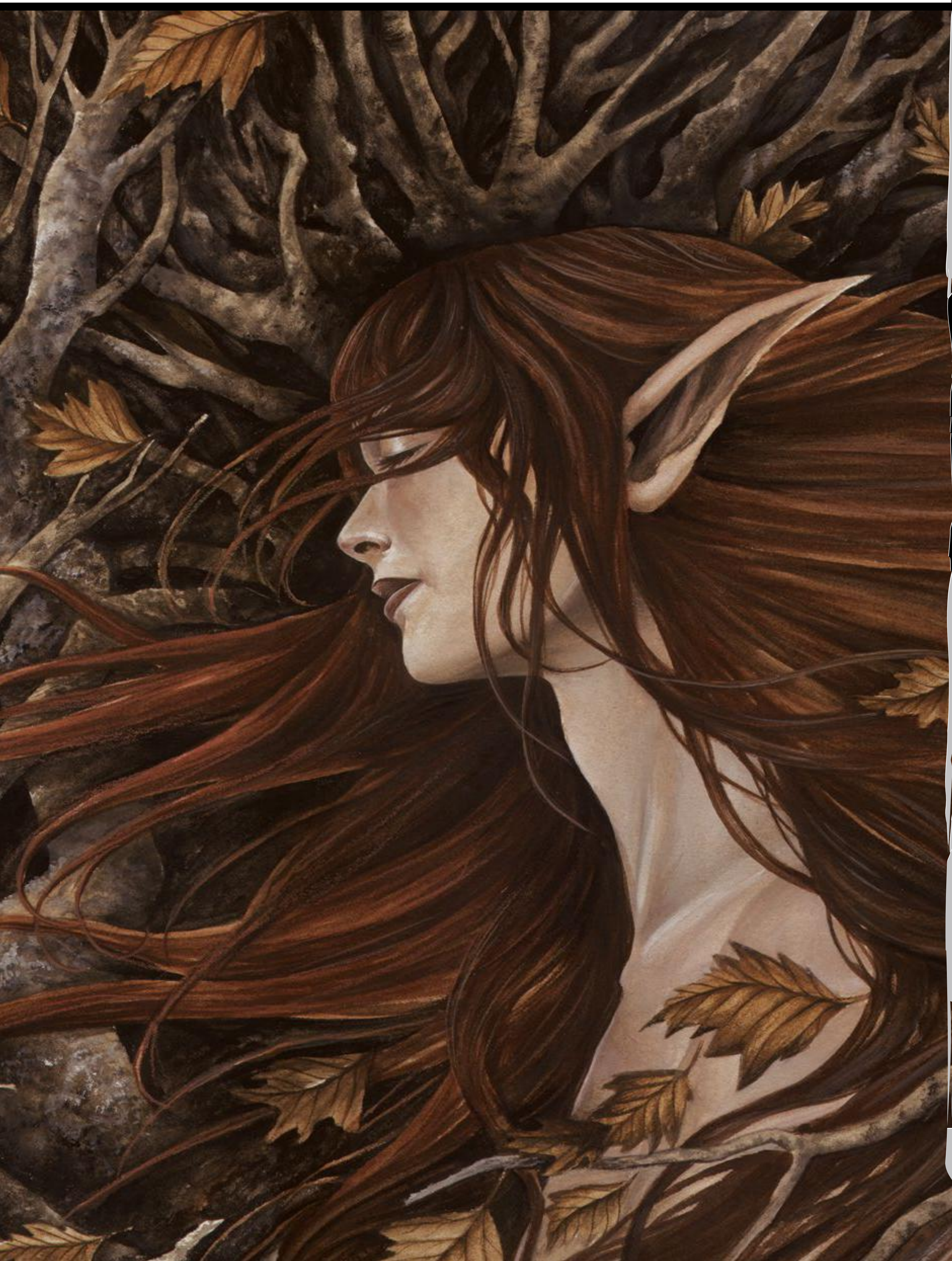
Don't forget the male of the species and the plain weird. A hedgehog could be an urchin – a faerie in disguise. Imps, goblins, brownies, pixies and elves are often considered to be male types of faerie. Titania is a popular subject, but Oberon and Puck shouldn't be forgotten. There's lots of scope for being unconventional, which I will elaborate on later.





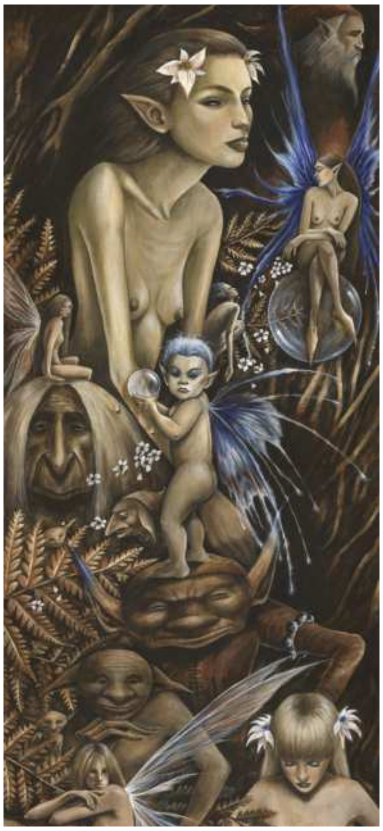
3 SCENE IT

I paint a lot of portraits and character studies, but I also like to create more detailed faerie scenes. Think about the backdrop – where would faeries be most likely to lurk? The bottom of a garden? Hedgerows are good; they're boundaries, which are an important aspect of faerie lore. Faeries could be found in gnarled old trees, or anywhere tangled with nature and inaccessible to humans. ➳



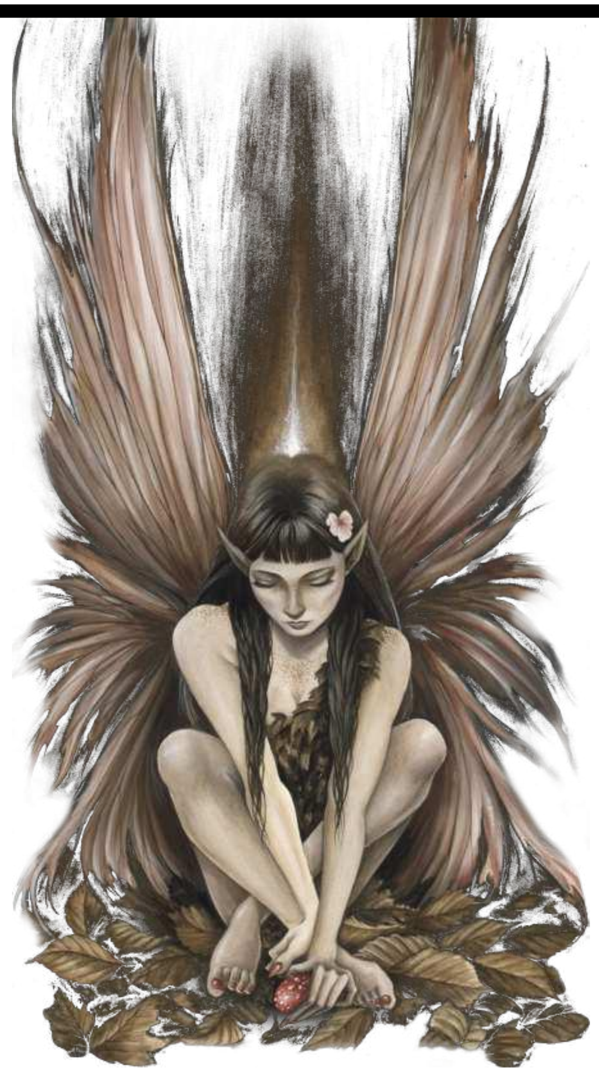
4 FOLKLORE

Get hold of some books on faerie folklore, then read and assimilate. *A Dictionary of Fairies* by Katherine Briggs is a great source of ideas, as is her *Fairies in Tradition and Literature*. *The Fairy Mythology* by Thomas Keightley is also a good resource. There are a lot of faerie A-Zs available, but one that must feature on your list is *Faeries* by Brian Froud and Alan Lee.



5 FAERIE TYPES

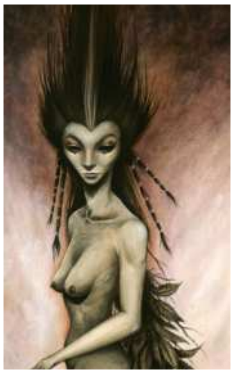
Here are just a few of the many faeries that can be found in ancient folklore: Asrai, Apple Tree Man, Abbey Lubber, Banshee, Barguest, Bogie, Brag, Brownie, Bwca, Changeling, Coblynau, Derrick, Dwarf, Elf, Ellyllon, Fir Darrig, Faun, Firbolg, Ganconer, Gnome, Grindylow, Gruagach, Hag, Hedley Kow, Henkie, Hinky-Punk, Imp, Jenny Greenteeth, Killmoulis, Knocker, Leanan Sidhe, Leprechaun, Loireag, Lunantishee, Luideag, Mermaid, Muryan, Ogre, Pwca, Phenodyree, Pixie, Puck, Selkie, Skriker, Troll, Will O' the Wisp, Woodwose. Look 'em up!



> “Faeries can be sinister beings, with a peculiar wrongness about them”

6 MYTHOLOGY

A bit grander in scale than folktales. Poring over books of world mythologies will soon pay off, throwing up ideas for the weird and wonderful. This can be applied to all forms of fantasy art, but there are faeries here, too. Think of the Elves, Orcs and Trolls in *Lord of the Rings* – all mythologically inspired versions of the genre, but faerie art nonetheless. The Irish mythological cycle and the Welsh *Mabinogion* are good local examples.

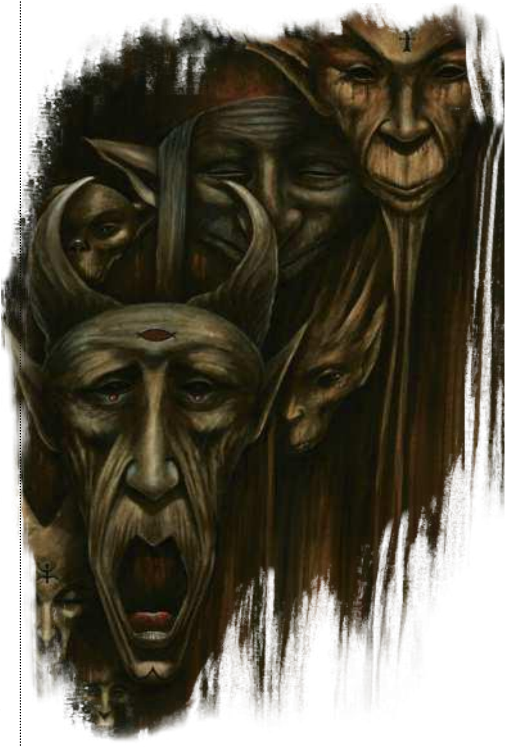


7 FAERIES AIN'T PRETTY

Faeries can be sinister beings, with a peculiar wrongness about them. Use this notion when developing a character – combine beauty with something odd, like a hare's foot in place of a hand, or twigs for hair. A faerie doesn't have to have wings, either. Simply making the eyes odd can set it apart from humans. Faeries often appear beautiful, but there will be something that gives them away.

8 THINK NATURE

I see faeries as nature spirits or elemental beings, so look to the natural world for inspiration. Leaves, twigs, feathers and bits of plants could all be incorporated into a faerie character. I often do this as part of the faerie itself – organic growths sprouting from the back or head, or from an arm or leg. And if you must clothe your faeries, apply the same approach to elements of faerie clothing – a dress made out of leaves or a mask of twigs and feathers. I'm always collecting stuff for reference when I'm out and about.



9 DO YOUR RESEARCH

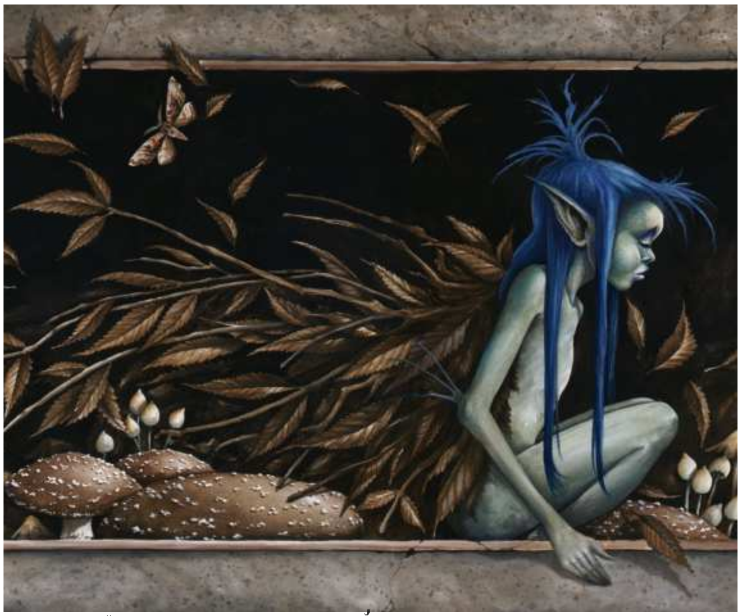
This is an important one – it will make your character more believable and give it substance. The wealth of information in my mind can shape itself into an idea for a picture or character. I'm not suggesting that you hide yourself away for years and eventually emerge as an authority on mythology. Putting in a few hours' research is perfectly adequate.

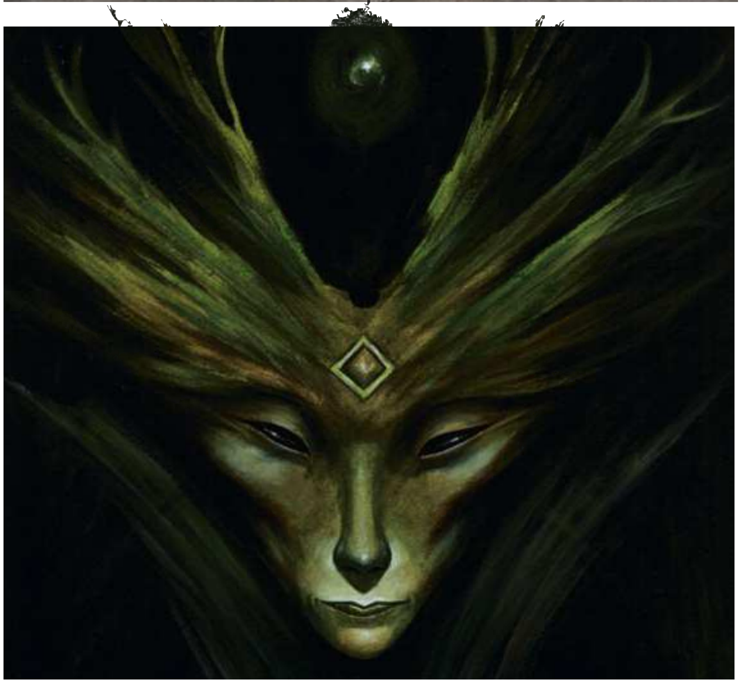
10 SIMULACRA

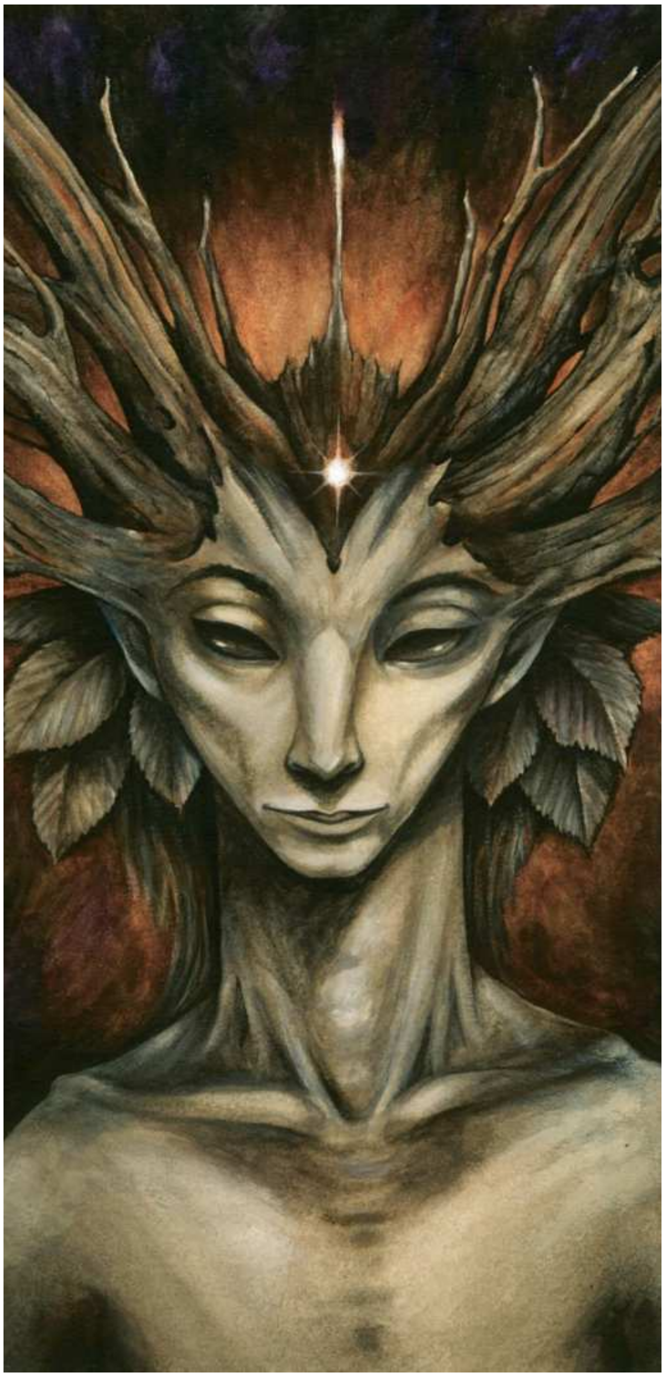
Look with an artist's eye. Gnarled goblin faces could peer out from the bark or roots of a tree. Dragon heads could form in the shape of a weathered rock. If the morning light is just right, faerie creatures leer out at me from the pattern in my bedroom curtains. If you really want to see them, they'll appear.

11 COLOUR

The colours of faeries are the shades of nature – the greens and browns of autumn leaves and the delicate hues of flowers. The greencoaties and Green Lady are denizens of the faerie world, as are the brownies and brown men. The names all suggest their colours. Adding a splash of bright colour to the subdued tones can create a glow. I use mucky colours and build up translucent layers. Don't be afraid to experiment.



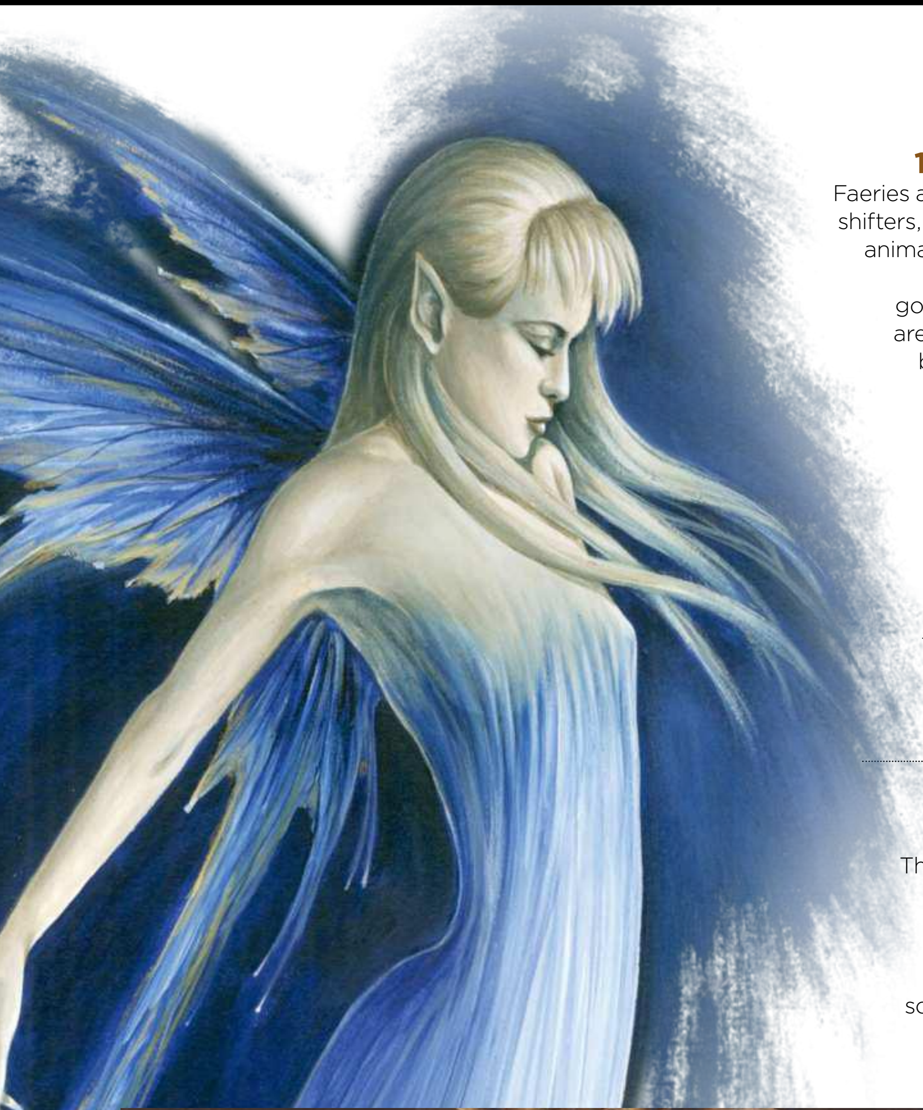




> If the morning light is just right, faerie creatures leer at me from the curtains

12 GET THEM TO POSE

If you're into the whole spirituality thing (and I am), try meditation or path-working to see them in your mind's eye. You could try this anywhere, but visiting a wild beautiful place, somewhere that faeries might lurk, could spark the imagination. Try to connect with the spirit of a place and you never know, a faerie might just pop out and pose for you. Of course, it helps to be a bit nuts as well...



13 ANIMAL BITS

Faeries are said to be shape-shifters, so try incorporating animal parts that give this away. Faeries with gossamer insect wings are the obvious choice, but how about using moth wings instead of butterflies? Get a field guide and study the patterns. Paint faerie characters with frog legs or rabbit ears, horns or antlers. Some faeries could appear very insect-like – who's to say that a mayfly isn't a faerie?

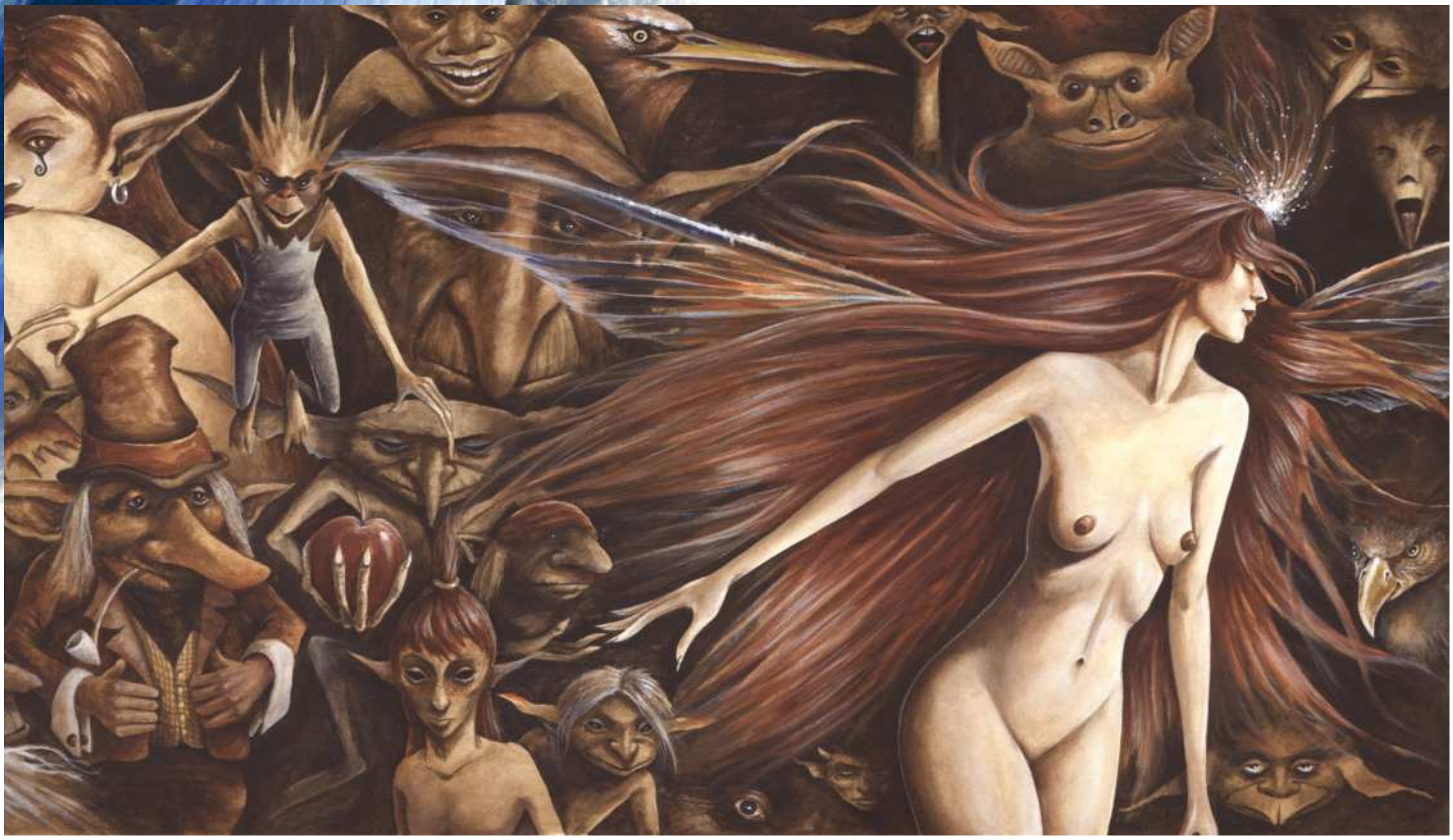
14 MAKE THEM GLOW

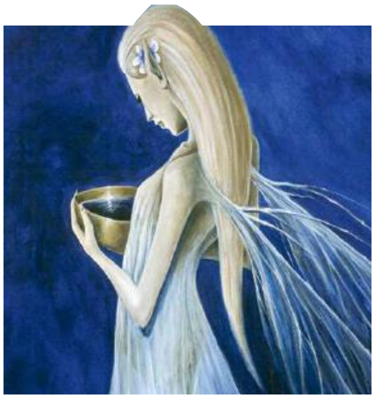
Faeries can be considered manifestations of supernatural energy, pulsing with light. You could suggest this energy with the flow of a painting, using sinuous lines to guide the eye. For instance, faeries don't need wings to fly, so they don't need to be structurally perfect. Instead of giving them solid wings, try impossible wings, constructed of light and colour.

> “It's not that there are no rules, more that... the rules are weird”

15 SUGGEST A NARRATIVE

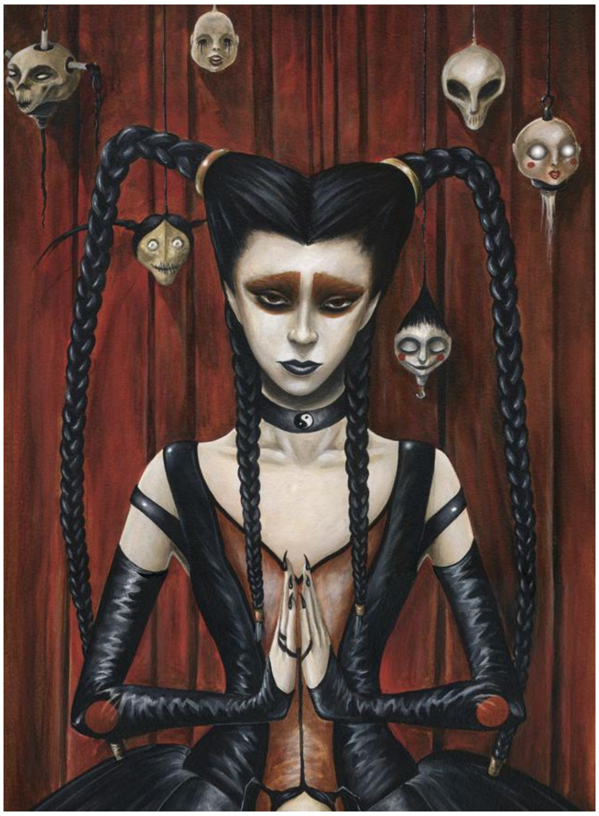
This approach lends itself well to faerie art. Has something just happened? Or might it be just about to happen? Suggest a narrative and let the viewer's imagination do the rest. Allow them to involve themselves and create a story in their mind. This can really inspire, and can make a picture magical. I sometimes have a half-formed story in my head when I start a painting, and at other times a story might come later, from a finished piece. Either way, you're creating folklore.





16 ELEMENTAL SYMBOLISM

Faeries can be classified according to their elemental nature, and this can be followed in character development. What might a fire sprite look like? Or a dark earthy Trow? An air spirit would probably appear slight and ethereal, and although a mermaid is an obvious choice for water, how about thinking outside the box and painting an Asrai or even a Jenny Greenteeth? Faeries themselves could be connected to the elusive fifth element of spirit.



20 THERE ARE NO RULES

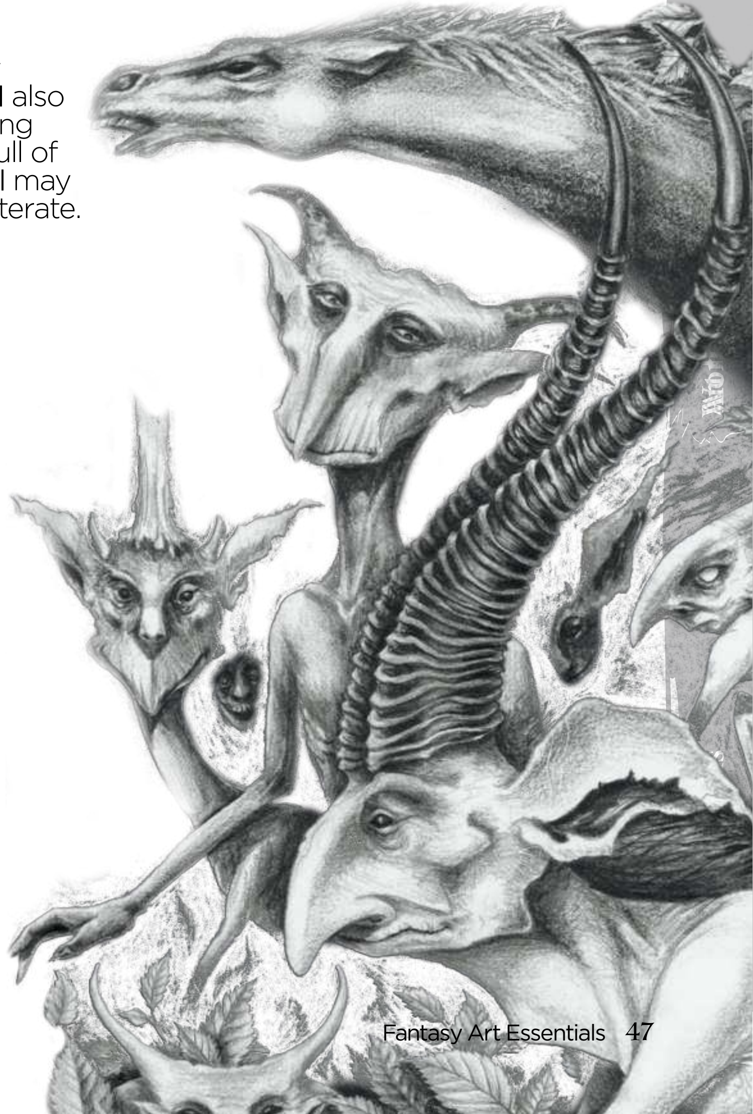
Lastly – and this isn't a cop out – you can ignore all of the above and paint what you like. It's not that there are no rules, more that, as with the world of faeries itself, the rules are weird. Bring faerie art up to date – how about dragging it out of the wild places and into the city? You could paint odd faerie-like characters with a story to tell, urban faeries, even goth and punk – it's all touched by faerie. The possibilities are endless.

21 DARK AND SINISTER

Folktales can be quite sinister and very dark. Faeries are thought to be the lost souls of the dead in some cultures. Think of the modern takes on fairytales that have made it to the big screen; the film industry favours the darker side of faeries. The crossover between horror and faerie art can blur. To hear the scream of a Banshee or a Skriker is a portent of death… now go and paint your nightmares!

17 SKETCHING AND DOODLING

It sounds obvious and every artist does it – but I'm constantly doodling faerie faces, wing ideas, goblins and dragon heads. I also sketch interesting bits of nature, leaf shapes, feathers – anything that catches my eye and imagination. Build up sketchbooks full of reference material that you could incorporate into a painting. I may be stating the obvious here, but it certainly doesn't hurt to reiterate.

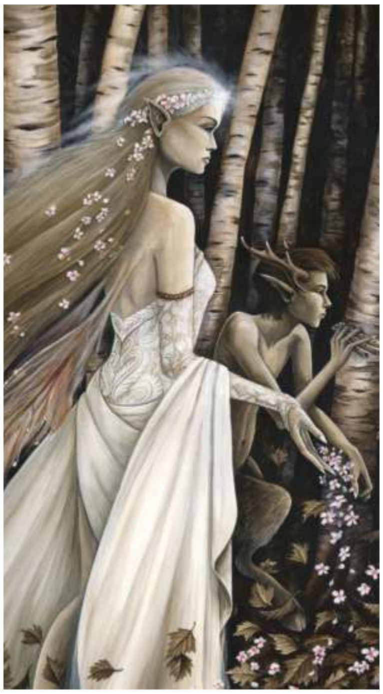


18 THE GODDESS AND THE GREEN MAN

Are they the king and queen of faeries? I often incorporate a green or brown-man foliate face in a faerie painting, sometimes with antlers or horns to represent the Lord of the Woods. The Green Lady or the twiggy haired hedgewitch archetypes represent, to me, a form of the faerie queen or a forest goddess.

19 FAERIE ART MASTERS

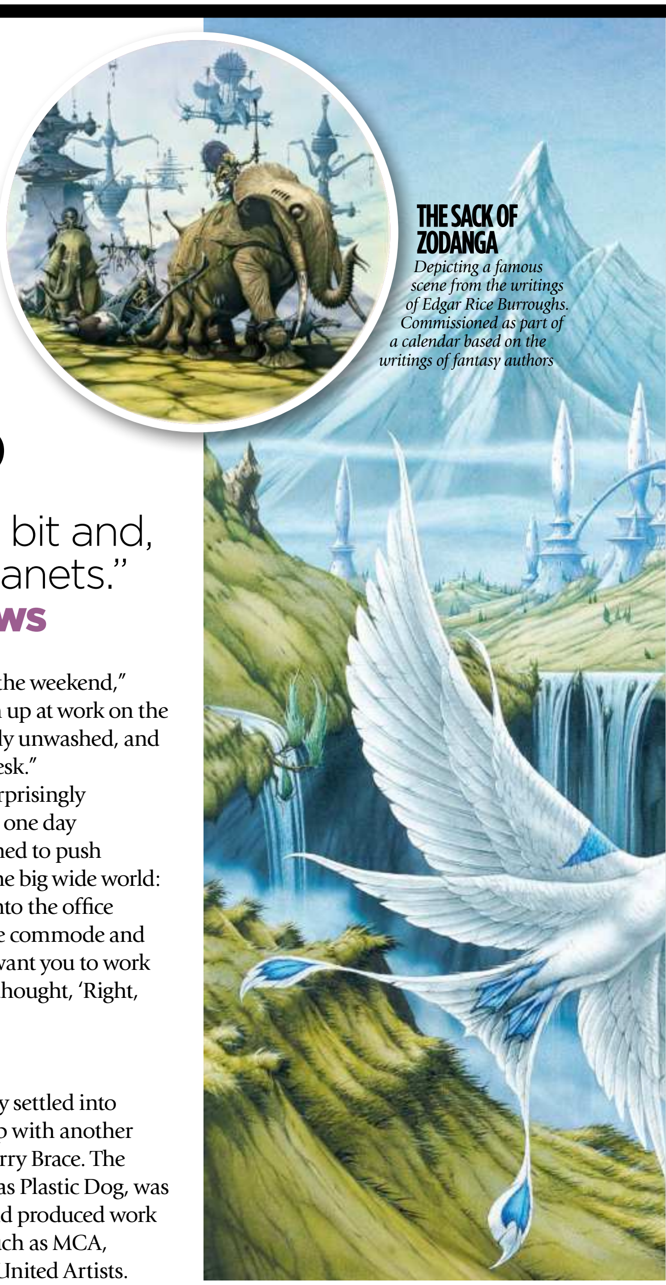
Be inspired by those who have gone before: Rackham and Dulac, John Bauer or Richard Dadd. John Anster Fitzgerald and Joseph Noel Paton took inspiration from folklore and Shakespeare. Also, look at the masters of natural history art.



Interview

Rodney Matthews

“I encourage people to get on my wavelength a bit and, without being pretentious, travel to far-flung planets.” Welcome to the world of **Rodney Matthews**



THE SACK OF ZODANGA

Depicting a famous scene from the writings of Edgar Rice Burroughs. Commissioned as part of a calendar based on the writings of fantasy authors

For more than 30 years Rodney Matthews has been one of fantasy art’s defining figures. The style he characteristically downplays as “slightly organic, spiky stuff” has been used on countless book covers, record sleeves, posters and, in recent times, animation and video games. He maintains that his success is all down to fate: “Somewhere in the universe there’s a stone pillar and chiselled on it is the legend, ‘Matthews will be a fantasy artist’.” Today, unflaggingly enthusiastic, Rodney is planning an assault on the world of animation.

SOMERSET BORN AND RAISED

Rodney was born in Somerset in 1945. A sensitive youngster, his parents encouraged his obvious artistic streak. Rodney recalls being a huge fan of cartoons, and of Disney in particular. “As a child I used to try and draw the characters,” he says, “but I found after a while that I couldn’t draw anything that was straightforward.” Rodney seemed unable to draw simple copies; his creations struck a note of extremity. “I always liked to embellish,” he explains, “which, I suppose, was the embryonic stage of being a fantasy artist.”

As his education progressed, Rodney continued to work away at his fantastical side but, as ever, the practicalities of life came into play. “When I left school,” says Rodney, “I thought, ‘Enough of this foolishness, I must earn a living’.” This led to a job retouching photographic plates and film for a large Somerset print works: “A huge room of people lined up like slaves in a Roman galley.” Suffice to say, Matthews didn’t last.

LIGHT ENGINEERING

Still convinced he was destined for a life of hard graft, Rodney tried his hand in his father’s workshop, which produced steel structures for the building trade. After six months, with his catalogue of injuries mounting up, Matthews Senior, ever supportive, told his son: “You’re not really suited to this industry. Why don’t you go to art college?”

Rodney duly enrolled at Ealing to study design. This was where he discovered his love for rock music, played in numerous bands and in the process became a drummer of not inconsiderable talent. This, he kept up after leaving college and joining Bristol ad agency Ford’s Creative, where he stayed for a total of nine years.

Though Rodney readily admits he learned some important lessons at Ford’s, it was clear he was being pulled in another direction. “I’d go off to play a gig at the weekend,” he says, “then turn up at work on the Monday completely unwashed, and fall asleep at my desk.”

Artist
PROFILE

Rodney Matthews

Born in Somerset, July 1945. Rodney Matthews has been a leading light of the fantasy art scene for more that 30 years. He’s most famous for his work on album covers for the likes of Thin Lizzy and Asia. His vast body of illustration work has, in recent time, given way to animation and film projects, which he still pursues from his Welsh mountain hideout.

www.rodneymatthews.com

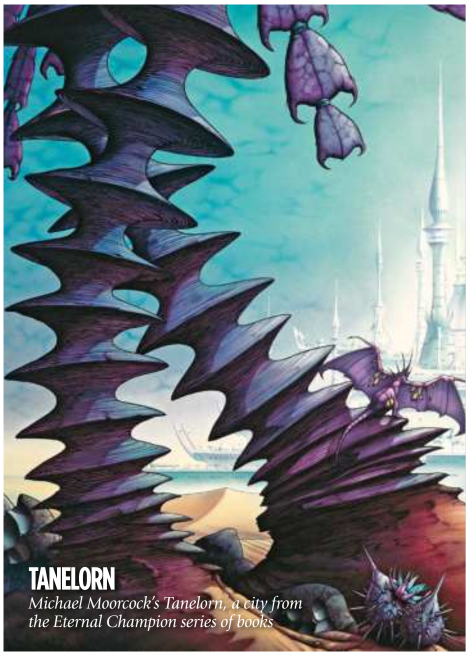
His boss was surprisingly open-minded, but one day something happened to push Rodney out into the big wide world: “Someone came into the office carrying a portable commode and said ‘Matthews, I want you to work on this’ and I just thought, ‘Right, that’s it’.”

PLASTIC DOG

Eventually, Rodney settled into a loose partnership with another artist-musician, Terry Brace. The company, known as Plastic Dog, was based in Bristol and produced work for record labels such as MCA, Transatlantic and United Artists. It was during this phase that Rodney developed the distinctive style that his fantasy work is known for.

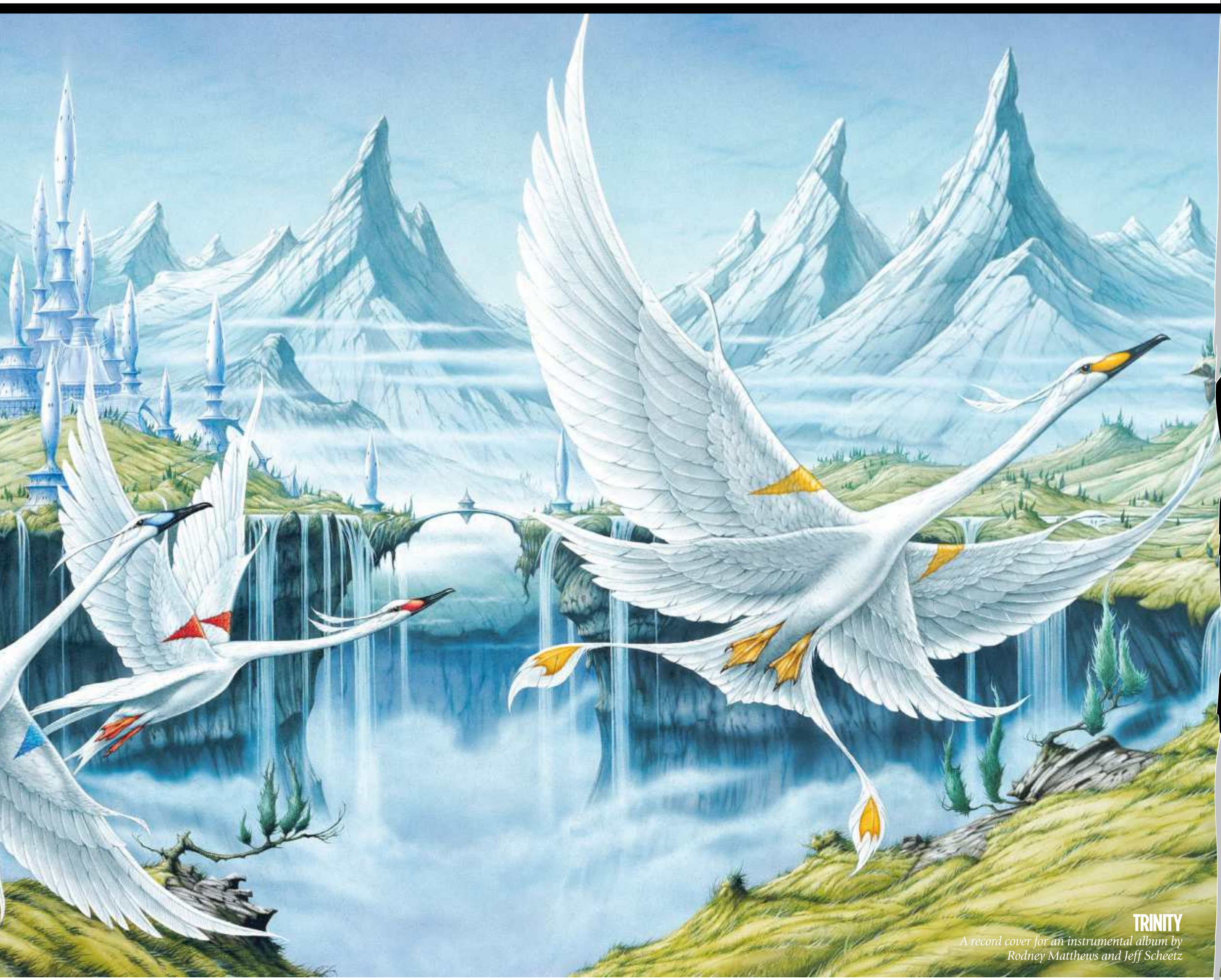
The record covers became increasingly fantastic and Rodney began to earn a reputation. “It took me a while to get into the style,” he says. And, ever the pragmatist, Rodney sees the development of his ‘spiky organic’ style as a response to consumer demand, “That’s what people seem to like best.”

This all happened in the early 70s and, just as prog rock was really starting to go ballistic, Rodney was approached by Big O publishing and the poster years started. These were vintage Matthews. “In the Seventies I lived from selling posters,” he recalls with a wistful tone. “I sold millions.” This was also the beginning of Rodney’s fruitful collaboration with fantasy author Michael Moorcock.

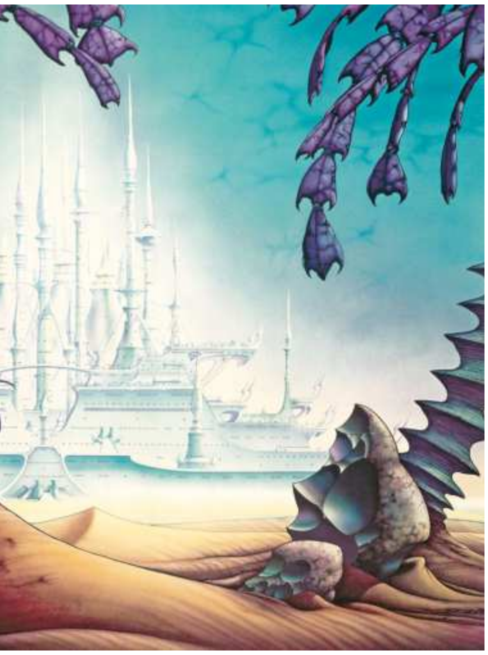


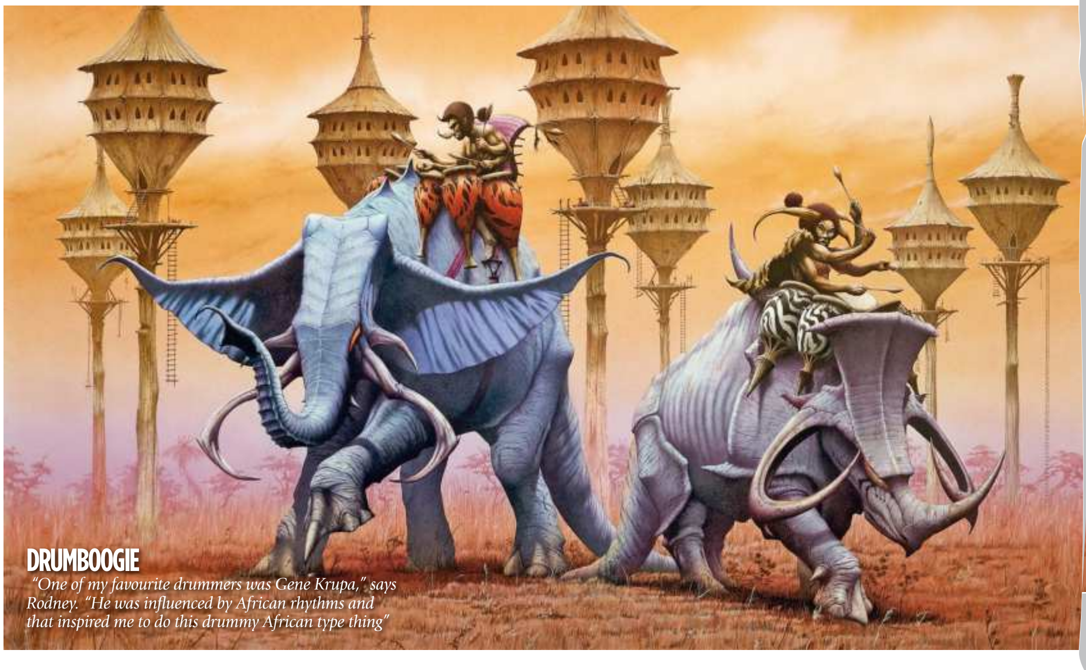
TANELORN

Michael Moorcock’s Tanelorn, a city from the Eternal Champion series of books

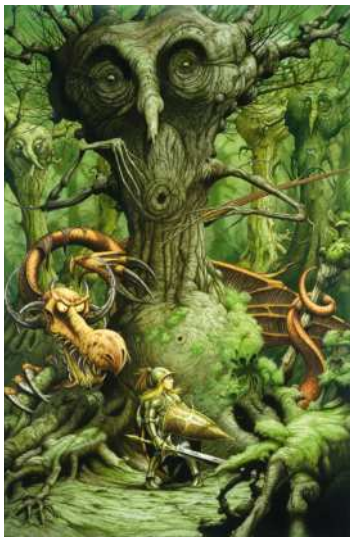


TRINITY
A record cover for an instrumental album by Rodney Matthews and Jeff Scheetz

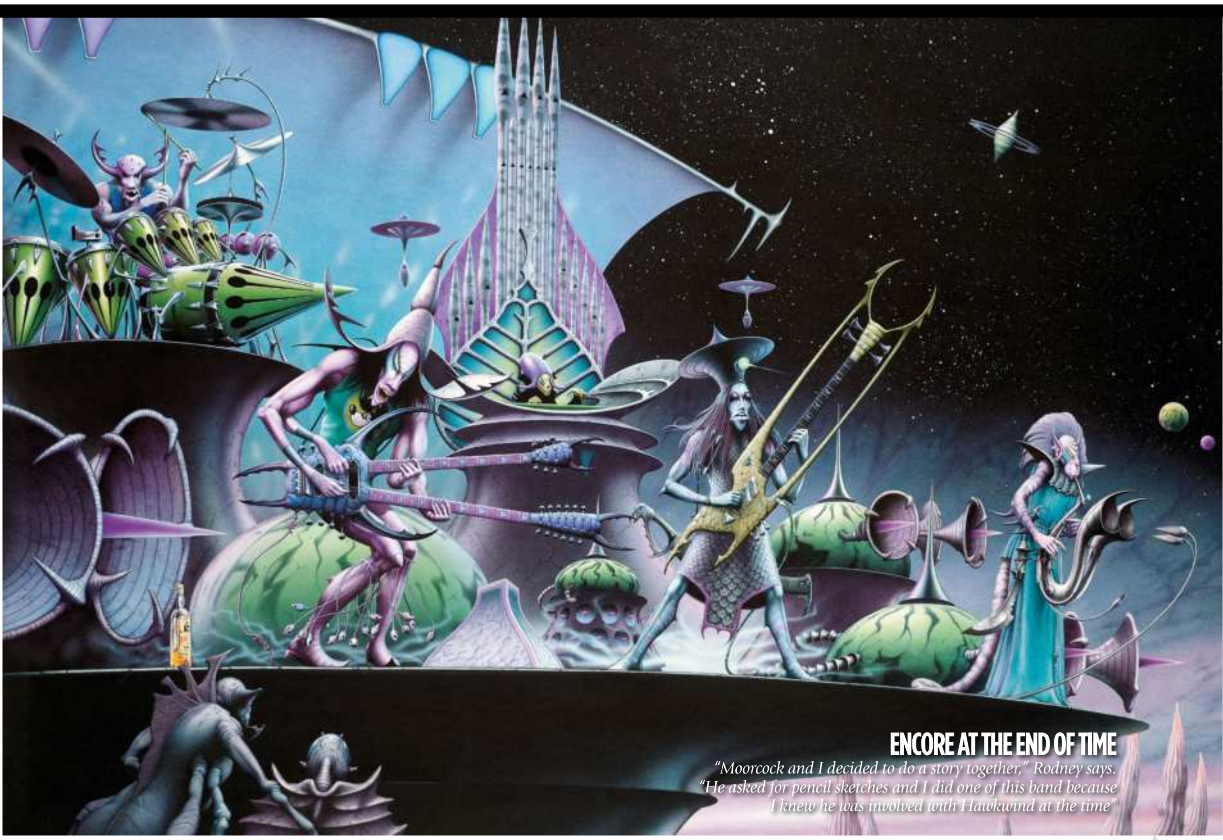




DRUMBOOGIE
"One of my favourite drummers was Gene Krupa," says Rodney. "He was influenced by African rhythms and that inspired me to do this drummy African type thing"



JABBERWOCKY
This was created for a poster based on the poem in Lewis Carol's Alice series



ENCORE AT THE END OF TIME
"Moorcock and I decided to do a story together," Rodney says. "He asked for pencil sketches and I did one of this band because I knew he was involved with Hawkwind at the time"

> **"I couldn't do anything that was straightforward. I always embellish, which I suppose is the embryonic stage of being a fantasy artist"**

Between 1973 and 1980 Rodney produced more than 80 original poster designs and they sold around the world in their millions, but unfortunately the party wasn't going to last forever. "Everyone jumped on the bandwagon, but the bandwagon couldn't sustain the weight. The whole thing collapsed in 1980." Rodney was genuinely grieved by the passing of this phase: "Almost overnight the whole thing fell apart."

PROG ROCK IMPLOSION

The bands that demanded Rodney's artwork had become bloated and self-regarding, and the quantity of poor imitations was increasing rapidly. Something had to give. The arrival of punk sealed the deal: "All of a sudden, my style was unfashionable," he says wryly. What sustained Rodney throughout the Eighties was the second wave of British heavy metal, "People such as Iron Maiden and Magnum." A decade of musical collaborations later and Rodney was still exploring that same consistently fantastical world. "What you've got to be asking yourself," he laughs, "is this: is there any one planet where all this stuff is going on?"

A NEW CHAPTER

"I was at a heavy metal event; a bloke bought a load of my posters." It was 1992, he was from a video game company called Traveller's Tales. "He said they wanted me to design a logo for them." And so began Rodney's involvement with the digital world, a direction he's been pursuing with considerable vigour ever since.

The T T job led to more work, but this time Rodney collaborated with video game publisher Psygnosis where he helped to create its PlayStation game *Shadow Master.* "I went on to work on a couple of other games after that," says Rodney, "but the real bonus was getting involved with animation." The success of *Lavender Castle,* in 1998, produced by Gerry Anderson, gave Rodney the hunger for more.

Now Rodney's ultimate goal is to set up an animation studio and realise the numerous projects he has up his sleeve. "In an ideal world, if someone asked me what I want to do now it would be children's animation." Watch this space.

See the next page to learn to paint like Rodney Matthews

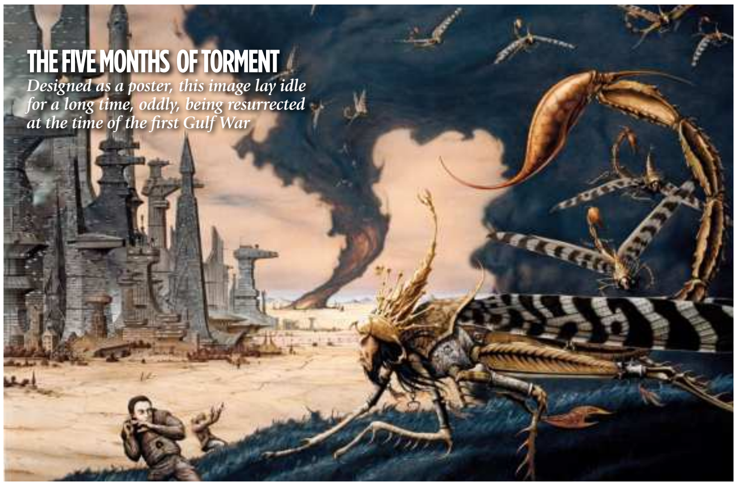
MATTHEWS AND MOORCOCK

A creative partnership bearing strange fruit

When Michael and Rodney got together, it was only a matter of time before something great was produced. That something was the illustrated fantasy classic, *Elric at the End of Time.*

Against his expectations, ("I thought he was going to be very intimidating, but he was a nice bloke actually,"), Rodney became fast friends with Michael Moorcock and the two decided to work together. "He asked me if I could give him images, sketches that he could write into his story." So Rodney duly supplied his own brand of narcotic visions and Moorcock wrote the tale. One hundred and twenty pages later, *Elric at the End of Time* was born.

"This was when Moorcock was involved with the band Hawkwind," says Rodney. "He read his bizarre poetry on stage with them." Aware of the Hawkwind connection, Rodney decided to include the band among his images for the book. The result, *Encore at the End of Time,* has a strangeness that is hard to top, and consequently one that is just now being rediscovered. "I've had people asking for it again lately," says Rodney. "Everything seems to be coming full circle."



THE FIVE MONTHS OF TORMENT
Designed as a poster, this image lay idle for a long time, oddly, being resurrected at the time of the first Gulf War

Traditional skills
TELL A STORY

Legendary fantasy artist **Rodney Matthews** demonstrates how to create a painting that conveys a convincing story

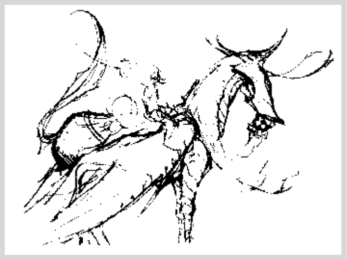
Even a simple fantasy illustration such as this one, Embarkation, needs to be properly considered before you even begin sketching.

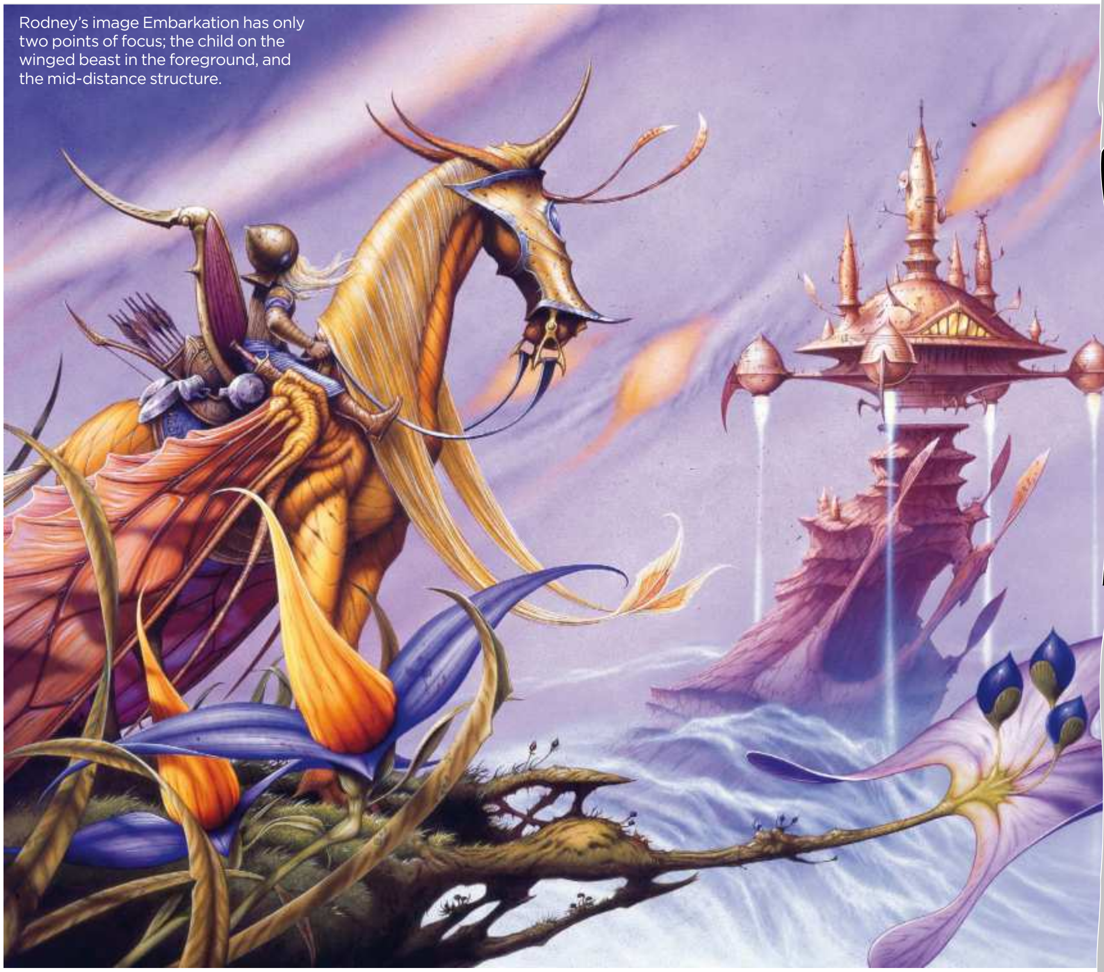
Once you've visualised your idea, make bold thumbnail sketches on a tracing pad. Focus on the overall layout before concerning yourself with the detail.

When you're satisfied and know what ingredients will be included, you can work on a finished sketch.

Keep it simple. My image has just two points of focus: foreground (the child on the beast) and mid-distance.

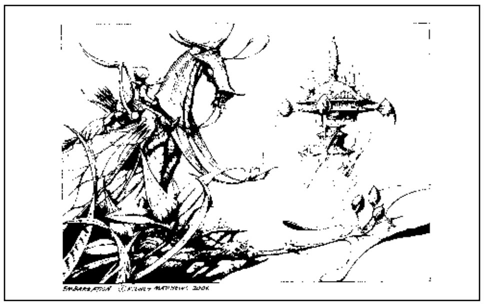
You're now ready to paint. Use colour to convey a particular mood. Embarkation is gentle, optimistic; its key colours are yellow and purple. Use blues to indicate distance to landscapes, and red for energy. Don't throw in all your colours – this could dissipate focus and reduce impact.



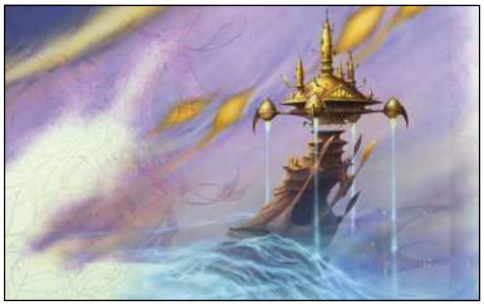


Rodney's image Embarkation has only two points of focus; the child on the winged beast in the foreground, and the mid-distance structure.

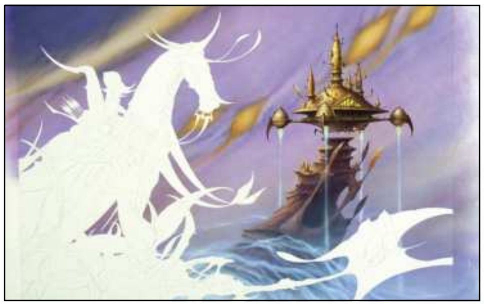
STEP-BY-STEP: Telling a fantasy story with your painting



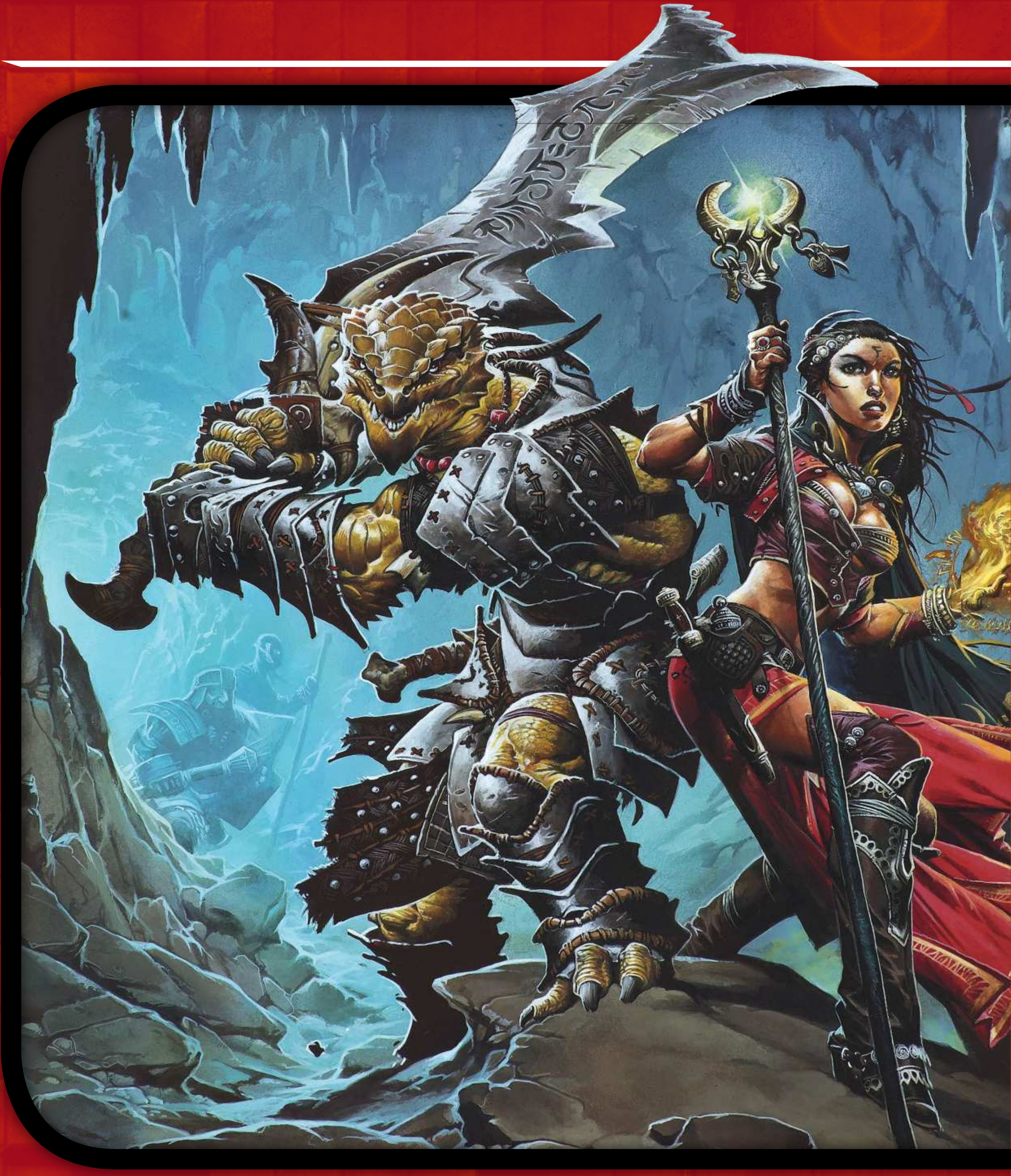
1 I start to scribble away at thumbnail sketches. I usually do up to six thumbnails. One of these will always shine out above the others because it's comfortable on the eye. You can't commence on your finished piece of work before you've sorted out the foundations – just like when building a house. Here's my finished sketch.



2 Having completed the pencil drawing to your satisfaction, trace it down to an art board and begin your colour work, masking for the airbrush area. Starting with the background, work forwards using the airbrush for such things as skies and mists. The latter will help to give distance to remote objects within your painting.



3 Use stronger colours and shadows for foreground features, remembering to establish your light source and direction. Study flora and fauna. The best fantasy has some factual elements that make it believable. You can now start on your main foreground character, remembering again to establish the direction of your light source.



Unless stated, images © Wizards of the Coast

THE ART OF DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

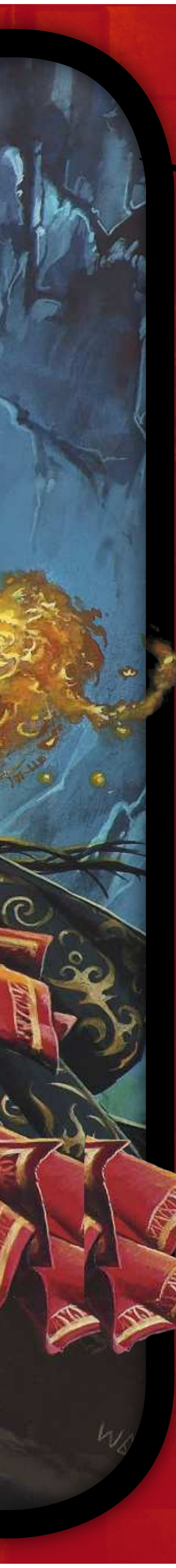
Without a doubt, the D&D phenomenon defined fantasy artwork. We take a trip back to D&D's early era of inspiration and find out how its look has been reinvented

"Paladin in Hell. Talk about setting a scene. Can you imagine being the only paladin in Hell? So much butt to kick, so little time to live," says Jon Schindehette.

He's referring to an iconic line drawing by David C Sutherland III, which appeared on page 23 of the *Player's Handbook* in 1978. A glowing knight in platemail hacks at a spike-tailed demon with his sword, while numerous other denizens of darkness close in around him. In the late Seventies and early Eighties, versions of this image and others like it were doodled in countless school books as thousands of young players took up Dungeons & Dragons. Not only did it set the scene for a worldwide craze in gaming, it also formed a starting block for a whole generation of fantasy artists.

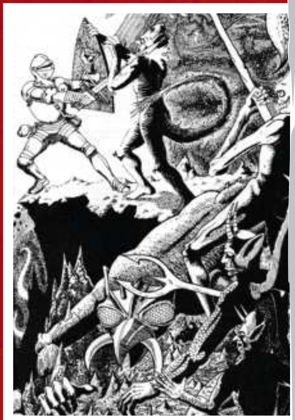
Jon was an avid gamer back then, and today is living the dream: he's the senior creative art director for Dungeons & Dragons, at Wizards of the Coast. Although it sounds like the perfect job, it can't be easy. As with that paladin back in 1978, the denizens of darkness have been closing in on D&D itself.

With card games attacking from the right, hyper-real computer games lunging in from the left and competing RPGs rushing head-on, the game that started it all has required reinvention. With well over 40 candles on its last birthday cake, these days D&D is played under the complex Fifth Edition rules. Now, Jon and the team at Wizards have come up with a lighter introduction to the game that comes in a very attractive red box. ➳



FOURTH EDITION

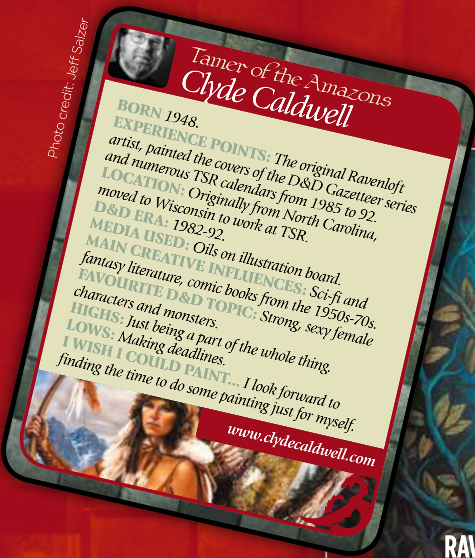
This was the cover art from 2008's Player's Handbook, created by Wayne Reynolds. One of today's leading D&D artists, he's closely associated with the controversial style brought in with the Fourth Edition rules



A PALADIN IN HELL

This 1978 line drawing by David C Sutherland III inspired a generation of D&D players and young fantasy artists

Photo credit: Jeff Salzer



Tamer of the Amazons

Clyde Caldwell

BORN 1948.

EXPERIENCE POINTS: The original Ravenloft artist, painted the covers of the D&D Gazetteer series and numerous TSR calendars from 1985 to 92.

LOCATION: Originally from North Carolina, moved to Wisconsin to work at TSR.

D&D ERA: 1982-92.

MEDIA USED: Oils on illustration board.

MAIN CREATIVE INFLUENCES: Sci-fi and fantasy literature, comic books from the 1950s-70s.

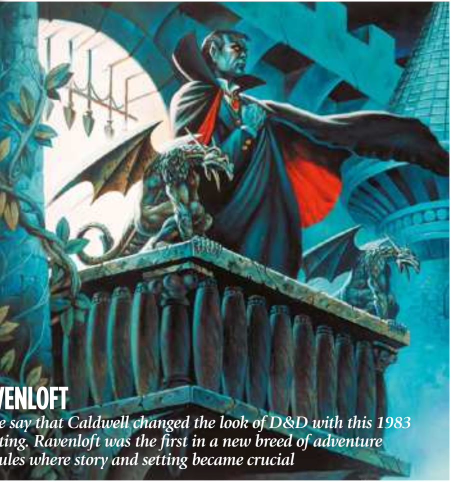
FAVOURITE D&D TOPIC: Strong, sexy female characters and monsters.

HIGHS: Just being a part of the whole thing.

LOWS: Making deadlines.

I WISH I COULD PAINT... I look forward to finding the time to do some painting just for myself.

www.clydecaldwell.com

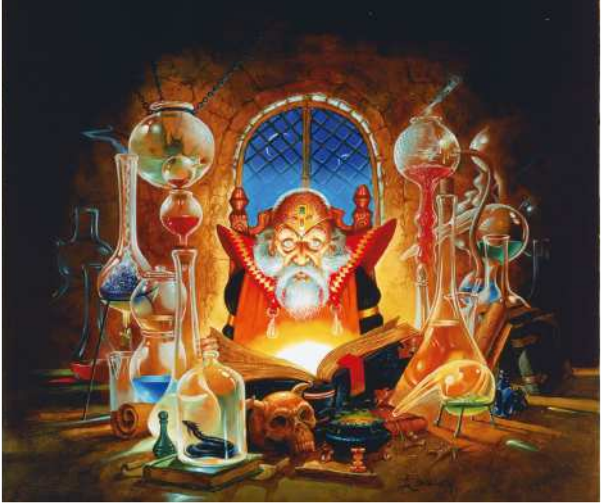


RAVENLOFT

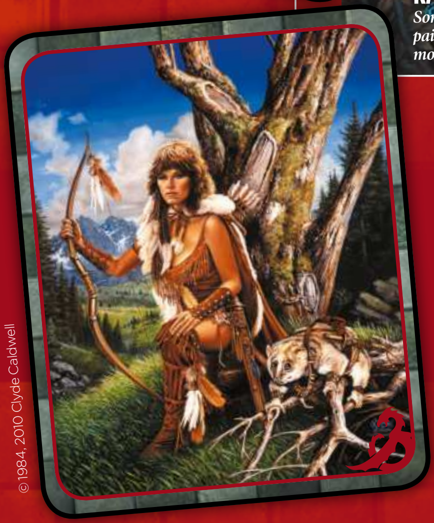
Some say that Caldwell changed the look of D&D with this 1983 painting. Ravenloft was the first in a new breed of adventure modules where story and setting became crucial

UNEARTHED ARCANA

Jeff Easley was part of the in-house team that defined D&D artwork. This image adorned the first edition of Unearthed Arcana, a guide book about spells and magic

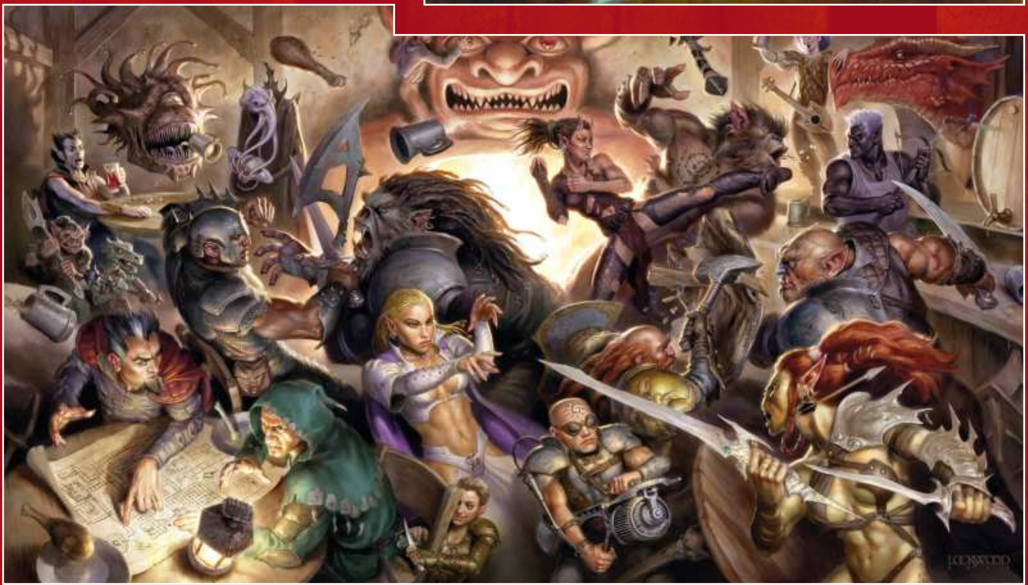


©1984, 2010 Clyde Caldwell



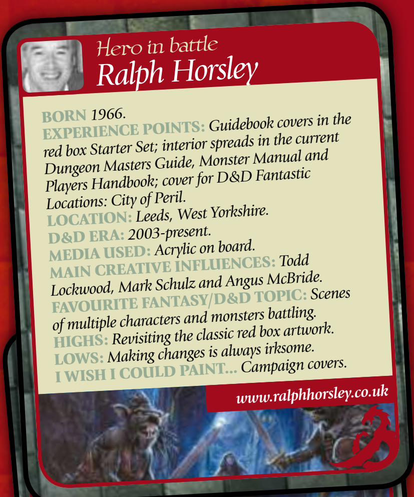
ARELENE

"I was into focusing on a central character with less emphasis on the background, so wanted to show Larry and Keith that I could paint a landscape too," says Clyde Caldwell of his Dragon magazine image



MONSTER MELEE

Todd Lockwood painted this scene for the game's 30th birthday back in 2004. Note the homage to the old Player's Handbook in the background



Hero in battle

Ralph Horsley

BORN 1966.

EXPERIENCE POINTS: Guidebook covers in the red box Starter Set; interior spreads in the current Dungeon Masters Guide, Monster Manual and Players Handbook; cover for D&D Fantastic Locations: City of Peril.

LOCATION: Leeds, West Yorkshire.

D&D ERA: 2003-present.

MEDIA USED: Acrylic on board.

MAIN CREATIVE INFLUENCES: Todd Lockwood, Mark Schulz and Angus McBride.

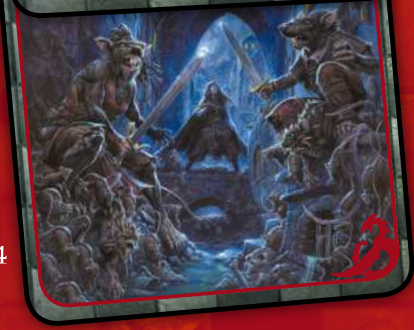
FAVOURITE FANTASY/D&D TOPIC: Scenes of multiple characters and monsters battling.

HIGHS: Revisiting the classic red box artwork.

LOWS: Making changes is always irksome.

I WISH I COULD PAINT... Campaign covers.

www.ralphhorsley.co.uk



CITY OF PERIL

Enter the world of the wererats. Ralph Horsley painted this dark and threatening image for a D&D adventure cover

> "A favourite piece of art or an artist's style was one of the things that kept the fans coming back" *Jon Schindehette*

➸ If this sounds familiar, maybe you remember 1983's Basic rules? Bursting from its red box were a fierce red dragon and a barbarian warrior in combat. That very image, by legendary artist Larry Elmore, appeared again on the front of the Fourth Edition D&D Fantasy Roleplaying Game Starter Set, along with the old logotype. It's a touch of class for which Wizards should be commended. But employing one of the game's most enduring images isn't just a nod to nostalgia; it hoped to draw in new players to the game too.

Although there are character sheets, dice and maps, D&D is played primarily in the imagination. Yet art has always been at the heart of it. The covers of the modules, internal drawings and lead miniatures used to represent characters were all starting points for how players envisaged their fantasy world. "Countless times I've had discussions with D&D fans whose game experience either began with, revolved around, or related to, a favourite piece of art or an artist's style," says Jon. "And that's one of the things that kept them coming back."

Today he works with an established freelance stable including Ralph Horsley, Wayne Reynolds, William O'Connor, Steve Prescott, the partnership of Zoltan Boris and Gabor Szikszai, among many others. He looks for a distinctive style that brings something unique, but fits with his vision for the game. Back when D&D was first

D&D FOR THE FUTURE

We asked senior creative art director Jon Schindehette what his vision of the Dungeons & Dragons world entails

What look and feel do you want Dungeons & Dragons art to have?
My personal take on the brand of Dungeons & Dragons is one of heroic adventure, where even the lowliest of characters can be bigger than life. Every villain can become an arch-enemy. Each monster brings the promise of the thrill of victory… or the agony of defeat.

What goals do you set for the D&D artwork?
I'm always striving for the art to get gut-level responses like: "That guy is so cool! I want to be him!" When I can elicit an emotional response to our heroes, villains, monsters or environments, I win!

What are the challenges you face from today's leisure markets?
Hyper-realism in today's games and movies has removed the need for imagination to fill in the blanks. How do we live in a world of hyper-realism, and yet inspire imagination? I believe we need to make decisions about what and when we choose to illustrate.

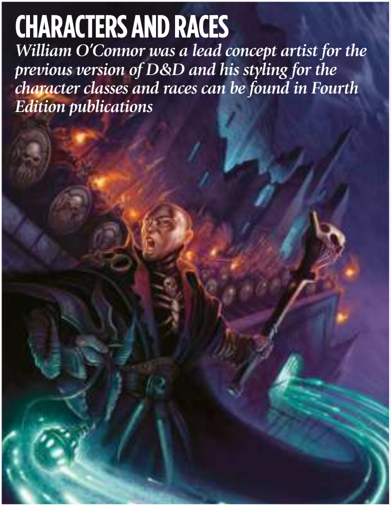
What do you think has been the most memorable D&D art?
D&D and its related worlds have historically been defined by its artists. Dragonlance by Elmore, Dark Sun by Brom and Ravenloft by Caldwell. They defined a look. Heck, they didn't just define it, they owned it.

Wayne Reynolds is one of several artists on the team today who bring a distinctive style to the D&D brand. As an art director, I like to find artists who have a defined artistic style. Why? Because they're memorable. Weren't we just talking about Elmore, Brom and Caldwell?

For you, what does an artist need to become the next hero of D&D artwork?
I may not know what it takes to become a hero, but I do know what it takes to work your way to the top tier of fantasy artists.

First off you need a commitment to excellence, always striving to produce a personal best. Second, nurture the desire to improve – be open to critiques and suggestions, and always look to improve your hand drawing skills.

Third, always try to exceed your expectations, rather than simply meeting them. Forth, expand your core art skills, refine your vision and nurture your ability to tell a story. Finally, you have to develop your own look or style. It's not enough just to be a great painter. You must have an edge – something that makes your work stand out from the crowd.



CHARACTERS AND RACES
William O'Connor was a lead concept artist for the previous version of D&D and his styling for the character classes and races can be found in Fourth Edition publications

established, the art direction wasn't so strategic. The earliest D&D artists like David Sutherland, Erol Otus, David A Trampier and Jim Roslof set the tone for the game in a range of styles. Shortly thereafter, TSR decided that an in-house team of trained artists could take it to a new level.

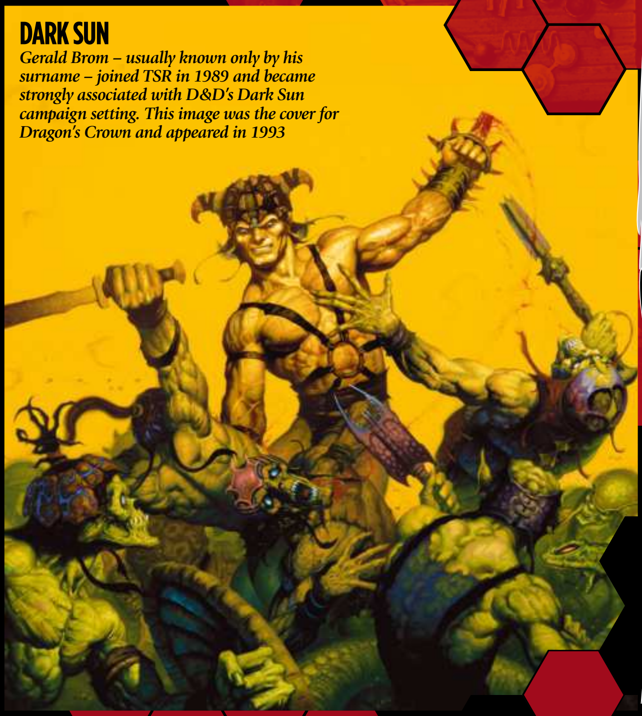
During 1981 and 82, Larry Elmore, Jeff Easley, Clyde Caldwell and Keith Parkinson joined to paint cover artwork for new releases. "I didn't know it when I was doing that box cover, but me, Parkinson, Easley and Caldwell were setting a look for games," recalls Larry Elmore. "We were just sort of painting the way we wanted to and there wasn't much fantasy art around at the time. So we didn't have a lot to build on."

ALL EYES ON TSR

This in-house dream team hadn't only stepped into an undefined area of fantasy. They were with a company that was enjoying tremendous success. Just about every kid in the English-speaking world was enjoying D&D. Gamers and budding artists all wanted to work at TSR's HQ in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. "I won't forget the first time I saw a book with one of those guy's art on the cover. It was Jeff Easley's painting of the hill giant on the cover of the *AD&D Monster Manual II*. Here was something professionally crafted, with focus, story and power. I was blown away," says Todd Lockwood, now a well-known D&D artist himself.

That book was published in 1983 when demand for the game was going through the roof. In the same year, TSR launched Ravenloft, a module that became a campaign adventure and remains an important franchise for Wizards today. ➳

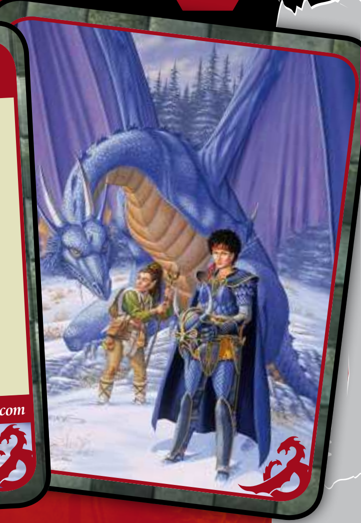
Continued on page 58



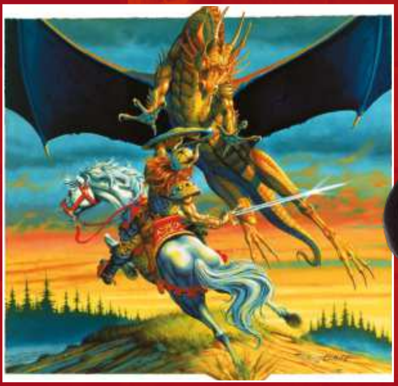
DARK SUN
Gerald Brom – usually known only by his surname – joined TSR in 1989 and became strongly associated with D&D's Dark Sun campaign setting. This image was the cover for Dragon's Crown and appeared in 1993

Wizard with a paintbrush
Larry Elmore

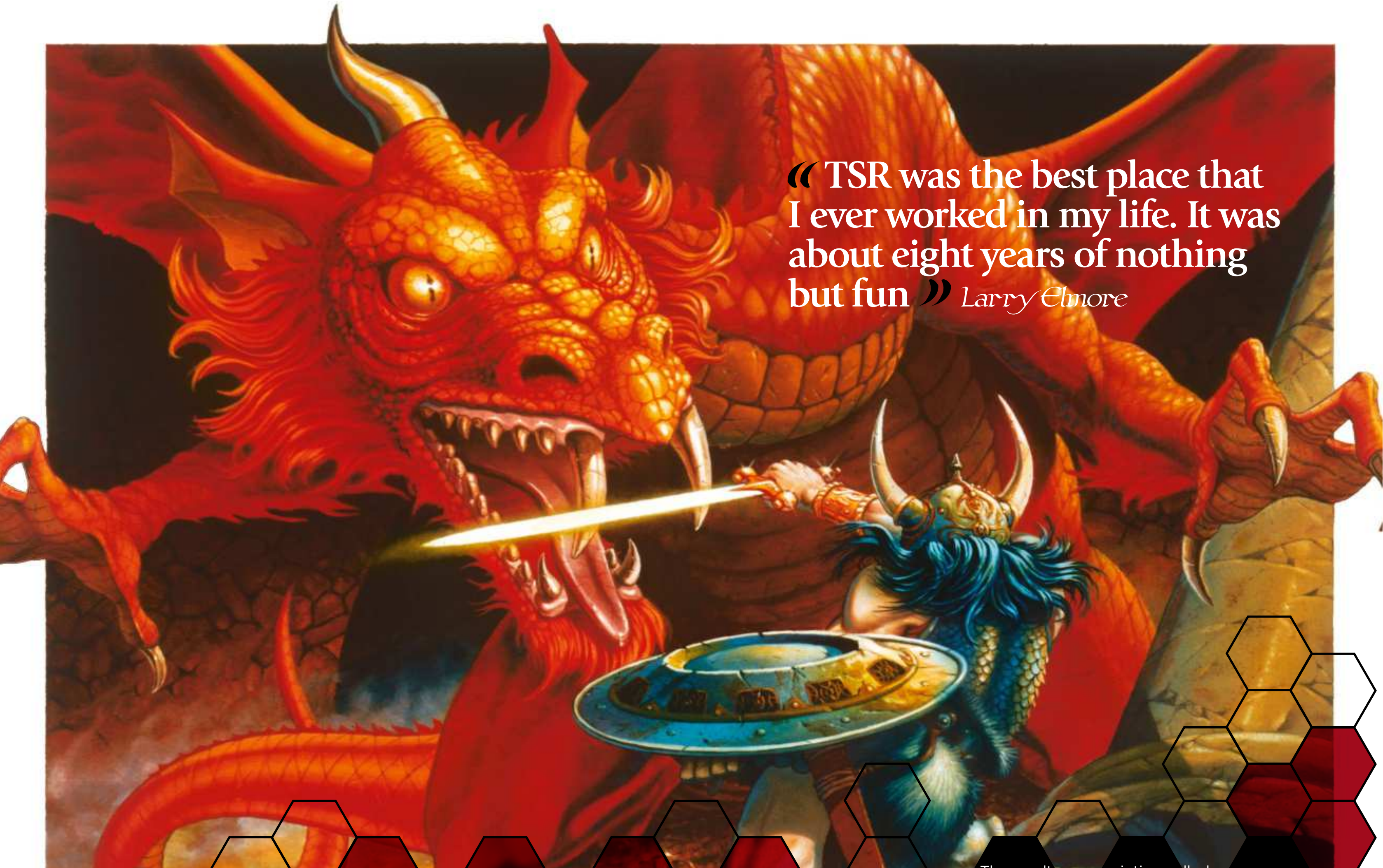
BORN 1948.
EXPERIENCE POINTS: *Painted the Basic Rules, Expert Rules and Master Rules Compendium box covers in 1983, the first three Dragonlance covers.*
LOCATION: *Originally from Kentucky, moved to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Then back to Kentucky.*
D&D ERA: *1981-1987.*
MEDIA USED: *Oil on masonite.*
MAIN CREATIVE INFLUENCES: *Frank Frazetta, the Hildebrandts, NC Wyeth, Howard Pyle.*
FAVOURITE D&D TOPIC: *Big scenes with armies, an epic look and dragons.*
HIGHS: *Seeing the success of Dragonlance.*
LOWS: *Worrying that TSR would go under.*
I WISH I COULD PAINT… *Portraits of all the main Dragonlance characters.*
www.larryelmore.com



DRAGONS OF WINTER NIGHT
Even when the first series of Dragonlance books were reprinted in 1992, Larry Elmore was invited back to paint the covers. This image was for the third book in the series



AIR ATTACK
Another early classic by Larry Elmore, this painting appeared on the Expert Rules Set 2, a blue box, published in 1983. Perhaps we'll see it again soon on a new D&D product?



> “TSR was the best place that I ever worked in my life. It was about eight years of nothing but fun” *Larry Elmore*

VENTURE INTO THE LAIR OF ANCIENT RED

Larry Elmore recalls how he created the iconic artwork of the D&D Fantasy Roleplaying Game Starter Set, re-released by Wizards in 2010

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS
FANTASY ROLEPLAYING GAME
STARTER SET

In 1981, Larry Elmore joined TSR, as one of the first really experienced illustrators they hired to work in-house. He'd previously been in the US Army, but as an artist his work had already been published in sci-fi magazines. One of his key assignments was to paint new artwork for the D&D rules box sets, which TSR revamped in 1983.

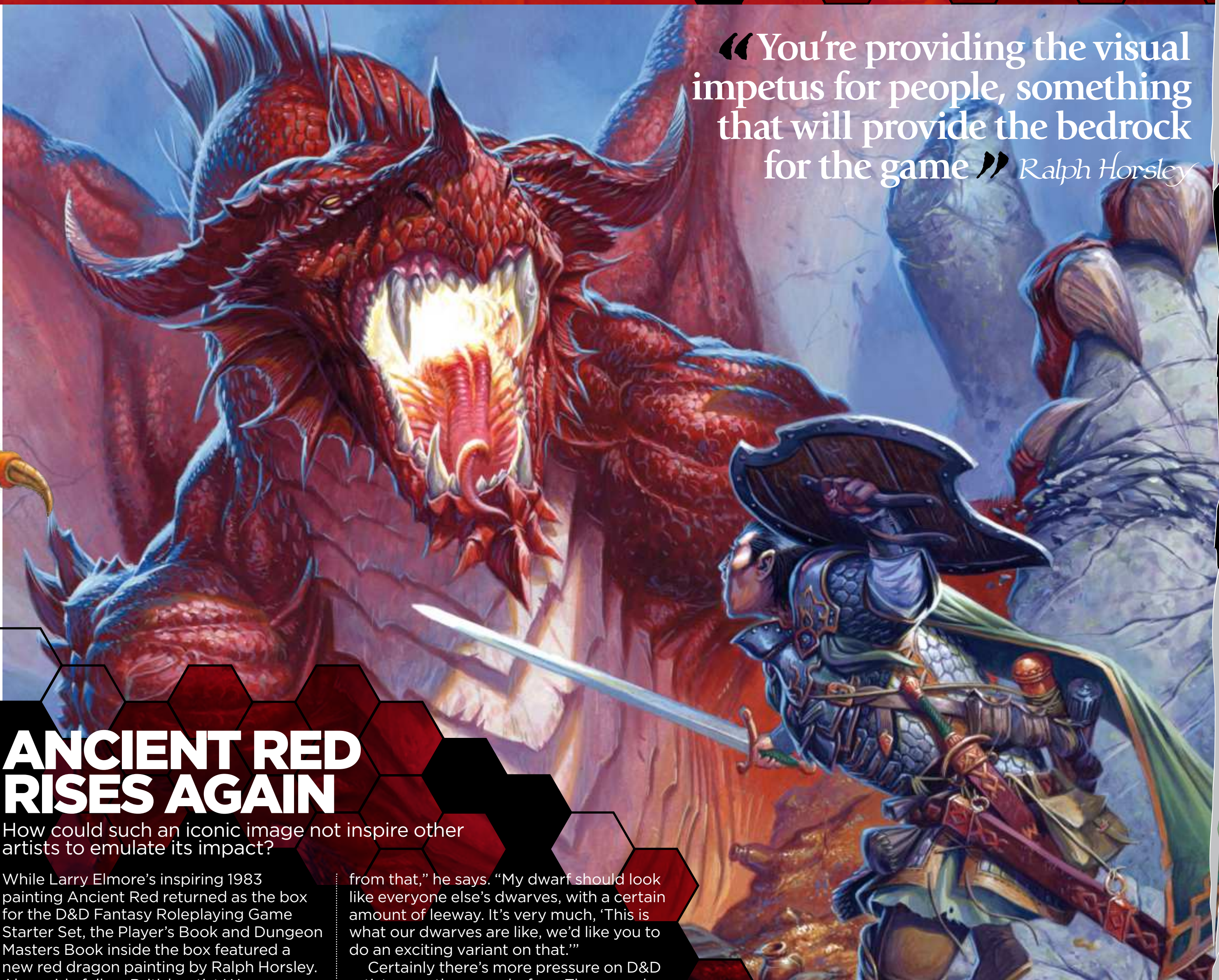
His initial sketches were rejected by Gary Gygax. As head of TSR and one of the founders of D&D, Gary was god-like to other TSR staff, but Larry marched down the hall and demanded to see him. A secretary tried to stop him, but eventually he gained admittance.

“So we discussed it, and I did some sketches, and I understood what he wanted,” he says. “I thought it was a good idea – he wanted it to jump out at you, and I'd been doing some stuff for the Army two years before that, where we'd have tanks bursting out of a frame, like bursting out of the page, trying to get more impact. So I said, ‘I know what you're talking about.’”

The result was a painting called Ancient Red, and a good working relationship with Gygax. Air Attack followed for the Expert Rules box, then Dragon Blade on the Master Rules Compendium. He also did the covers for the first three Dragonlance novels.

“TSR was the most unique and best place that I ever worked in my life, and it was about eight years of nothing but fun. You'd go in to work and you'd work there until nine or ten at night sometimes. You didn't want to leave,” Larry says.

He did leave in 1987, as it turns out, but Larry has never given up on fantasy art, painting hundreds of images for various other game systems, books and magazines. Today, he teaches painting and does private commissions. “They'll have to prise the paintbrush out of my cold, dead hand, before I'll stop,” he adds.



> “You’re providing the visual impetus for people, something that will provide the bedrock for the game” Ralph Horsley

ANCIENT RED RISES AGAIN

How could such an iconic image not inspire other artists to emulate its impact?

While Larry Elmore’s inspiring 1983 painting Ancient Red returned as the box for the D&D Fantasy Roleplaying Game Starter Set, the Player’s Book and Dungeon Masters Book inside the box featured a new red dragon painting by Ralph Horsley. Alongside fellow British artist Wayne Reynolds, Ralph is recognised as a defining artist for today’s D&D style. This work has been described as an homage to Larry’s original piece.

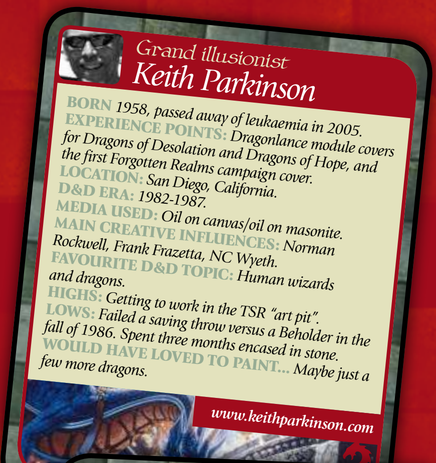
“Growing up, I never thought that I would end up working on the product and being associated with Larry Elmore and that generation of artists in such a direct way. It’s very satisfying and very rewarding.”

Although Larry Elmore, Keith Parkinson, Jeff Easley and Clyde Caldwell were art directed, in their day the game world was far more open to their interpretation. With everything that competes with D&D today, artists like Ralph have to fit in with a style guide. “If I’m doing a dwarf it’ll follow on from that,” he says. “My dwarf should look like everyone else’s dwarves, with a certain amount of leeway. It’s very much, ‘This is what our dwarves are like, we’d like you to do an exciting variant on that.’”

Certainly there’s more pressure on D&D artists now than ever before. The game has an incredible heritage to live up to, while so many other things are competing for the RPGer’s pound. For Ralph, it’s important to consider the breadth of contemporary fantasy work and move forward. “Maybe I’m aware of video games and whatever else, but I’m not trying to mimic them. You’re aware of the same dynamism that’s out there in comic art and so on,” he says.

“You’re providing the visual impetus for people, something for them to easily pick up on and that will provide the bedrock for the game. There’s a responsibility to make the game look exciting, the characters look interesting, and create a world that you’d want to immerse yourself in.”

Ralph Horsley’s homage to Ancient Red adorns the books inside 2010’s D&D Fantasy Roleplaying Game Starter Set

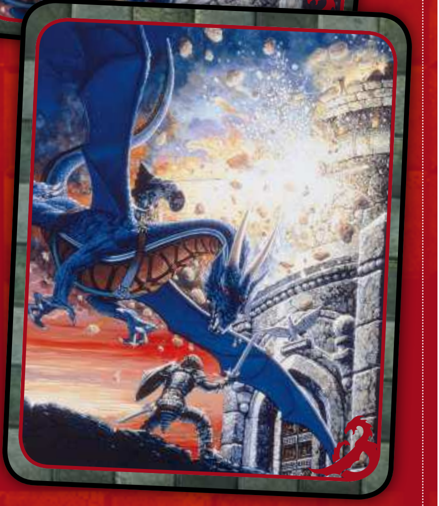


Grand illusionist

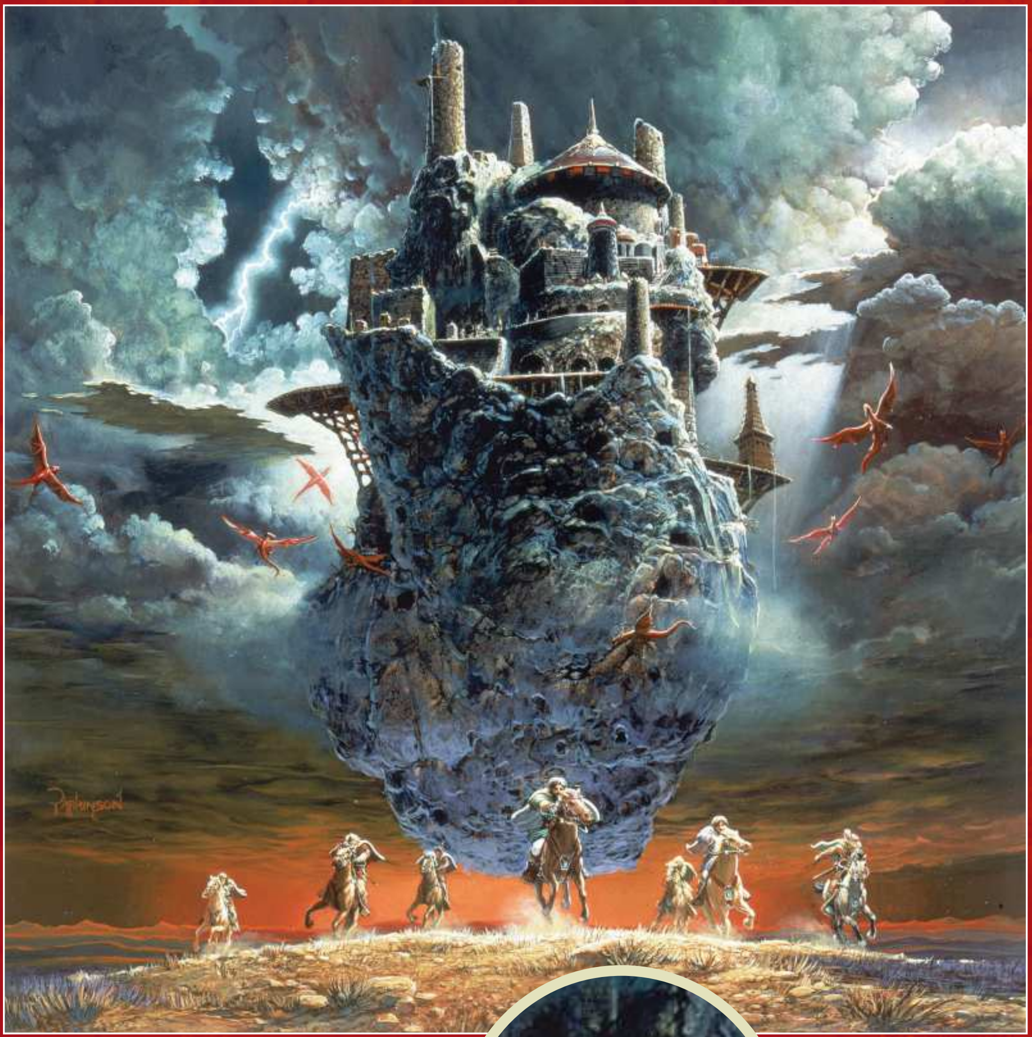
Keith Parkinson

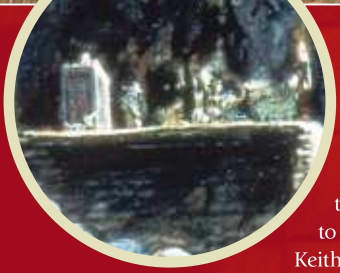
BORN 1958, passed away of leukaemia in 2005.
EXPERIENCE POINTS: Dragonlance module covers for Dragons of Desolation and Dragons of Hope, and the first Forgotten Realms campaign cover.
LOCATION: San Diego, California.
D&D ERA: 1982-1987.
MEDIA USED: Oil on canvas/oil on masonite.
MAIN CREATIVE INFLUENCES: Norman Rockwell, Frank Frazetta, NC Wyeth.
FAVOURITE D&D TOPIC: Human wizards and dragons.
HIGHS: Getting to work in the TSR "art pit".
LOWS: Failed a saving throw versus a Beholder in the fall of 1986. Spent three months encased in stone.
WOULD HAVE LOVED TO PAINT... Maybe just a few more dragons.

www.keithparkinson.com

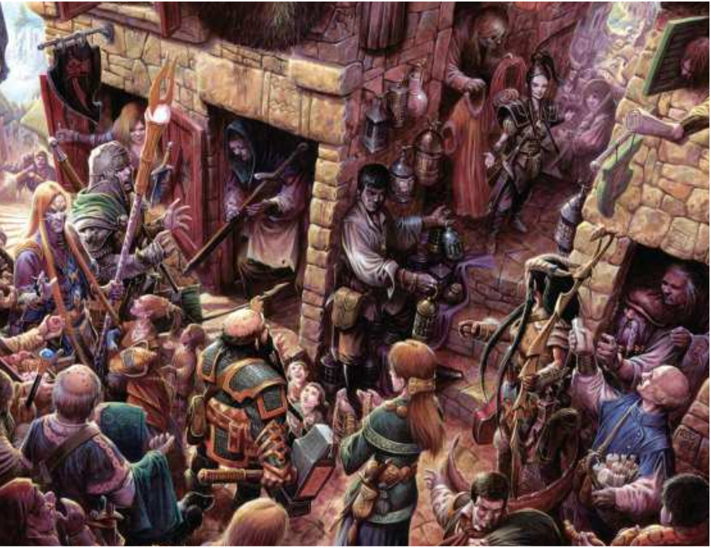


DRAGONS OF WAR
Awesome energy explodes from this painting by Keith Parkinson for the eighth module by Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weis for the Dragonlance series





DRAGONS OF DESOLATION
The citadel floats up out of the earth in Keith Parkinson's painting for the fourth Dragonlance module, Dragons of Desolation. The insert reveals Keith's nod to Doctor Who



FELLCREST
Ralph Horsley loves to create settings that involve multiple characters and lots of action. This depiction of Fellcrest appears in the latest Dungeon Master's Guide

➸ A large part of its success is down to Clyde Caldwell's chilling image of a vampire surveying the lands around his keep.

"Ravenloft was one of my early pieces as a staff artist," explains Clyde. "That was my first exposure to Tracy Hickman. I had a lot of fun doing the art for that module, since I was ready for a little horror in my artistic stew, and I got to do all of the interiors for the module as well as the cover, which let me put my visual stamp on it. Tracy was heading up the Dragonlance team and all the artists were excited about it. It was a chance to create a whole new gaming world from the ground up."

The team created illustrations for the *Dragonlance Chronicles*, which consisted of game modules and novels. Authored by Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weis, it allowed the young Keith Parkinson to shine as a cover artist.

Keith passed away in 2005, but his son Nick recalls how his father had fun painting *Dragons of Desolation*: "The reason that was a favourite has more to do with a joke than the actual subject of the painting. My dad was a big Doctor Who fan, and if you look carefully, on the ledge on the citadel you can see the Doctor, K-9 and the TARDIS."

By 1987, two million Dragonlance novels were sold, along with another half a million D&D modules. The art team had now become mainstream. However, as Larry points out, that wasn't the aim. Like everyone at TSR, they were gamers at heart. Playing every lunchtime, their campaigns

TAKING ON THE MANTLE

One artist talks of his time in the world of D&D

The new edition rules and D&D Essentials range bring new opportunities for artists like Tyler Jacobson. Having graduated from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco with an MFA in Illustration, he's already had his first handful of fantasy and D&D commissions.

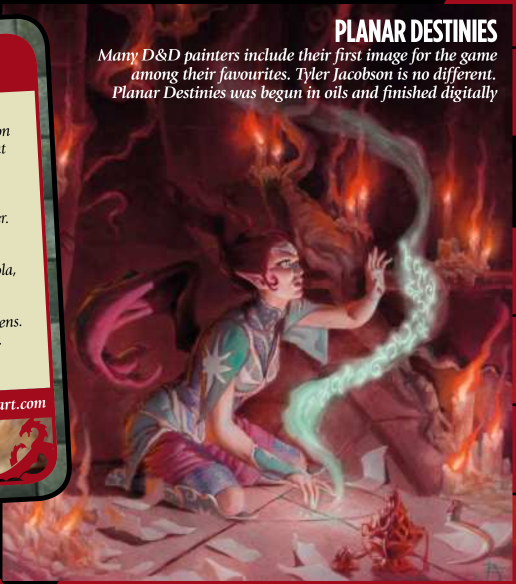
"My first important image was my first commission. It was for an elf woman casting a spell in a candle-lit dungeon," he recalls. "I used my traditional painting skills and painted the image in oils. I wanted to do more but because of the oil drying time I didn't have enough time to complete the image in oils. So I turned to completing the image digitally."

Like many artists before him, he's also developed his skills and ideas working for Dragon magazine. Today it's an online publication, but it still nurtures new talent. One of Jacobson's biggest inspirations growing up was Jeff Easley, whose covers jumped off the page, yet he's developing his own style and approach.

"I really enjoy the darker characters in D&D. I love the imagery of a dark, moonlit world where there are magical beings lurking in the corners. I also like the more animistic characters. I'd really love to see a world full of more alien-like creatures that are very unlike what we normally get to see," he says.

Young turk
Tyler Jacobson

BORN *1982.*
EXPERIENCE POINTS: *Cover image for Dragon issue 384, and a range of internal images for recent and upcoming D&D-related publications.*
LOCATION: *Renton, Washington.*
D&D ERA: *2009-present.*
MEDIA USED: *Oil on board, Photoshop, Painter.*
MAIN CREATIVE INFLUENCES: *Frank Frazetta, Dean Cornwell, JC Leyendecker, NC Wyeth, Alex Ross, Craig Mullins, Donato Giancola, Greg Manchess, Jaime Jones, Jon Foster, Todd Lockwood, Jeff Easley, John Howe and Alan Lee.*
FAVOURITE D&D TOPIC: *Shifters and wildens.*
HIGHS: *My first commission and my first cover.*
LOWS: *None so far.*
I WISH I COULD PAINT... *Dragons.*
www.tylerjacobsonart.com



PLANAR DESTINIES
Many D&D painters include their first image for the game among their favourites. Tyler Jacobson is no different. Planar Destinies was begun in oils and finished digitally

lasted for years, feeding their art with authenticity. Experienced artists from advertising firms got in touch, hoping to illustrate for D&D. Although some of them could produce great fantasy imagery, the details of the game were missing.

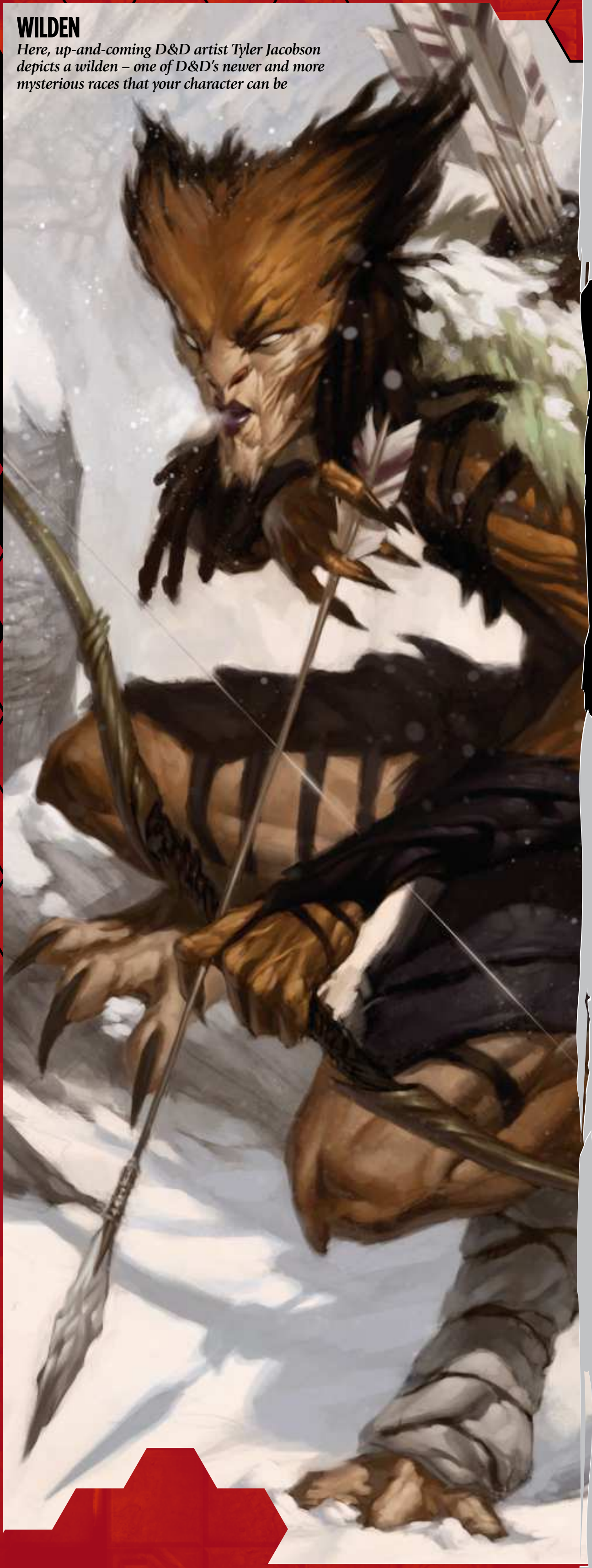
"We knew that everything in the scene was important to the game – the weather, the time of day, you name it," says Larry. "Like when we did a fighter or an adventurer, he would usually have pouches and, if we had to, we'd show a backpack. We'd put ropes and maybe a hook or something to climb walls. We gave him armour that looked functional."

> "All the artists were excited about Dragonlance. It was a chance to create a world from the ground up" *Clyde Caldwell*

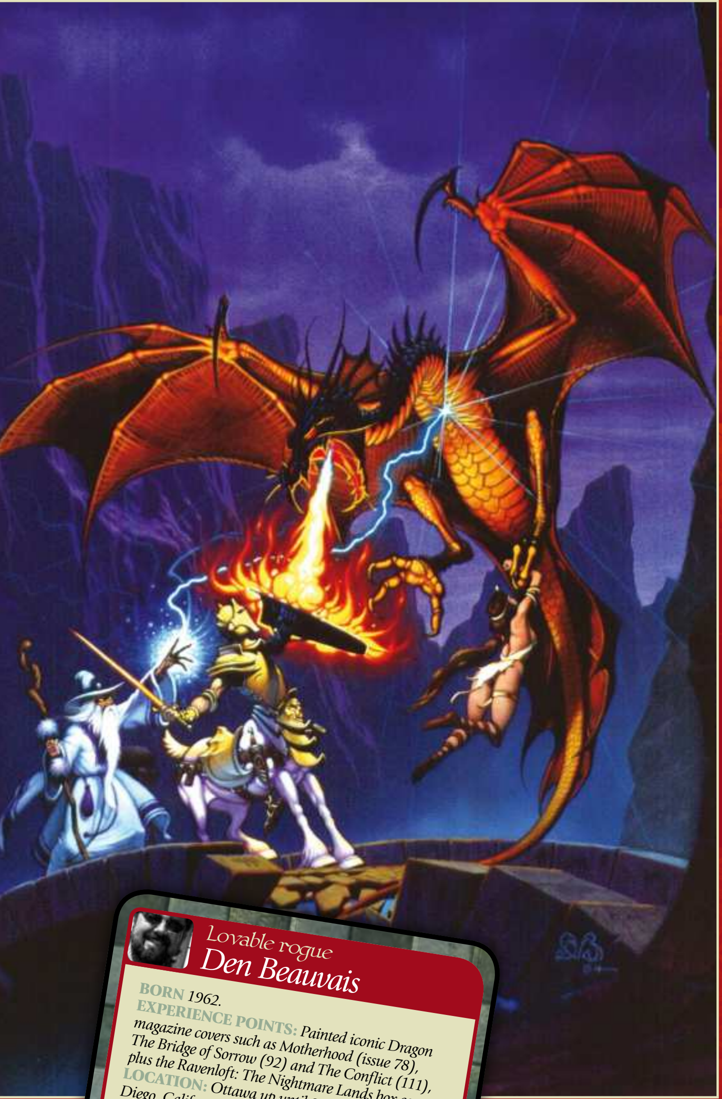
A gentle flame of competition flickered in the campfire of D&D art, fanned by the opportunity to work for *Dragon* magazine. Published by a separate division of TSR and edited by Kim Mohan, Dragon covered new developments in role playing and fantasy art; early editions had articles on Boris Vallejo and the Hildebrandts. The in-house artists enjoyed more freedom with *Dragon* commissions, as did other freelancers such as Den Beauvais. His popular Bridge of Sorrows painting for issue 92 was made into a model set by Ral Partha.

"I think what attracts me most about Bridge of Sorrows is the classic dragon

➔



WILDEN
Here, up-and-coming D&D artist Tyler Jacobson depicts a wilden – one of D&D's newer and more mysterious races that your character can be



THE BRIDGE OF SORROWS

This stunning cover for Dragon magazine issue 92 by Den Beauvais sparkled in the imagination of many young players. So popular was the image that Ral Partha made it into a fantasy model kit

Lovable rogue

Den Beauvais

BORN 1962.

EXPERIENCE POINTS: Painted iconic Dragon magazine covers such as Motherhood (issue 78), The Bridge of Sorrow (92) and The Conflict (111), plus the Ravenloft: The Nightmare Lands box cover.

LOCATION: Ottawa up until 2003, then San Diego, California, then Vancouver.

D&D ERA: 1980-1996.

MEDIA USED: Acrylics and airbrush on board.

MAIN CREATIVE INFLUENCES: Frank Frazetta, Syd Mead, Roger Dean and Keith Parkinson.

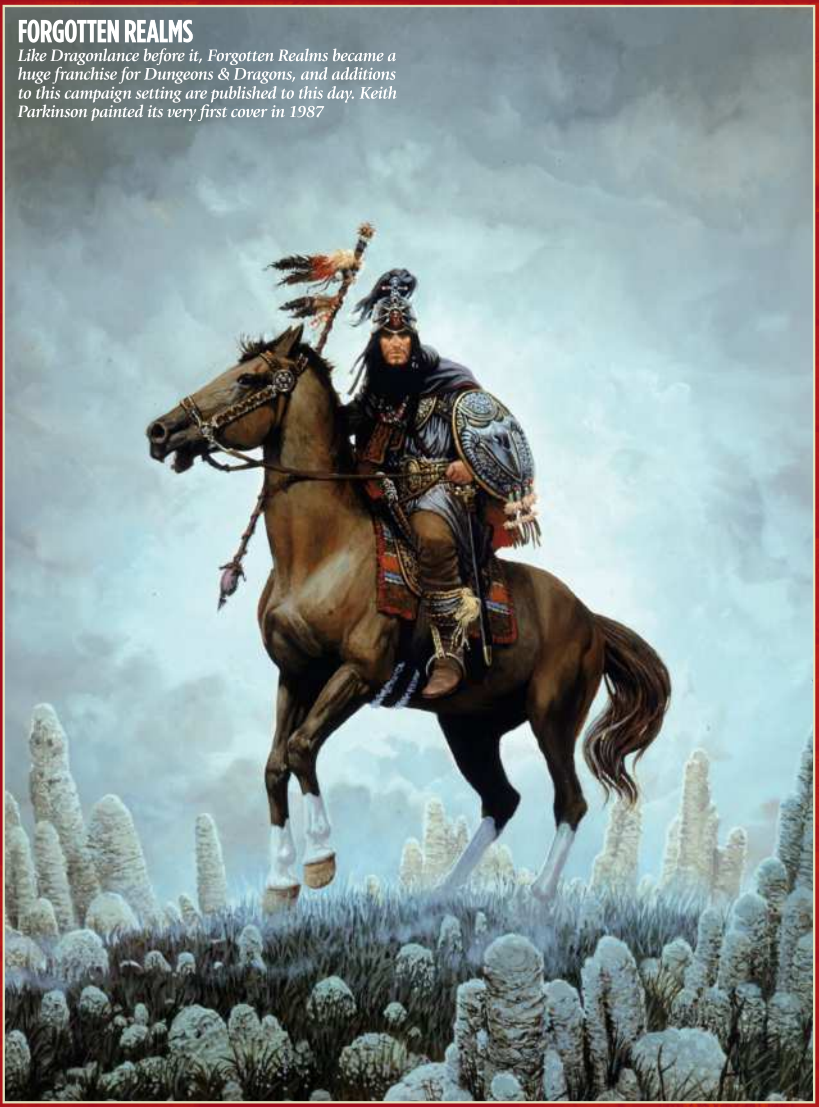
FAVOURITE D&D TOPIC: Dragons. What else?

HIGHS: Money, inspiration and weed.

LOWS: No money, uninspired and out of weed.

I WISH I COULD PAINT... A new race of Hemp Elves that I'd make up myself.

www.denbeauvais.com, www.conspiracycards.com



FORGOTTEN REALMS

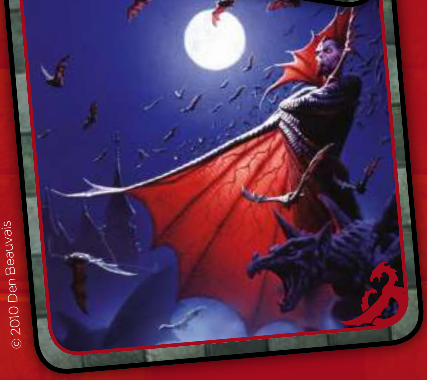
Like Dragonlance before it, Forgotten Realms became a huge franchise for Dungeons & Dragons, and additions to this campaign setting are published to this day. Keith Parkinson painted its very first cover in 1987

pose," he says. "Back then we were all competing to get these classic poses and we were all racing to do these images first, especially dragons. They're the icon, the top fantasy creature there is."

No party of adventurers stays together forever. Having made a defining impact on fantasy art, eventually the in-house artists began going their separate ways. Clyde stayed with TSR until 1992. Jeff Easley stayed even longer and saw in a new generation of in-house heroes like Fred Fields and RK Post, both now legends in their own right. And who can forget Brom's work for the Dark Sun campaign setting?

In 1996, Todd started at TSR just in time to experience D&D's huge revolution. The company was bought by Wizards of the Coast and moved to Renton, Washington. Undoubtedly influenced by D&D's imagery, its Magic: The Gathering cards had usurped TSR's hold on fantasy gaming. The new management decided to tear it up and start again, and work began on the Third Edition rules. Todd, a keen gamer and an experienced graphic designer, pushed for an opportunity to give D&D an overarching visual style from the get-go. Art director Dawn Murrin agreed and, working with Sam Wood and the other in-house

> « Back then we were all competing to get these classic poses and we were all racing to do these images first, especially dragons » Den Beauvais



SOUL SEARCHING

In addition to magazine covers, Den Beauvais contributed paintings for D&D modules in the Eighties and Nineties. Soul Searching was used for the Ravenloft series

© 2010 Den Beauvais

artists, they moulded a new look. Styling the dragons was a good place to start.

"That was certainly one of the highlights of my career: designing dragons for Dungeons & Dragons! You really can't have more fun than that. We were given pretty wide latitude to envision the game as we saw it," explains Todd. "Working on the Third Edition was a thrill not just because I got to see it the way I really always had, but because what we were creating was a centre rail, not the whole railway, passengers and all. In D&D, every player gets to imagine his or her characters exactly as they like."

Debate continues over the merits of the Third Edition, but from the late Nineties the game was in a new milieu. Financial competition for real world gold pieces was stiff. The card game Magic: The Gathering gave fantasy addicts something quick and easy to play. The *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy brought unprecedented special effects. Computer games were becoming more realistic, immersive and social. Was there still room for an imagined game?

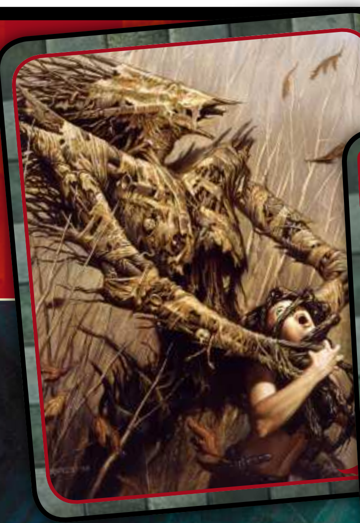
> "Designing dragons for Dungeons & Dragons – you can't really have more fun than that!" *Todd Lockwood*

D&D GOES FOURTH

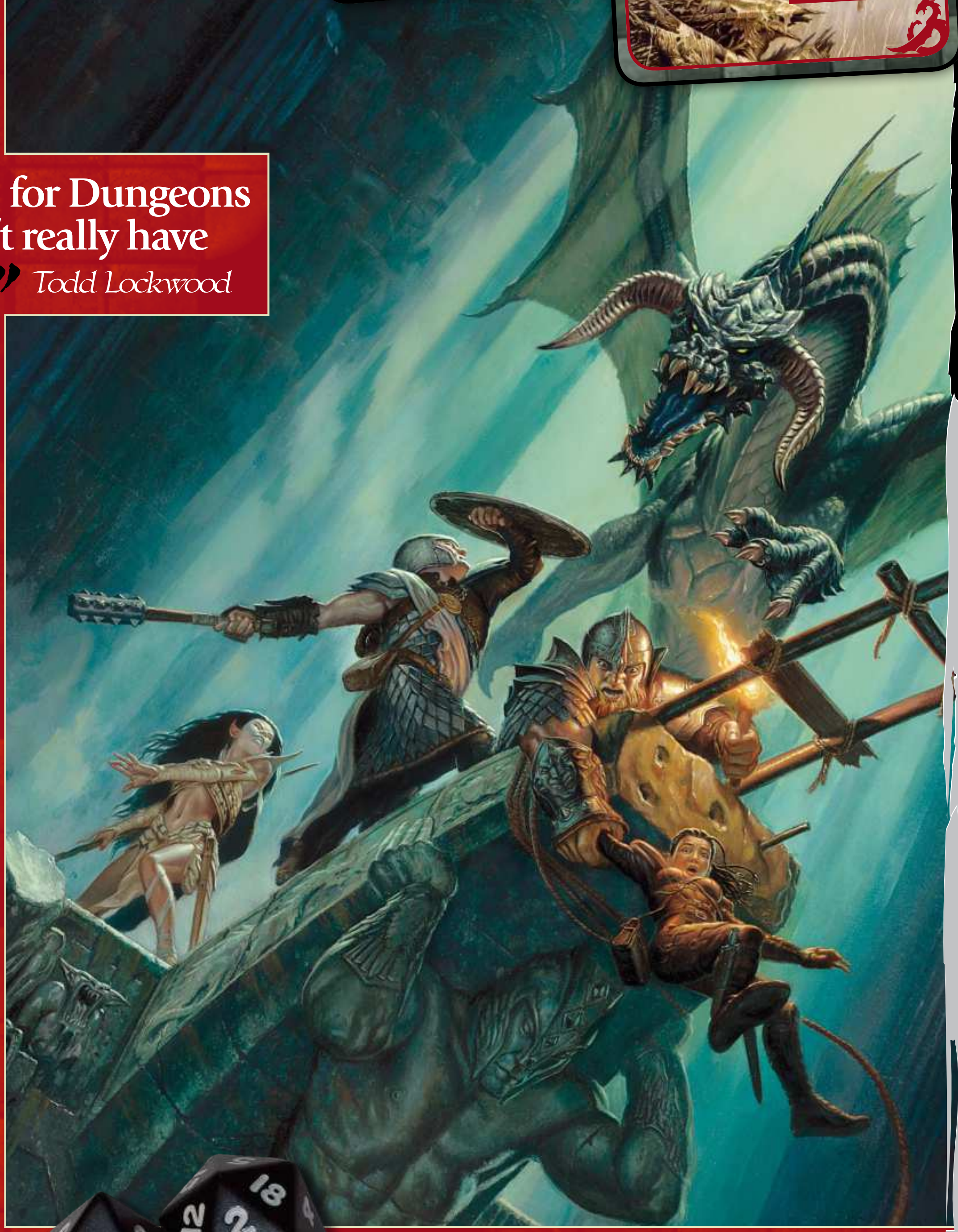
In 2002, toy giant Hasbro purchased Wizards of the Coast. Wizards still operates as a fantasy games company, but the in-house D&D painters were let go. A design team headed by Jon Schindehette now works with freelancers, forging ahead with Fifth Edition products. Successful sub-brands such as Forgotten Realms, Dark Sun and Dragonlance are still going, and the Eberron campaign world has become a successful online game.

In 2010 the red box Starter Set led the way for D&D Essentials, a brand aiming to introduce the game to new players and lapsed dungeoneers alike. In today's artwork, swords are bigger and poses more expressive. Manga, game graphics and contemporary fantasy styles are now influencing D&D. Artists such as Tyler Jacobson, Slawomir Maniak, Eric Bélisle and Eva Widermann are leaving their own distinctive marks on the game.

"It's very neat to see it evolve now to the look it has today," reflects Larry. "We might have influenced the younger guys, but now you look at some of the stuff those artists do, and that influences me. It's like a big circle."



WOOD GOLEM
Each creature needs to be defined visually for the many rulebooks. Todd Lockwood's artwork has been key in that process

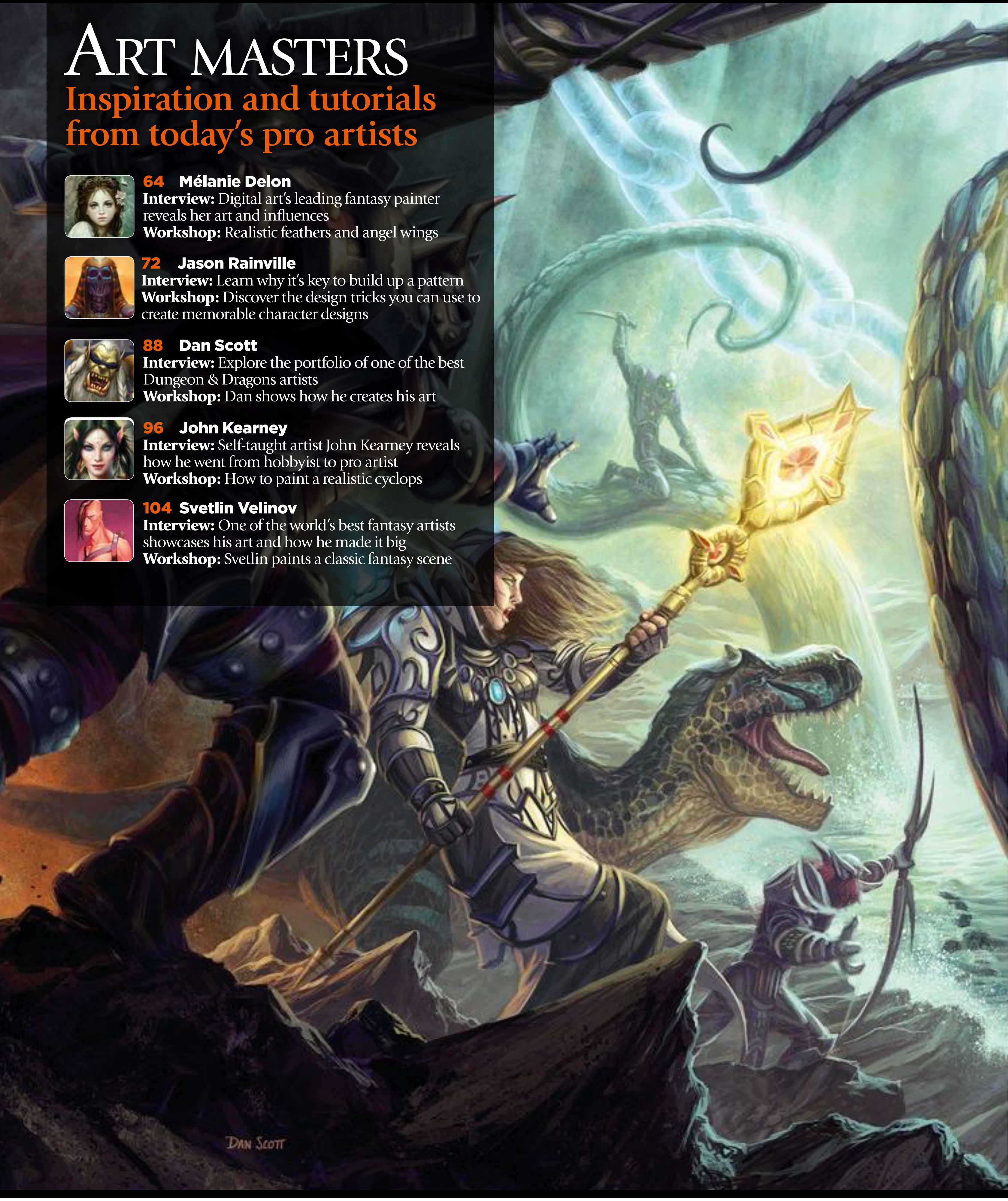


FORGE OF FURY
One of Todd Lockwood's grandest moments is this cover for the second adventure published under the D&D Third Edition rules. His dragons have defined the styling of these creatures ever since

Lord of the dragons
Todd Lockwood

BORN *1957.*
EXPERIENCE POINTS: *Painted covers for The Silent Sentinel and Forge of Fury, the first two D&D Third Edition modules.*
LOCATION: *Bonney Lake, Washington.*
D&D ERA: *1996-2002 (end of Second Edition AD&D, to the birth of Third Edition).*
MEDIA USED: *Painter, with bits of Photoshop.*
MAIN CREATIVE INFLUENCES: *Walt Disney, Frank Frazetta, Michael Whelan, Boris Vallejo, Jeff Jones, all the great D&D artists past and present.*
FAVOURITE D&D TOPIC: *Dragons.*
HIGHS: *Partying in Amsterdam with Kenny Baker.*
LOWS: *The arrival of the corporate mindset.*
I WISH I COULD PAINT... *I always wanted to do a portrait for each of the Third Edition dragons.*

www.toddlockwood.com



ART MASTERS

Inspiration and tutorials from today's pro artists

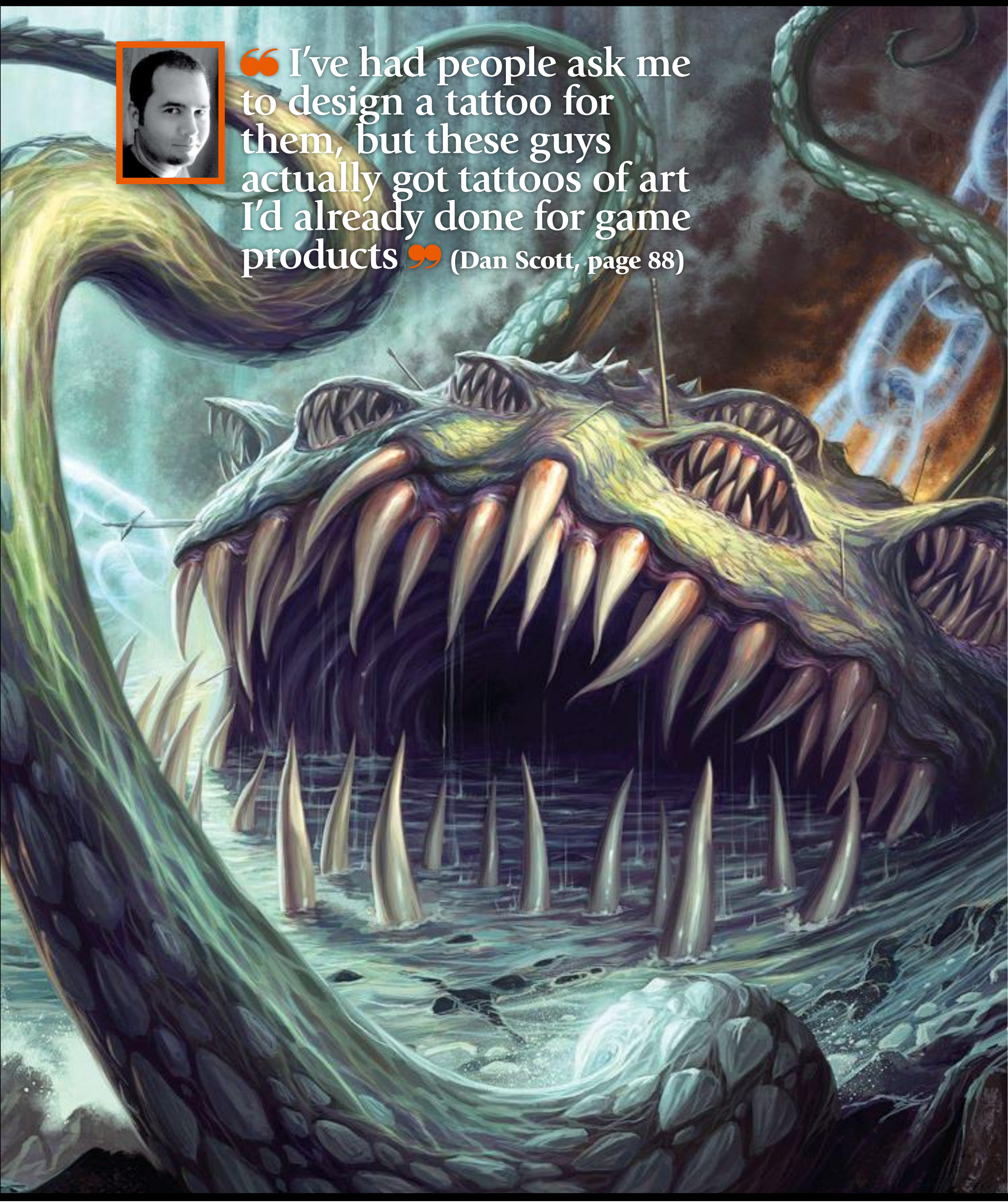
64 Mélanie Delon
Interview: Digital art's leading fantasy painter reveals her art and influences
Workshop: Realistic feathers and angel wings

72 Jason Rainville
Interview: Learn why it's key to build up a pattern
Workshop: Discover the design tricks you can use to create memorable character designs

88 Dan Scott
Interview: Explore the portfolio of one of the best Dungeon & Dragons artists
Workshop: Dan shows how he creates his art

96 John Kearney
Interview: Self-taught artist John Kearney reveals how he went from hobbyist to pro artist
Workshop: How to paint a realistic cyclops

104 Svetlin Velinov
Interview: One of the world's best fantasy artists showcases his art and how he made it big
Workshop: Svetlin paints a classic fantasy scene

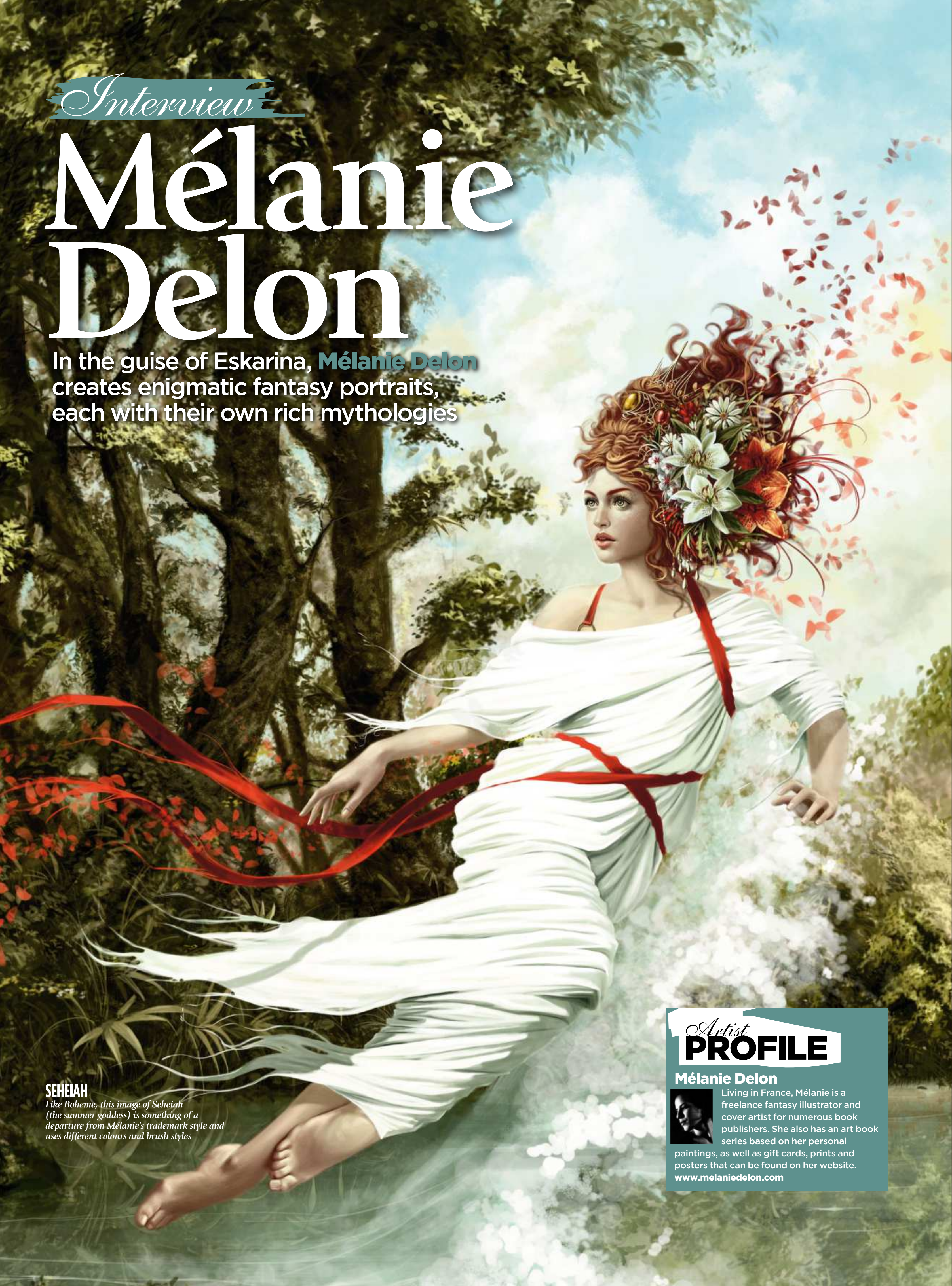


“I’ve had people ask me to design a tattoo for them, but these guys actually got tattoos of art I’d already done for game products” (Dan Scott, page 88)

Interview

Mélanie Delon

In the guise of Eskarina, **Mélanie Delon** creates enigmatic fantasy portraits, each with their own rich mythologies

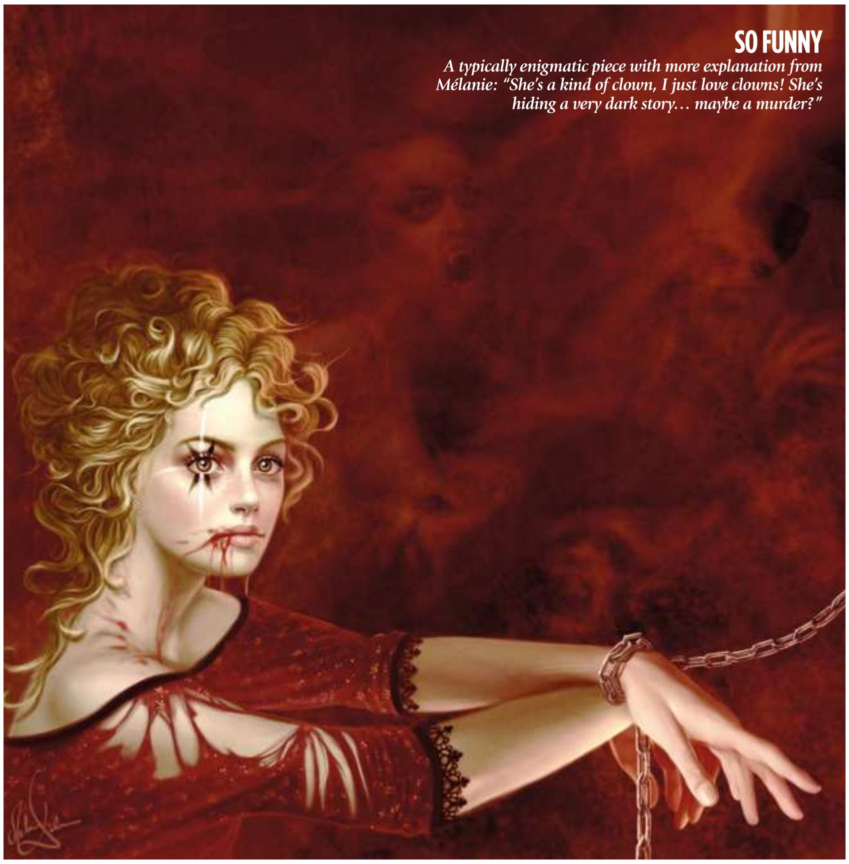


SEHEIAH
Like Boheme, this image of Seheiah (the summer goddess) is something of a departure from Mélanie's trademark style and uses different colours and brush styles

Artist PROFILE

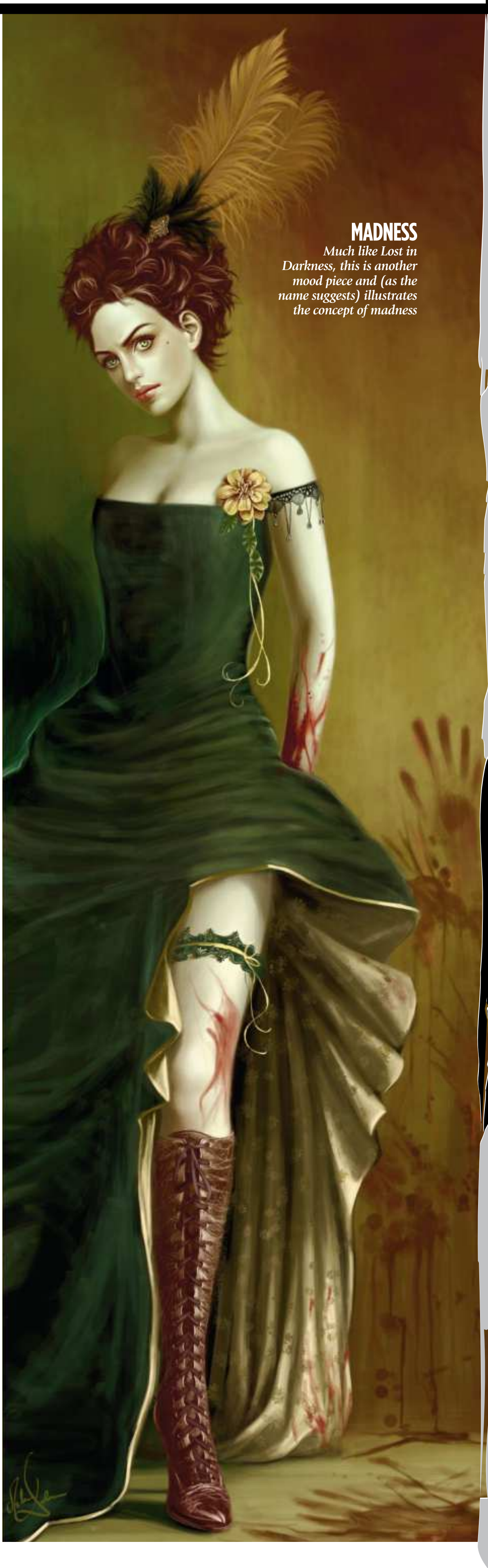
Mélanie Delon

Living in France, Mélanie is a freelance fantasy illustrator and cover artist for numerous book publishers. She also has an art book series based on her personal paintings, as well as gift cards, prints and posters that can be found on her website.
www.melaniedelon.com



SO FUNNY

A typically enigmatic piece with more explanation from Mélanie: "She's a kind of clown, I just love clowns! She's hiding a very dark story… maybe a murder?"



MADNESS

Much like Lost in Darkness, this is another mood piece and (as the name suggests) illustrates the concept of madness

"Feelings like sadness or solitude are pretty strong and even violent," enthuses Mélanie, who works under the moniker of Eskarina – a name taken from a heroine in one of Terry Pratchett's Discworld novels. "It's the story of a little girl who wants to became a wizard," she explains. "It's a kind of tribute I make to that author."

Mélanie is well known for creating otherworldly portraits that are mysterious and often emotionally charged. Images with titles such as Madness and Lost in the Darkness show her attempts to try to capture the power of these feelings on a digital canvas. "I try to re-transcribe what I am feeling when I have an idea, and to paint them I often contrast colours," she says, describing the starkly juxtaposed reds and greens of these images.

BRAIN TEASER

But not all of Mélanie's paintings deal with such morbid subjects – images like Boheme and Sucre d'Orge show she has a much lighter side. "They are all a part of me," she says, "kind of like a puzzle."

In many ways, Eskarina's paintings are indeed a part of her. Look closely at her work and you'll notice they share some similar features, as much of the reference material comes from her own image: "For everything that concerns anatomy or posture, I use myself and a mirror," she explains. "I have a little one next to my computer for painting faces and a big one in my room for the whole body."

Like many fantasy artists, Mélanie is an avid reader and she draws on literary references from Philip K Dick, Tolkien and obviously Terry Pratchett. "Some drawings are inspired by music, other drawings, movies and everyday situations. All my characters have their own stories – it helps me to create them and to give them life," she muses.

But Mélanie leaves some room for ambiguity and wants the viewer to infer their own stories from the images: "When I post on forums, I don't go into much detail in my descriptions," she says. "I prefer the reader to make up his or her own mind."

One day she hopes to publish a book of her images and set the record straight: "I think it will be fun to compare the stories they thought of with mine," she says.

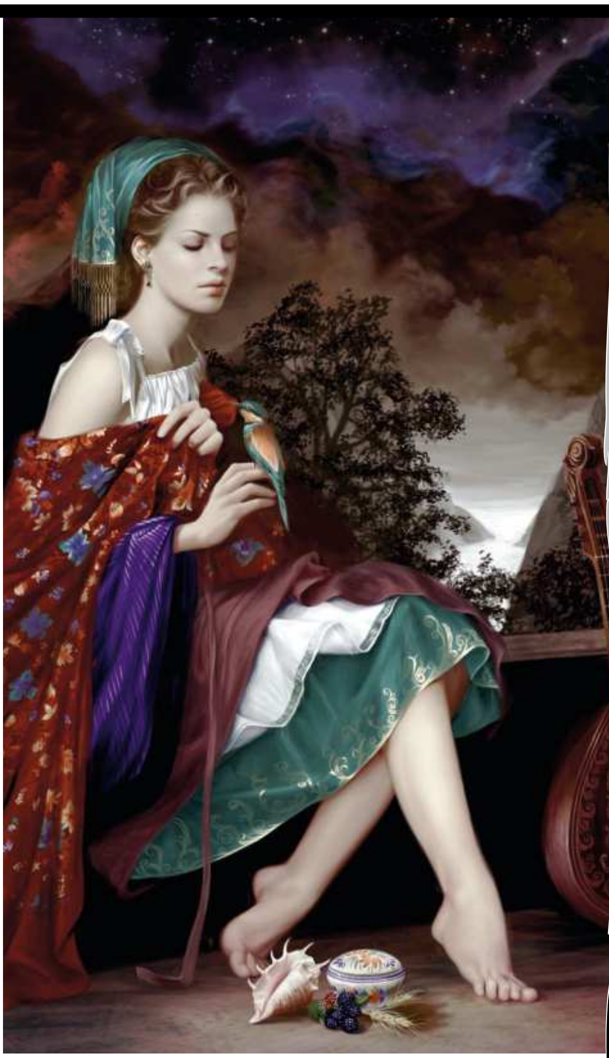
DOWN WITH TRADITION

One of the most surprising things about Mélanie is how quickly she has developed her style, particularly as she only started using Photoshop in 2005. What is even more remarkable is that her technique has been developed entirely using digital tools, having never worked on a traditional canvas. "I never painted," she confesses. "I drew a lot, mainly with pencil and markers, but it was for fun; until I discovered Photoshop."

Rather than seeking professional training or reading manuals, she learned entirely ➸

HOPELESS REFLECTIONS

A typically melancholy image, Hopeless Reflections is where Mélanie illustrates the feeling of imprisonment. "She's here, alone," the artist says, "watching her birds fly away…"



PEARL

Mélanie explains Pearl's backstory: "She is Myrhaelle, the last descendant of the lords of this earth. She lives alone on an island, in the ruins of the ancient city"

through experimentation. "It wasn't easy at first, I didn't know which way to go, but I kept on working and working, and the more I painted the more I tried to surpass my last work while learning new things," she enthuses.

Mélanie combines Photoshop with Corel Painter, taking advantage of the relative strengths of the two packages: "For my rough sketches and quick colouring, I find Painter easier to work with, but the biggest part of the painting is done with Photoshop and a Wacom. I do sometimes switch back to Painter for certain textures."

She's enthusiastic when talking about her tools: "I use my own brushes, two in particular: a basic Hard Round edge that I use for almost everything, and a Spackled, which is great for blending colours and bringing life to texture. Then all my custom texture brushes, the Blur tool (never the filter one), which is extremely useful and adjustable, and finally, layers. I love layers," she grins.

HISTORY OF ART

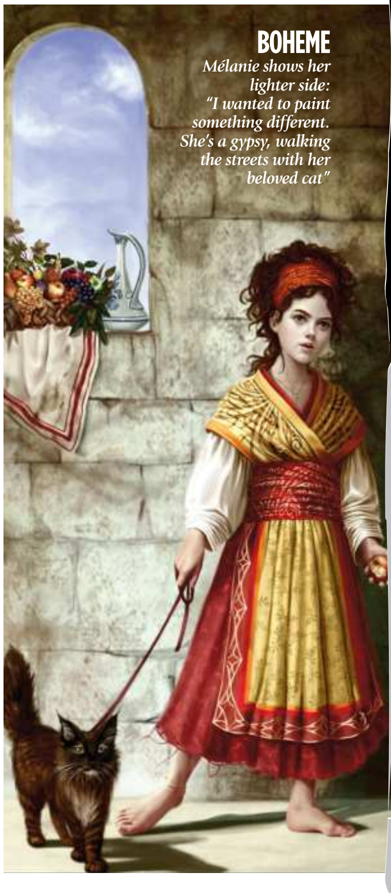
But while she may not have painted traditionally, she has developed a unique and self-confident style that owes a lot to her university studies on the history of art. "Those two years of studies helped me discover many artists and to understand the evolution of art," she explains. "It's also, culturally speaking, a big help. I think that's why my works can't be tagged as pure fantasy, there are always historical elements that blend in with the ones I create."

Look closely at the detail of Mélanie's paintings and the historical influences become clear. She references Turner, for example, as an influence on her background painting technique. But the artist she draws on most heavily is the 19th century French academic painter William Adolphe Bouguereau, who painted mythological themes. Mélanie is humble in acknowledging her debt. "I think he has influenced – and keeps on influencing – me on all levels," she says. "Moreover, the way he deals with lights and colours, it's incredible. Bouguereau's characters are so alive. I would like to have his talent!"

Mélanie has clearly thrown herself into her artwork since going digital. "Drawing has become more serious for me and more than just a hobby," she says. "I usually spend about 10 hours a day on my painting – even more sometimes! I paint all day long, for my work and for fun. I'm trying to learn more and more with each painting."

Turn the page to learn to paint like Mélanie Delon

> "It wasn't easy at first, but I kept on working and the more I painted, the more I tried to surpass my last work while learning new things"



BOHEME

Mélanie shows her lighter side: "I wanted to paint something different. She's a gypsy, walking the streets with her beloved cat"

SUCRE D'ORGE

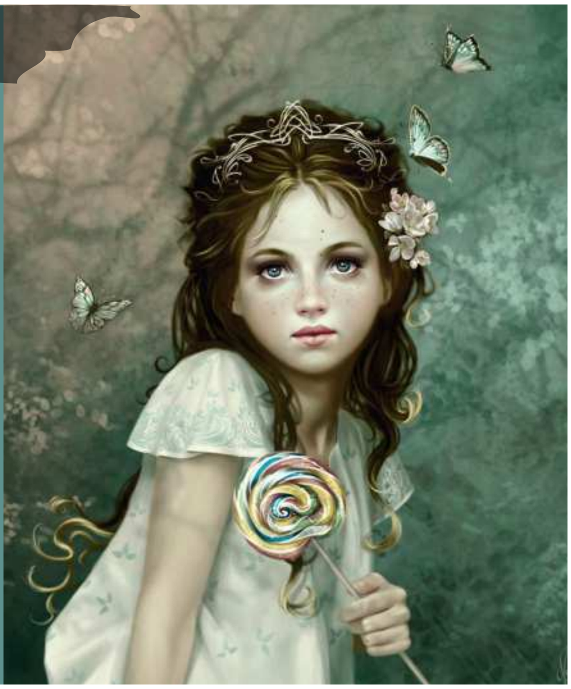
The sweeter side of Eskarina

While much of Mélanie's work deals with the darker side of human emotion, she shows a lightness of touch in some of her more whimsical images, like Boheme and Sucre d'Orge.

In these images, Mélanie shows a markedly different style to her more morbid portraits – gone are the starkly contrasted reds and greens, in favour of an altogether calmer blue pastel palette.

"I painted Sucre d'Orge for *Exposé 4*," she explains. "I wanted to create something really fresh, without darkness, so I decided to illustrate the innocence of childhood – she's a kind of little fantasy princess." While it's one of Mélanie's most accomplished images, it was actually one of her shorter projects, taking her only a week to paint (painting Pearl – see the image top-right – however took a full three weeks to complete).

What this image does share with her darker images is the model; again the facial features are taken from her own visage. According to Mélanie, the hardest part was getting the detail on the lollipop: "I added this because all children love them. I studied a lot of pictures to create the texture, and I must admit I'm pretty satisfied with the result." And so you should be, Mélanie.



Painter & Photoshop

FEATHERS AND ANGEL WINGS

Wings and feathers can be tricky to paint. **Mélanie Delon** explains her technique for creating a realistic look

Painting wings is quite similar to painting hair: the first time you do it seems impossible, but in fact it's not, and there are little tips that can help a lot.

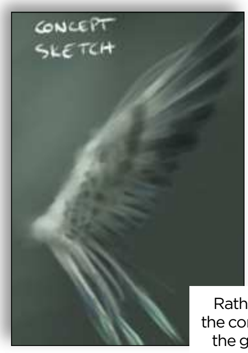
Before I start painting, I always do some photo research; in this case I looked at a lot of bird pictures to understand the feathers and decided what kind of design I wanted. Then I did a little concept sketch to test out a few colours.

When I paint wings, I think of them as a block; I never paint feather by feather, always as a whole element. I add in details later, once the lighting and the shape are okay. Working on them as a block helps to unify the wings and stops you getting too wrapped up in minor details.

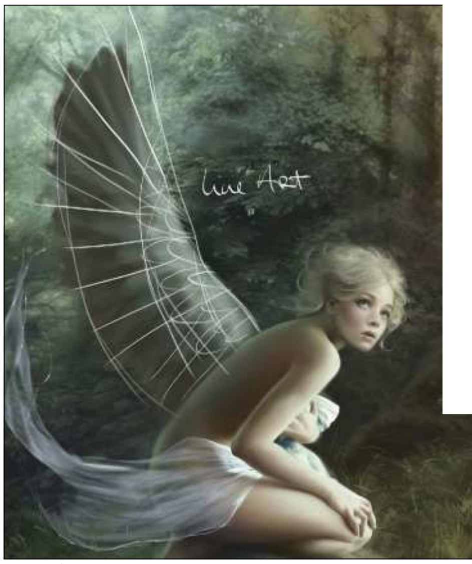
Wings can also reflect the character's mood or attitude: you can do this with colour, or by making the wings lighter or heavier. Here, I want to avoid the image coming across very clean and pure: she's not an angel, so her wings will be more like a bird's – a bit dirty and old.

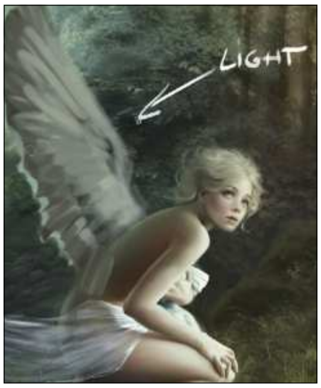
When painting wings and feathers, I usually use two brushes. For the base and the shape of the feathers, I use one that's very smooth and quickly gives me the kind of lightness I want. Then I use a spackled one for adding the details.

Now let's look at how to paint the wings and feathers, step by step.



Rather than revealing details, the concept sketch establishes the general shape and colour





Once you're happy with the general shape of the wings you can start sketching in the feathers

1 The base

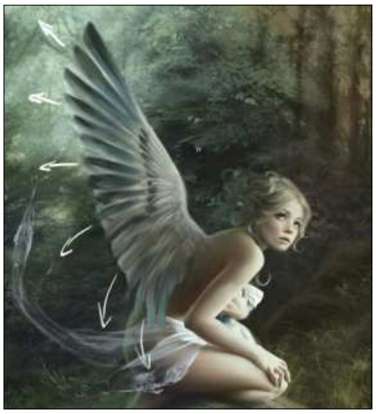
I usually start by doing a basic sketch of the general shape of the wings. I also do a little research on another canvas. I use a large-sized custom brush to work the general look and to set the base of my future wings. I don't need to go into details, I just choose my colours – which are basically the same as the background – and paint in huge blocks of colour.

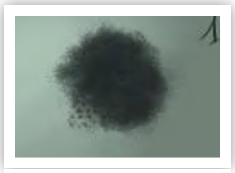
2 Sketching the feathers

I start to sketch the first feathers, still using the same brush as in the previous step. I flip the canvas horizontally quite often at this stage to correct any little issues. Once the base is okay I can start to look at light: for this I pick the same colour I use for the background.

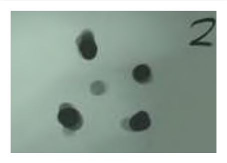
3 Detailed part

Now comes the fun part. I lay down the colour of the feathers, which are very dark at the extremities and brighter at the base of the wing. I use brush number one again, and paint huge blocks of colour – no need to start on the details here, it's only the base for future feathers. The extremities also need to be more defined, so I erase some parts and add more green here, because the second light source (which is more diffuse than the main one) will affect the feathers. ➳

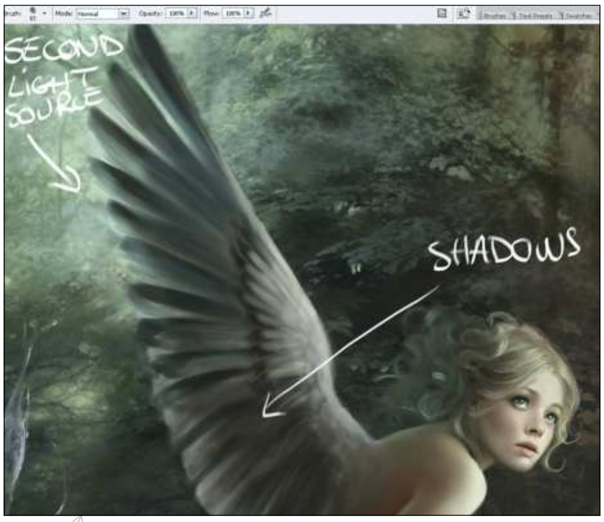




Custom brush, with Spacing set to 10 per cent and Opacity set to Pen Pressure



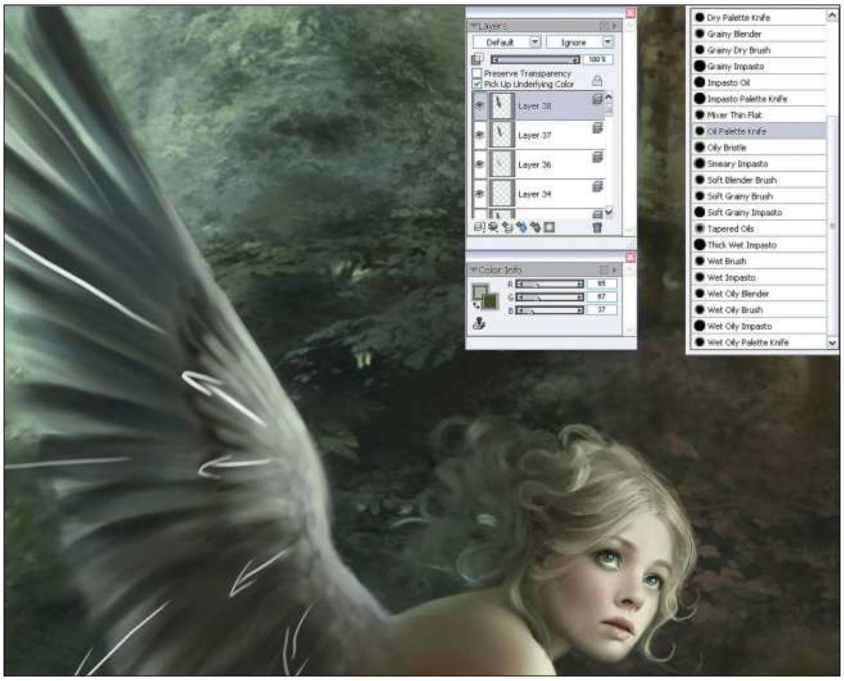
Spackled brush with Spacing set to seven per cent and Opacity set to Pen Pressure


SECOND LIGHT SOURCE
SHADOWS

4 Light and shadow

They're lacking volume so I have to add more contrast. I select a dark green tone for the shadows, and with brush number one I bring more darkness to the middle of the wing. I also add extra green from the second light source at the top of the wing.

> “If you don't have Painter you could use Motion Blur in Photoshop”


Layers
Default
Ignore
100%
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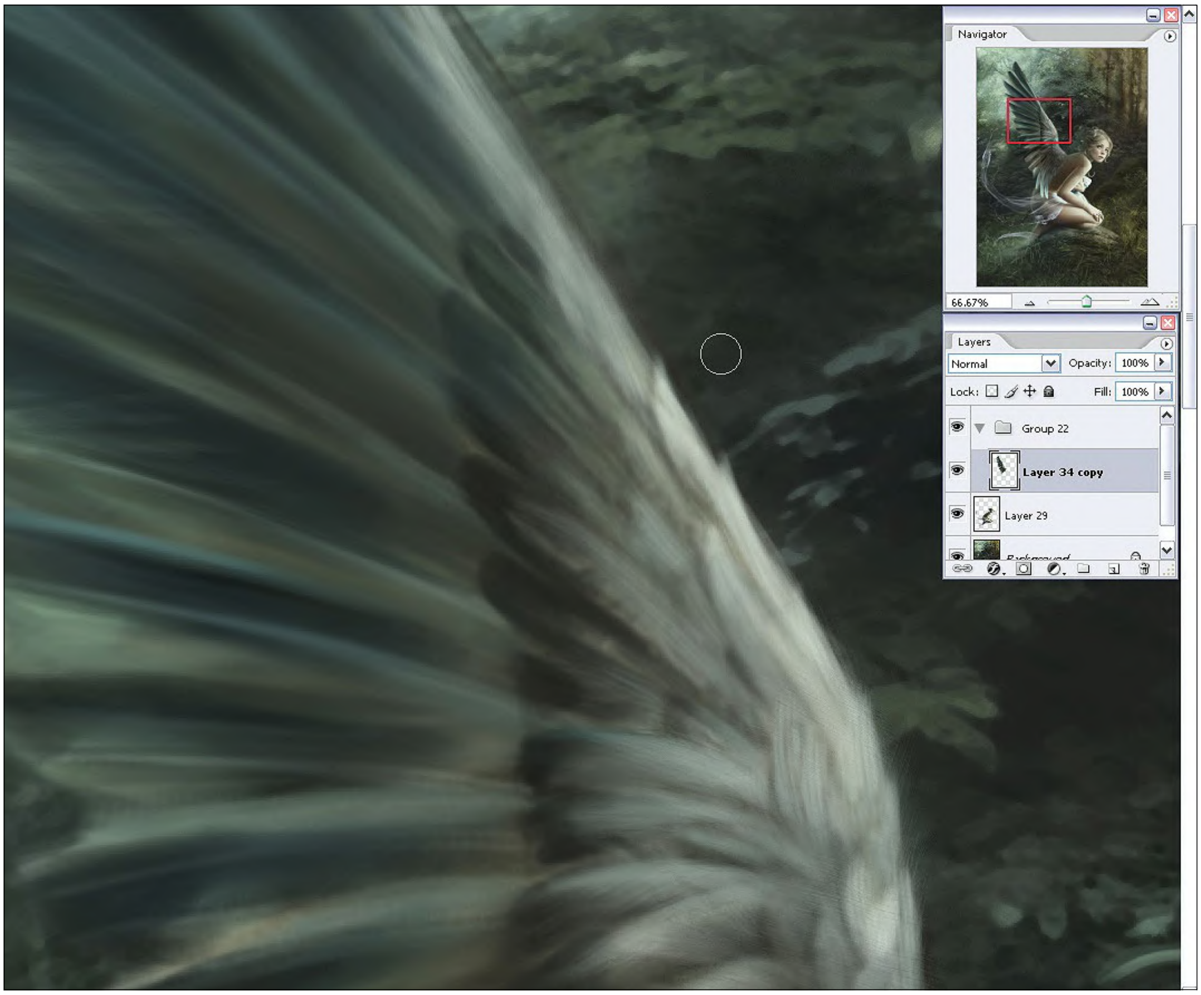
Pick Up Underlying Color
Layer 38
Layer 37
Layer 36
Layer 34
Color Info
R 85
G 87
B 37
Dry Palette Knife
Grainy Blender
Grainy Dry Brush
Grainy Impasto
Impasto Oil
Impasto Palette Knife
Mixer Thin Flat
Oil Palette Knife
Oily Bristle
Smeary Impasto
Soft Blender Brush
Soft Grainy Brush
Soft Grainy Impasto
Tapered Oils
Thick Wet Impasto
Wet Brush
Wet Impasto
Wet Oily Blender
Wet Oily Brush
Wet Oily Impasto
Wet Oily Palette Knife

5 Blurring

Now I switch to Painter, which is more appropriate for this stage. I create a new layer and with the oil palette knife I slightly blur the wing. I'm following the arrows above, to unify the feathers and to bring more movement and lightness to them. If you don't have Painter on your computer you could use Motion Blur in Photoshop with a very low distance (around 10 or 15 pixels) instead.


Navigator
66.67%
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Normal
Opacity: 100%
Lock:
Fill: 100%
Group 22
Layer 34 copy
Layer 29
Background

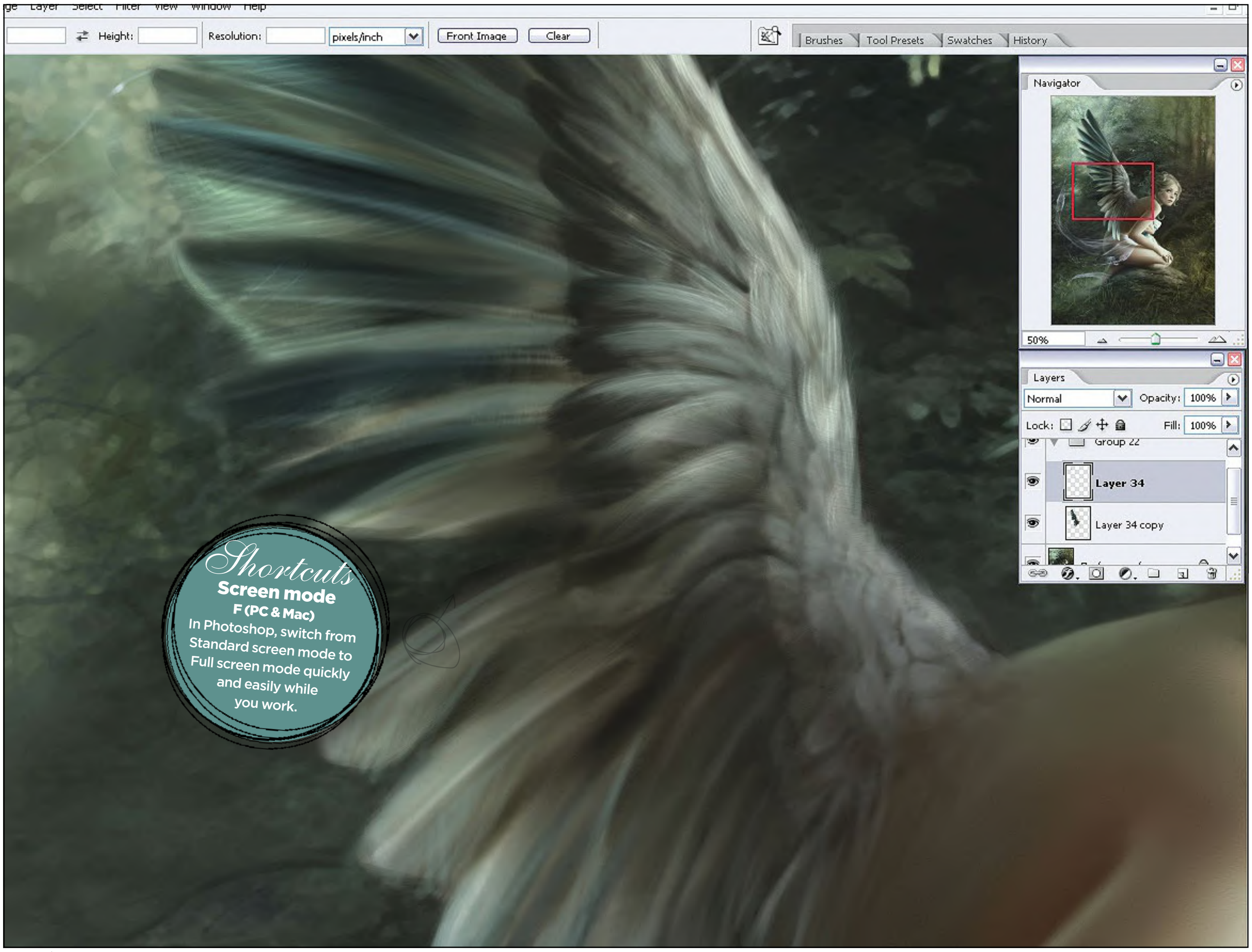
6 General refining

Here I decide to give the feathers more definition. I don't need to paint them one by one, just a few of them where the light source affects the wing. I also add more blue and more texture with the spackled brush. I do this several times, then I duplicate the layer and set it to soft light with a low Opacity; this will bring more volume to the wing.

PRO SECRETS

Add extra movement

Once my wings are finished, I duplicate the layer and add a little blur filter with a very low Opacity. This is pretty useful when you want to add more movement or increase the feeling of lightness. You can also do this in Painter with the Oil Palette Knife, which is better than the filter in Photoshop. Also don't forget to blur each feather's extremities with the Blur tool, setting strength to 50 per cent.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Select
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Opacity: 100%
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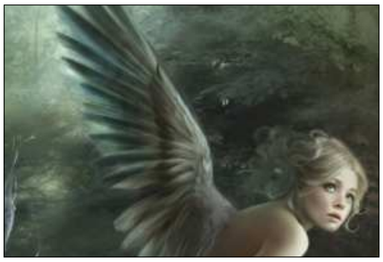
Fill: 100%
Group 22
Layer 34
Layer 34 copy

Shortcuts
Screen mode
F (PC & Mac)
In Photoshop, switch from Standard screen mode to Full screen mode quickly and easily while you work.

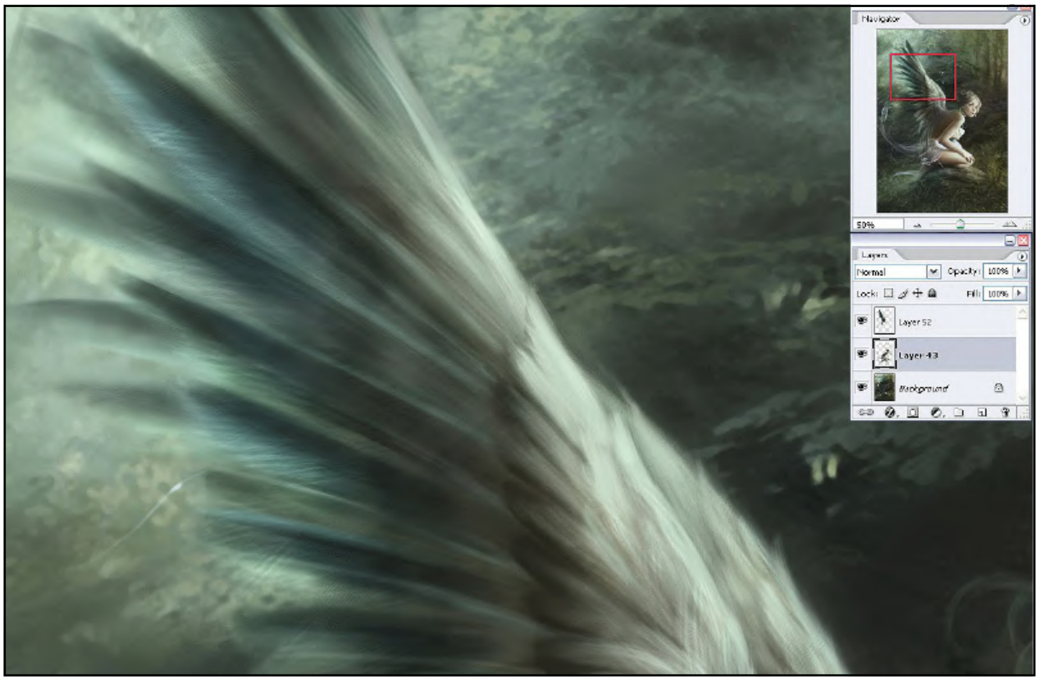
7 Special FX

I erase some parts of the extremities of the feathers to increase the realism. With the spackled brush I start to add more details to the feathers, picking a very saturated green (from the background) and painting some little rays of light on the extremities. I repeat this step a few times until I'm satisfied with the result.



8 Final touches

Now I only have to add extra light and some little colour variations on the biggest feathers. I usually switch to Painter one last time to fix some minor mistakes, and to unify everything.


Navigator
50%
Layers
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Opacity: 100%
Lock:
Fill: 100%
Layer 52
Layer 43
Background

9 Second wing

The first wing now finished, I duplicate the layer and place it under the main wing. I slightly modify the shape, add more light and blur the final result.

Artist Portfolio

JASON RAINVILLE

The Canadian fantasy and sci-fi illustrator tells **Gary Evans** why it's crucial to build up a pattern when tackling a project

Jason Rainville is thinking about how to describe his art. The fantasy and sci-fi illustrator begins with the render: he likes to emphasise form – a soft image is an unsuccessful one – so he lands on the word "chunky." Pose and lighting help dramatise his work. It could be a drama that's quiet and understated or a drama that's loud and bombastic, but his work must be dramatic. In short, Jason makes tough-looking art that also tells a story.

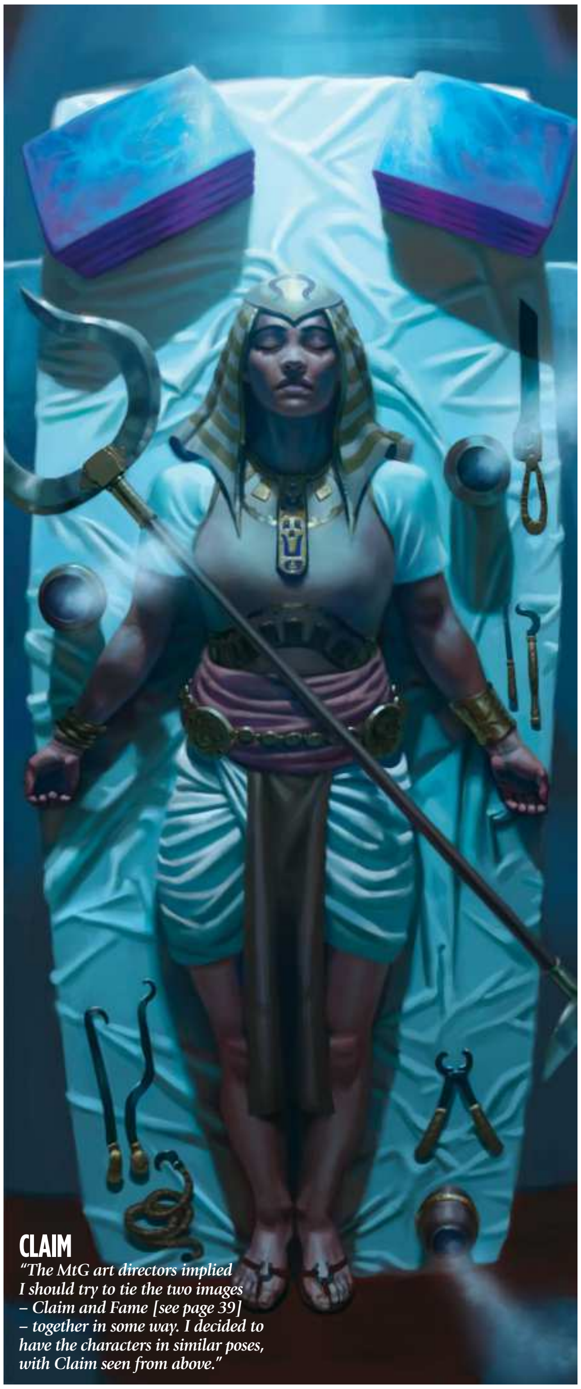
Behind the scenes, Jason follows a strict regime. Day by day, he builds discipline, builds up a pattern, improves slowly but surely. This regime applies to both his art and to his everyday life.

"I love character moments and emotion," the Canadian says. "Nothing holds a viewer's eye like something they can relate to, something that strikes deeper than the 'cool factor'" of the visuals or the design. There are two stages to an artist's early development: before and after intentional study."

Jason didn't begin intentional study until he was 22. Before that, he doodled. Growing up in small-town northern Ontario – in the "lower-middle class" – he had no idea how ➳

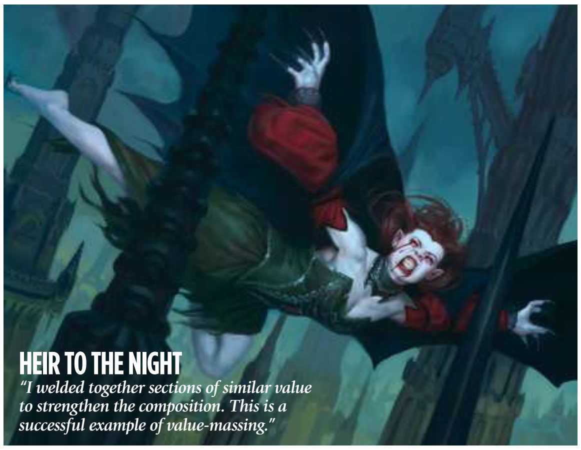
Artist PROFILE

Jason Rainville
LOCATION: Canada
FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Alphonse Mucha (for the Slav Epic more than anything), John Singer Sargent, Norman Rockwell, JC Leyendecker, William-Adolphe Bouguereau
SOFTWARE USED: Photoshop
WEB: www.jasonrainville.com



CLAIM
"The MtG art directors implied I should try to tie the two images – Claim and Fame [see page 39] – together in some way. I decided to have the characters in similar poses, with Claim seen from above."

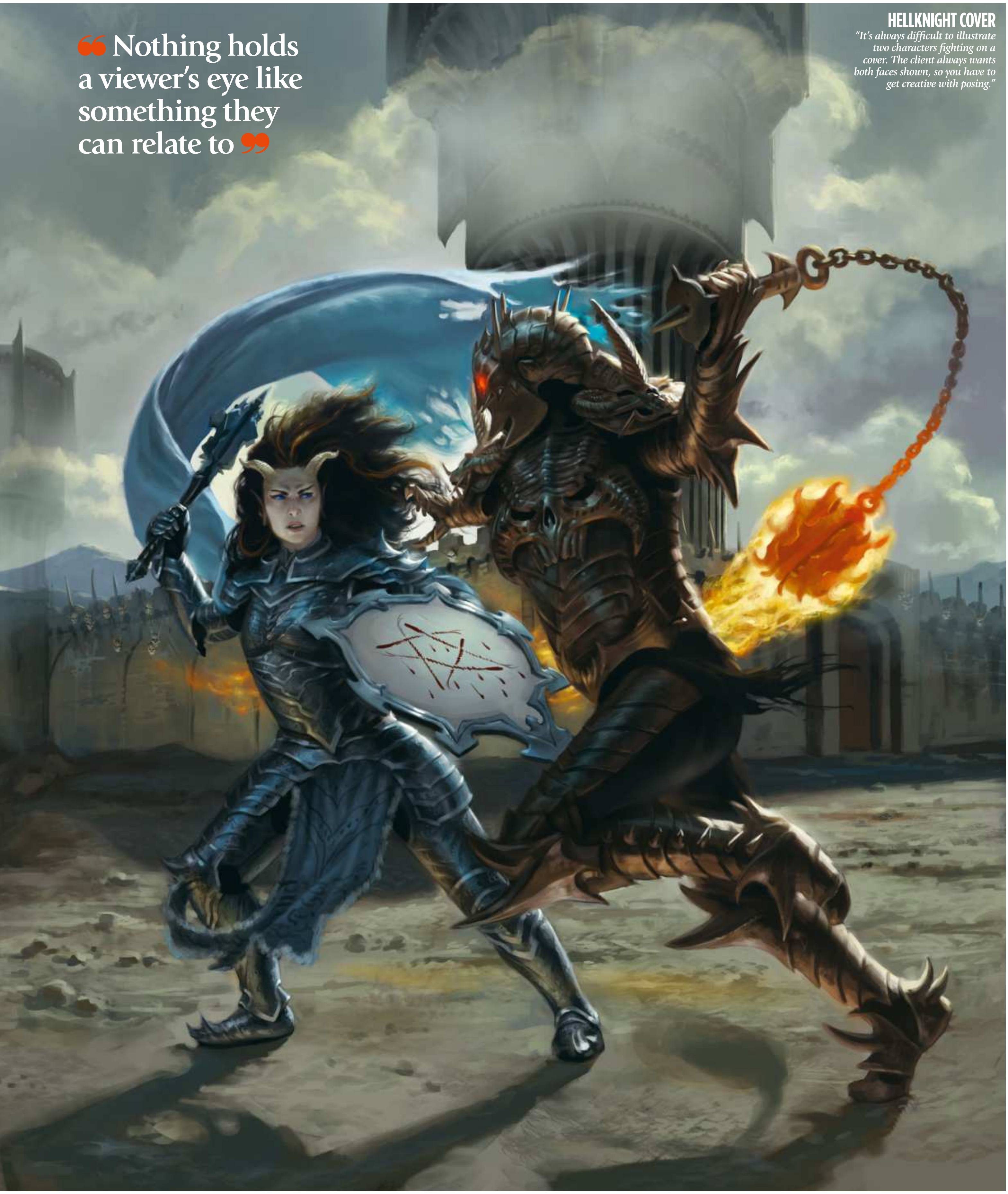
© Wizards of the Coast



HEIR TO THE NIGHT
"I welded together sections of similar value to strengthen the composition. This is a successful example of value-massing."

© Wizards of the Coast

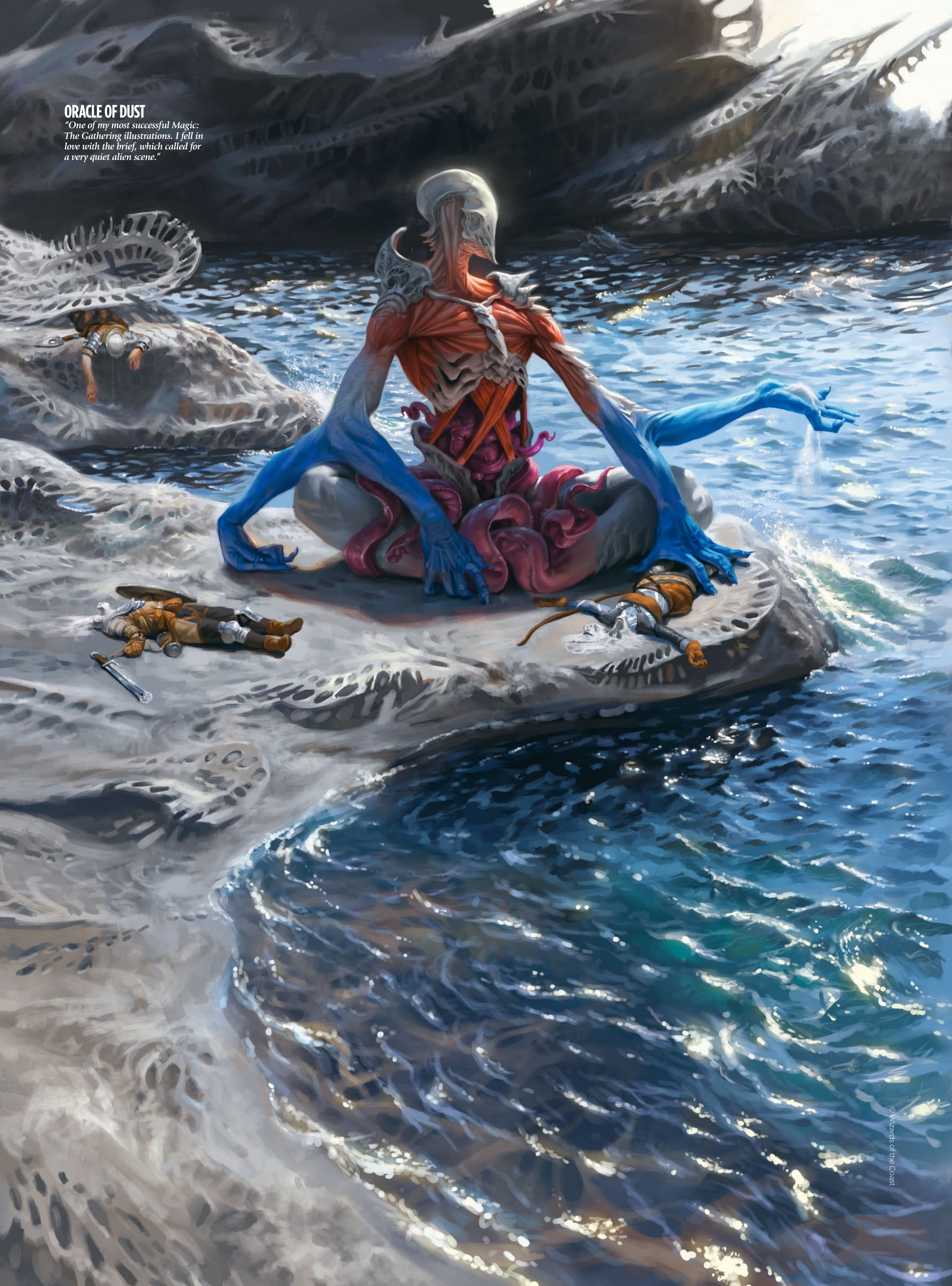
> “Nothing holds a viewer’s eye like something they can relate to”



HELLKNIGHT COVER

“It’s always difficult to illustrate two characters fighting on a cover. The client always wants both faces shown, so you have to get creative with posing.”

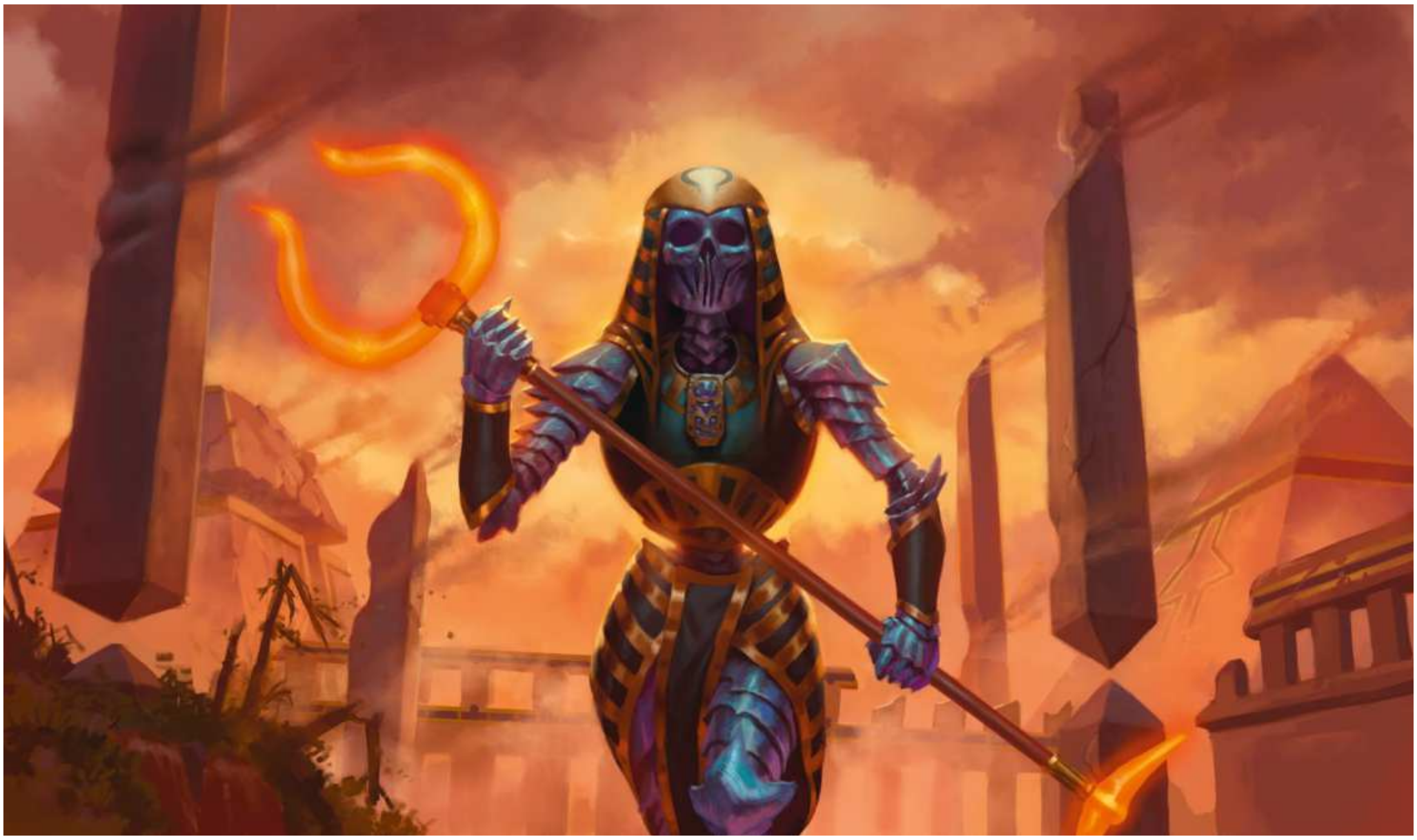
© Paizo Publishing



ORACLE OF DUST

"One of my most successful Magic: The Gathering illustrations. I fell in love with the brief, which called for a very quiet alien scene."

© Wizards of the Coast



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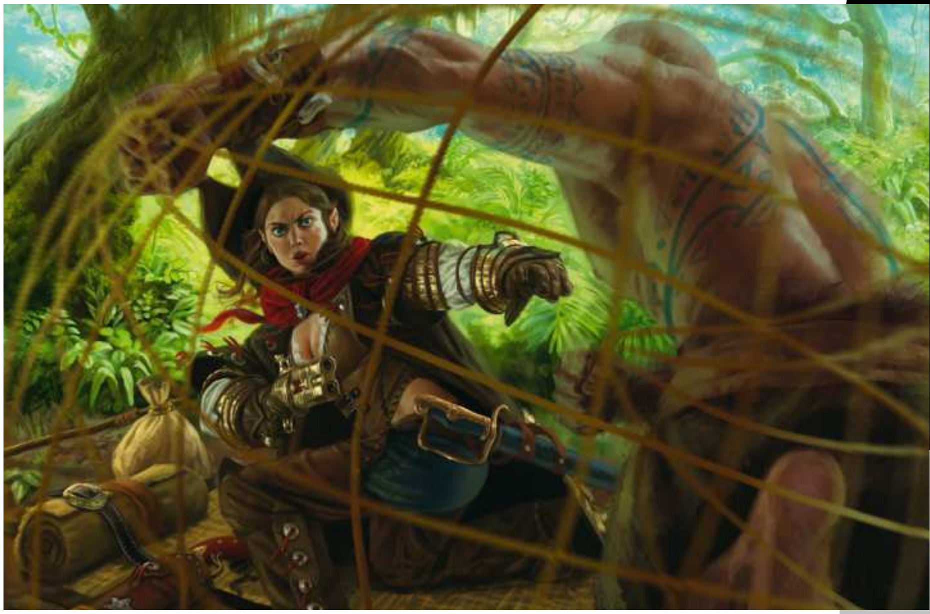
FAME
"Fame was an example of being honest with yourself and your art. Part-way through I realised the original background was boring and flat, and changed it to include more interesting elements at varying depths."

to make art a career. It wasn't until the second year of college that he had access to the internet. That's when he discovered conceptart.org.

"It was a place where amateurs and professionals got together to objectively critique each other's art," he says. "I learned how actively studying from observation and a lot of hard work can lead to real progress. After that I was hooked."

TWO SIDES OF THE SAME CARD

Jason studied graphic design, but would always find himself including illustrative elements in his work. Still, he had doubts about making it as professional illustrator. After college, in 2008, work as a graphic designer was equally hard to come by. He moved home and looked for a job as a printer, and finally any job at all. "I couldn't find work digging ditches," he says.



© Paizo Publishing

CHARACTERS OPENER
"One of my favourite illustrations. I feel like everything – values, colours, facial expression – is working well. I added a fun compositional element where the character is already trapped behind the net.

The artist continued to study art and eventually got some "very low-level work" with Rite Publishing, a company that created content for Pathfinder, the role-playing game. More jobs followed. He landed projects with Paizo Publishing and later with Wizards of the Coast. Jason owes a lot to his mentor at Rite, Steve Russell, and to his family. The former supported him artistically, the latter financially.

> "So far I've worked every member of my close family into an illustration for various clients"

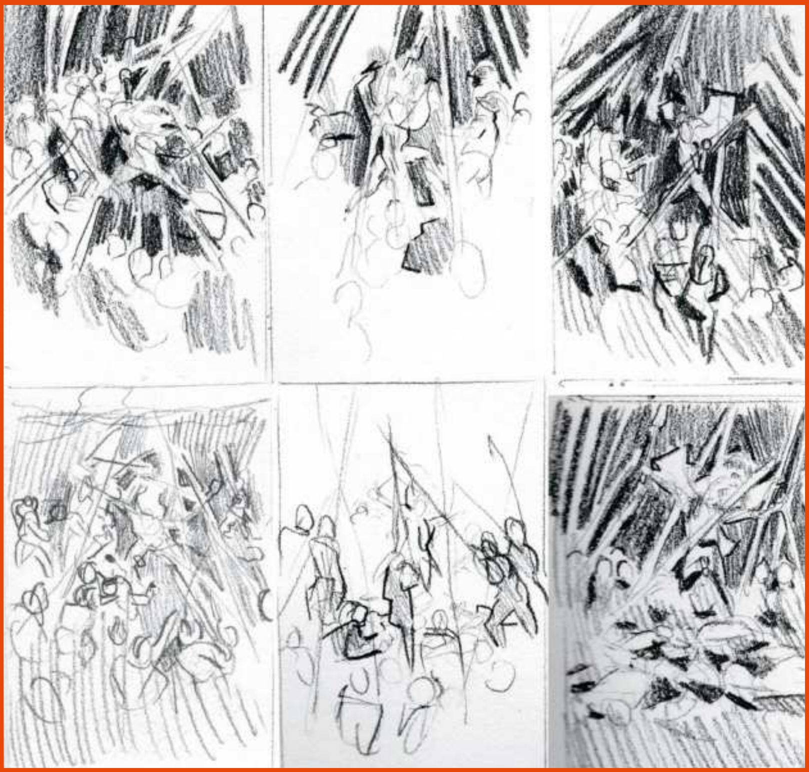
"I'll never forget Steve and the effect he's had on my life. So far I've worked every member of my close family into an illustration for various clients, with the final family member's illustration being released later this year. It's my small way of paying them back for years of support."

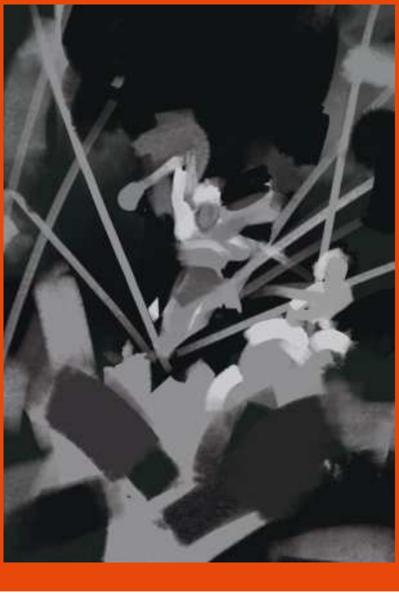
When Jason works with a new art director, he ask how they want to do things. Some like a lot of input, while others let him do his own thing. There are those who prefer to see concepts

BRUTAL, BOMBASTIC, AND HORRIFYING

Jason tells us how this brief from an adult RPG became a baroque bloodbath

This was the last image I produced for the Lamentations of the Flame Princess – a brutal, bombastic and horrifying role-playing game set around the time of the English Civil War. The brief was simple and visceral. The violent, blood-splattered musketeer Alice would single-handedly take on an entire Spanish terico, with the soldiers in her path enduring a number of horrible wounds.



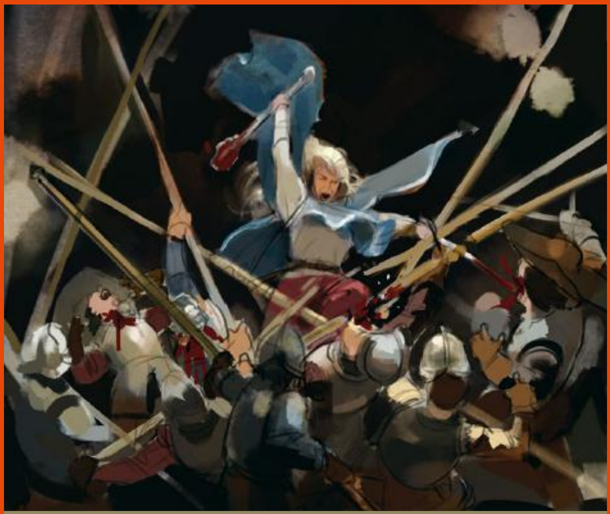


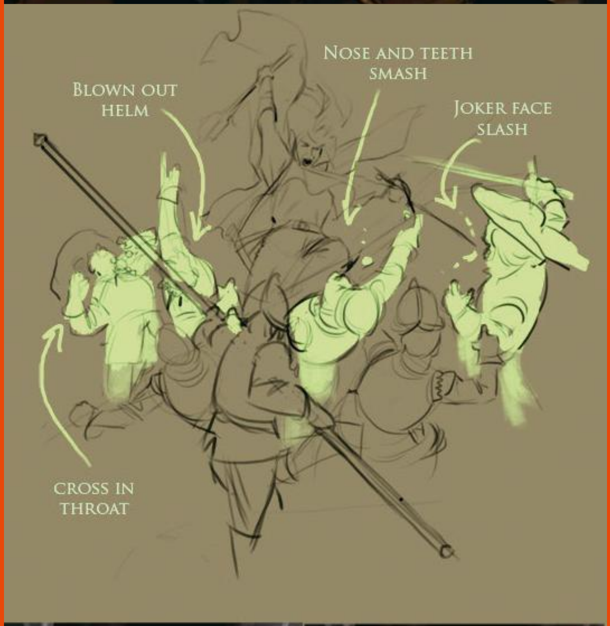
1 THUMBNAILING

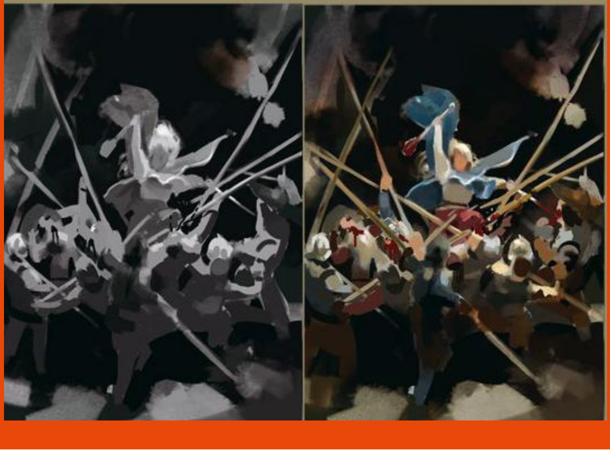
I pulled some reference of Spanish tericos and their soldiers, and began thumbnailing. I always thumbnail in pencil first, and usually I try to be clean about it, but this was a special case. The scene is so chaotic, with so many moving parts, that a looser impression of the values was my early focus.

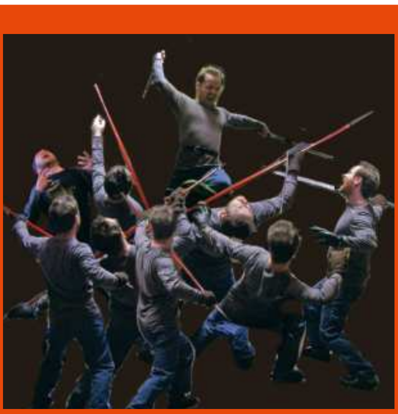
2 SKETCHES

I sketched some basic values in Photoshop and settled on a central composition. I cleaned it up, added some colour and sketched some key characters. In a rare move , I sent the client a "sketch sheet", which clarified what would go where.

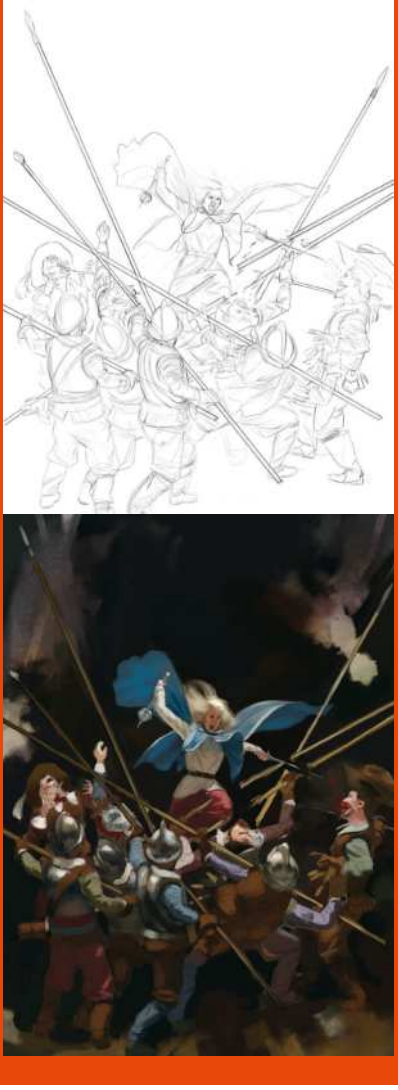


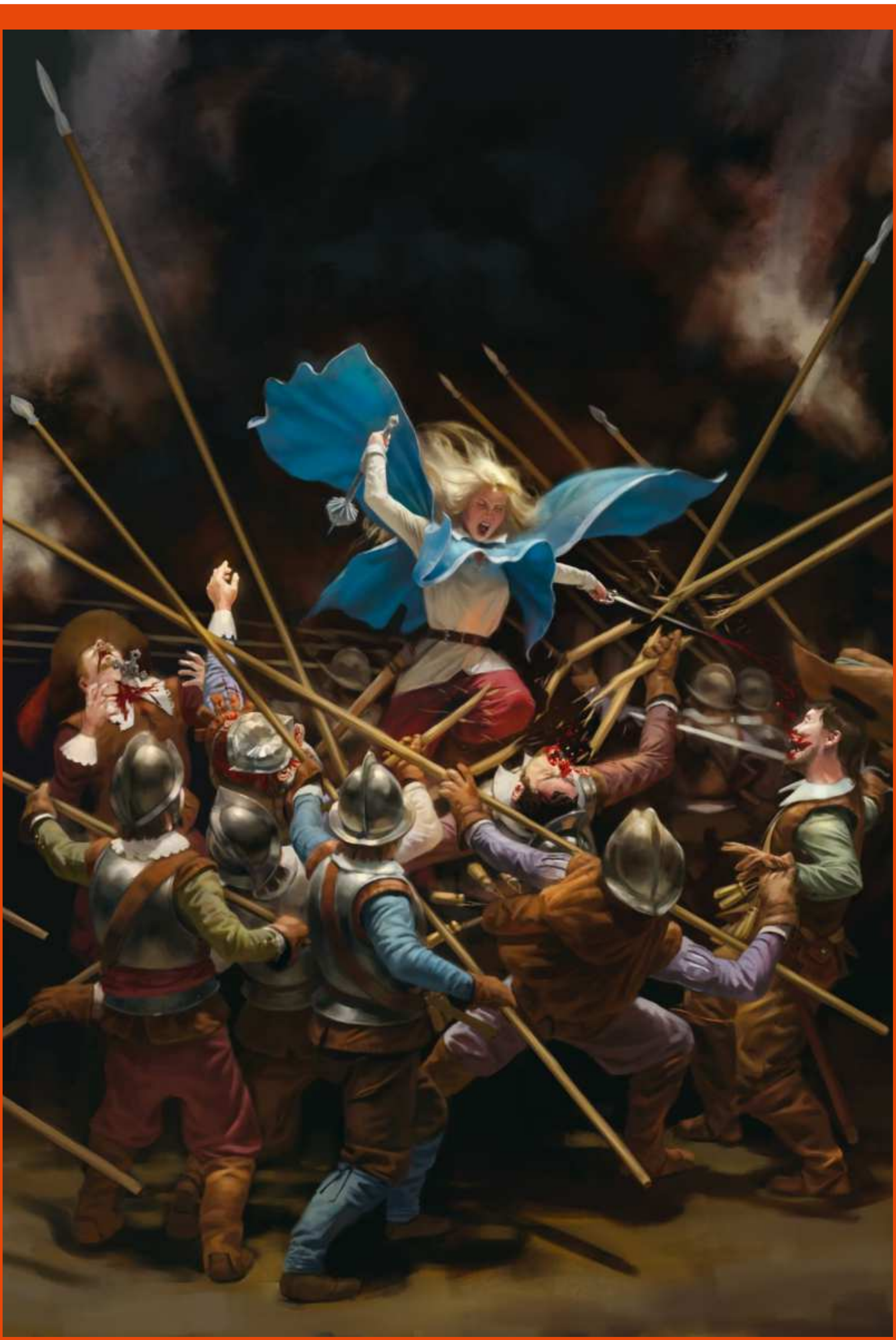






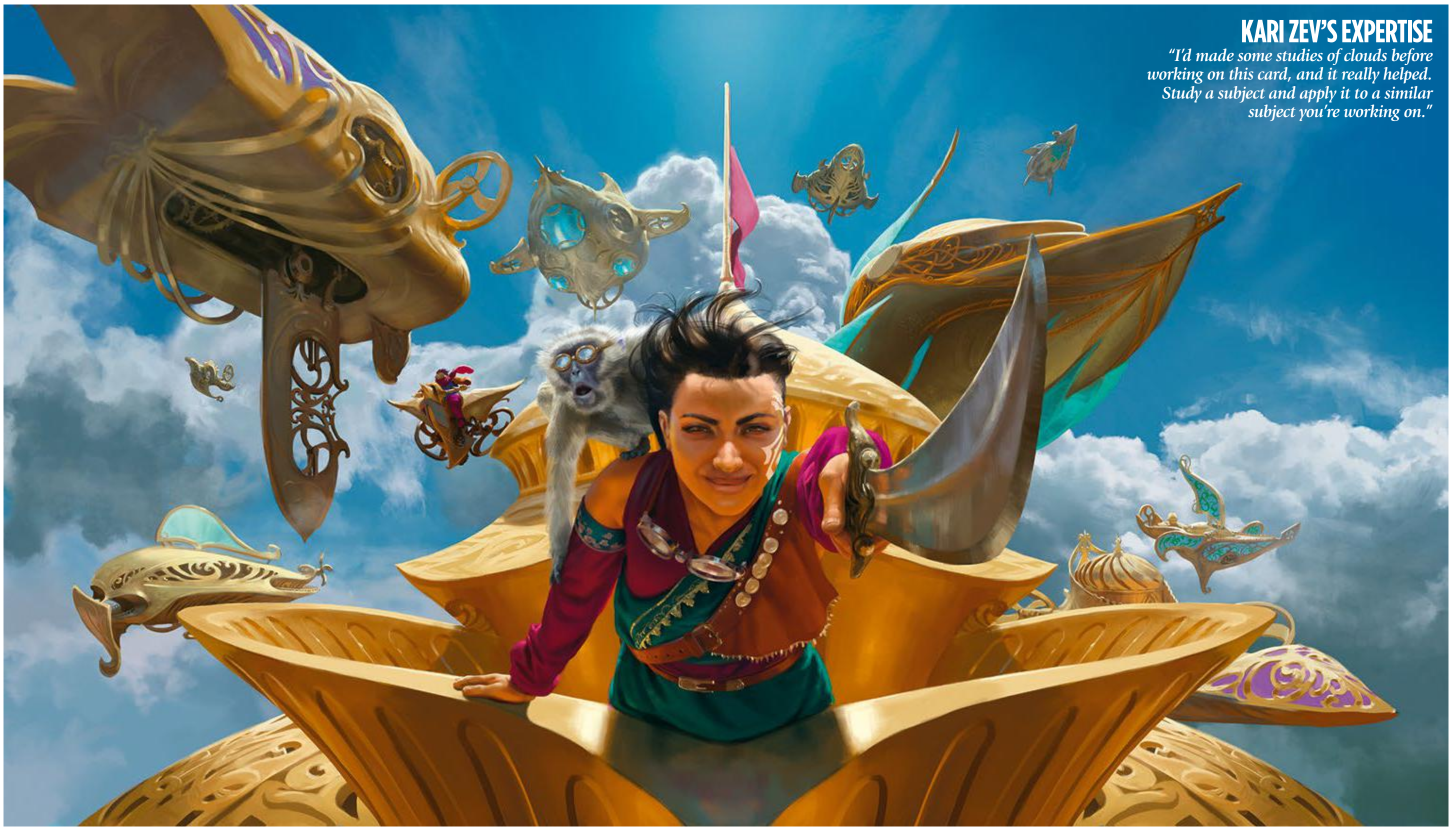
3 REFERENCE
I live in a remote area where models are hard to come by, so I tend to shoot myself for reference 99 per cent of the time. So I had to fill in for many characters in the same scene! I brought all of the pictures into Photoshop and arranged them together into a ridiculous ref sheet. Or maybe it's cool – you decide.





4 TIGHT SKETCH
Using all of my shots and gathered references, I set about creating a tight sketch of all the characters. I find working out all of the poses and details beforehand really helps with workflow. Noodling with basic aspects of an image down the line slows me quite a bit. Underneath this sketch I put in some rough colours. I very much wanted this to look like a baroque painting of the time, with a dark background and very dramatic lighting.

5 FINAL IMAGE
From there it was just a case of rendering everything overtop my rough colours and sketch. I tend to use simple brushes and techniques, and minimal layers if I can afford to.



KARI ZEV'S EXPERTISE

"I'd made some studies of clouds before working on this card, and it really helped. Study a subject and apply it to a similar subject you're working on."

© Wizards of the Coast

for every individual element, while others ask for a sketch of the full image. He likes to go back and forth on illustrative elements such as mood, themes, the back stories of his characters, and visual and narrative depth. "These are very satisfying exercises," Jason says, "that I feel are both gratifying and necessary in the more complex or one-off jobs, like a book cover, which needs to do so much with a single image." If something isn't working, he can usually see it and fix it. But he's equally happy for art directors to chip in with their observations.

"When I'm asked to change something," he says, "I'm very amenable. Not only because I want to keep the job and have a good working relationship with the client, but because I also simply want my best work to be out there."

Jason began working for Magic: the Gathering in 2013, which he calls "a blessing." The trading card game has a huge fanbase full of avid collectors. The game's online store makes it easy for fans to find Jason's work, which acted as a "catalyst in my business and marketing education."

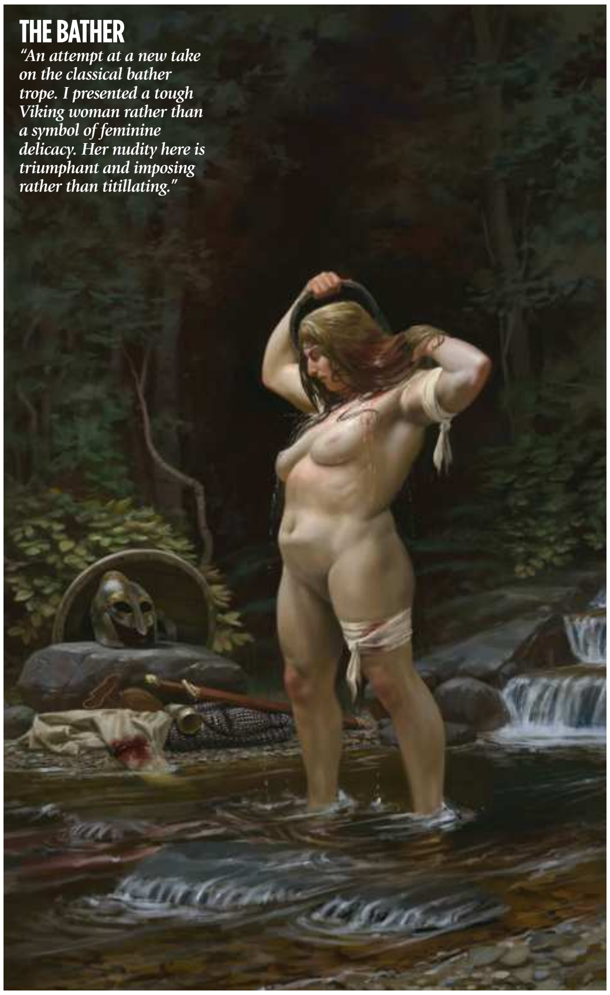
> **"When I'm asked to change something I'm very amenable… I simply want my best work to be out there"**

A recent Magic: the Gathering project called for two illustrations, Claim and Fame, featured on the same card, to be in some way connected. Jason did this through clever composition. Claim shows a woman dead on a slab and Fame shows the same woman as warrior reincarnated, her pose nearly identical in each.

WHAT DOES AND DOESN'T SELL

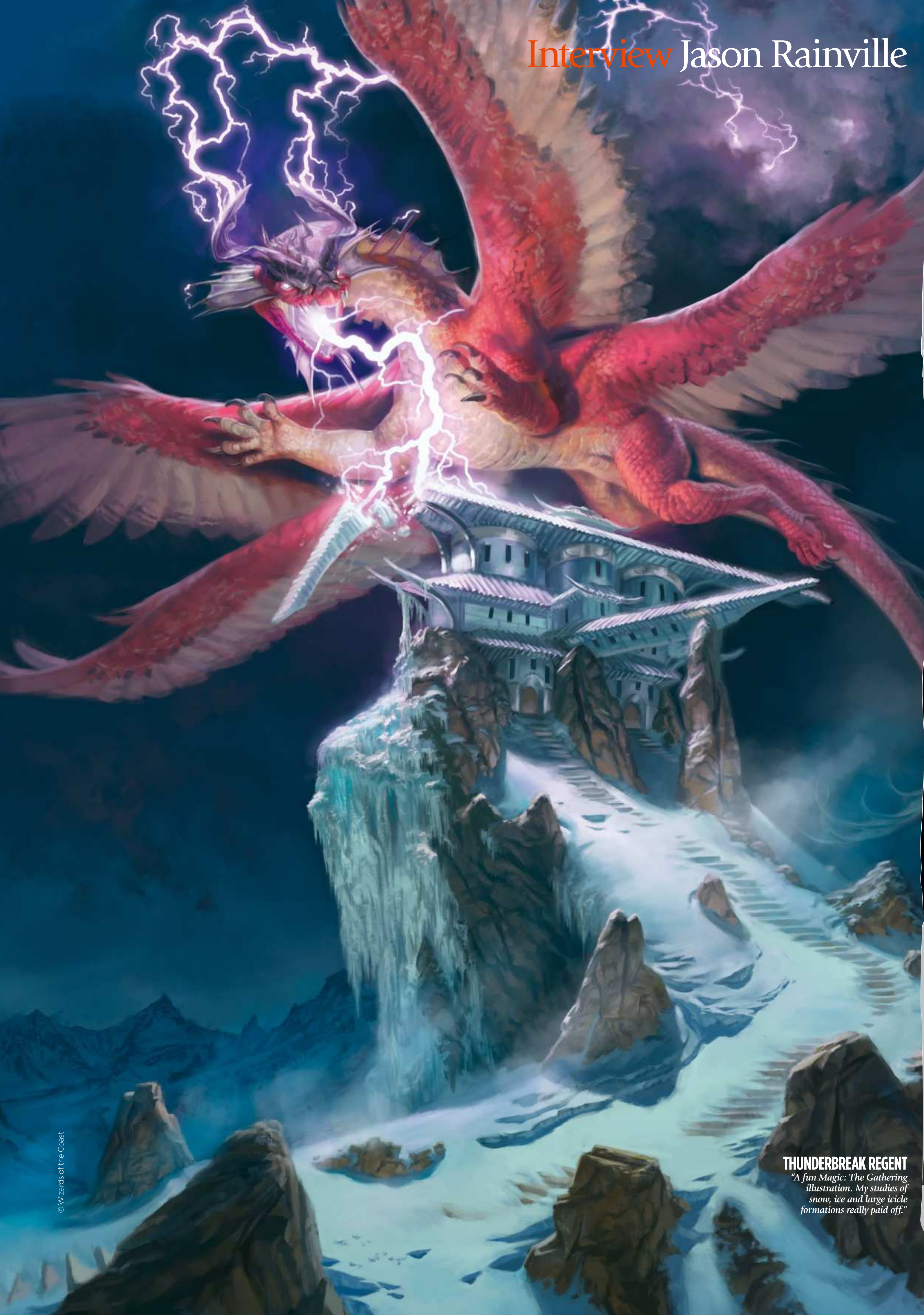
Jason begins with thumbnails, very small in size, to work out overall values without getting "too carried away."

These two factors – business and marketing – are what Jason finds most difficult about life as a professional artist. "Thinking about what may or may not sell causes me a bit of anxiety," he says. "Typically, what has a wide general appeal doesn't interest me, and what does interest me might not have a lot of general appeal.



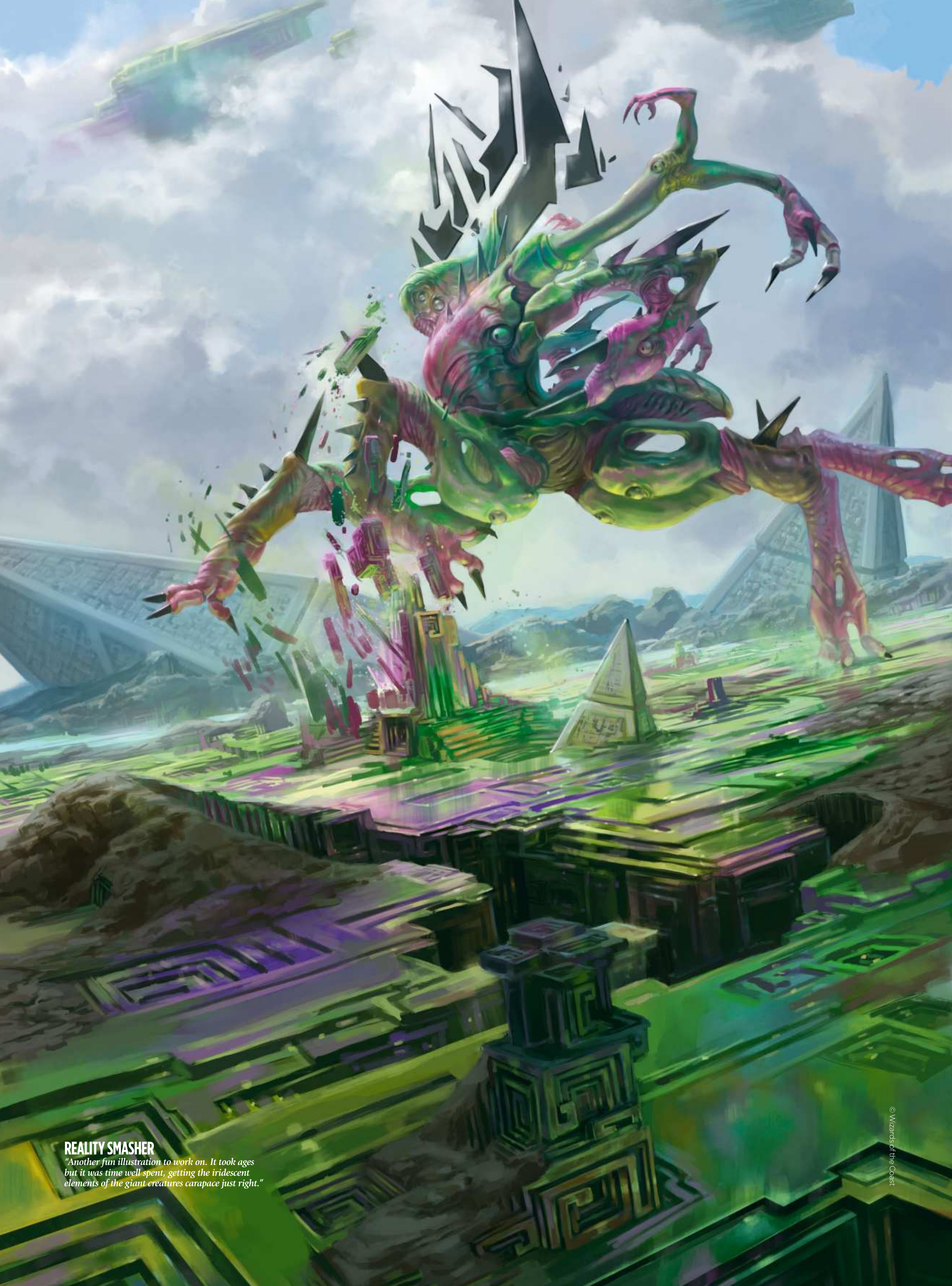
THE BATHER

"An attempt at a new take on the classical bather trope. I presented a tough Viking woman rather than a symbol of feminine delicacy. Her nudity here is triumphant and imposing rather than titillating."



THUNDERBREAK REGENT
"A fun Magic: The Gathering illustration. My studies of snow, ice and large icicle formations really paid off."

© Wizards of the Coast



REALITY SMASHER

"Another fun illustration to work on. It took ages but it was time well spent, getting the iridescent elements of the giant creatures carapace just right."

© Wizards of the Coast

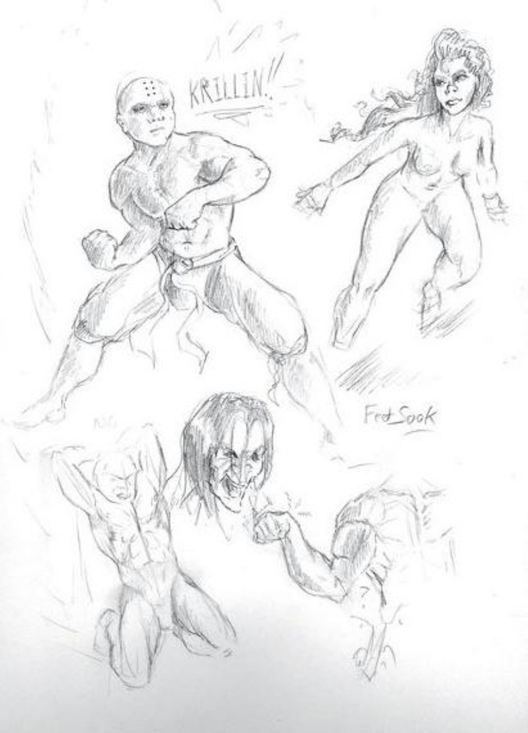
LEARNING TO FIND YOUR FORM

Jason explains how you can grasp the most important aspect of visual art…

"When I first started studying, I often felt frustration at how slowly things were moving. Then, about six months in, that changed. I learned two things: how to measure accurately with my eyes, and form.

I was annoyed that my studies from observation looked little like their subjects, so I started training myself to line up features and elements, measuring things with my eye, comparing the size, angle and shapes of those elements to others in the subject. With practice, I was able to more accurately capture my subject. I'd sketched Krillin from Dragon Ball Z and noticed that his forearm looked more like a real forearm! That was when I first realised that I had progressed.

Form was something I learned from Andrew Loomis, especially his book Drawing the Head & Hands. I focused on constructing planes that recede and advance through space, which made it so much easier to determine lighting, place features, foreshortening – everything. Krillin and the other drawing here are from between 2006 and 2008. Compare them to, say, The Bather [page 42], and you see that the most important aspect of visual art is an understanding of form.""



KRILLIN
Two of Jason's biggest breakthroughs were learning form and how to accurately measure with his eyes, the development of which can be seen in this early sketch.

ANDREW LOOMIS
From Andrew's book, Drawing the Head & Hands, Jason learned key composition skills such as lighting, place features, and foreshortening.

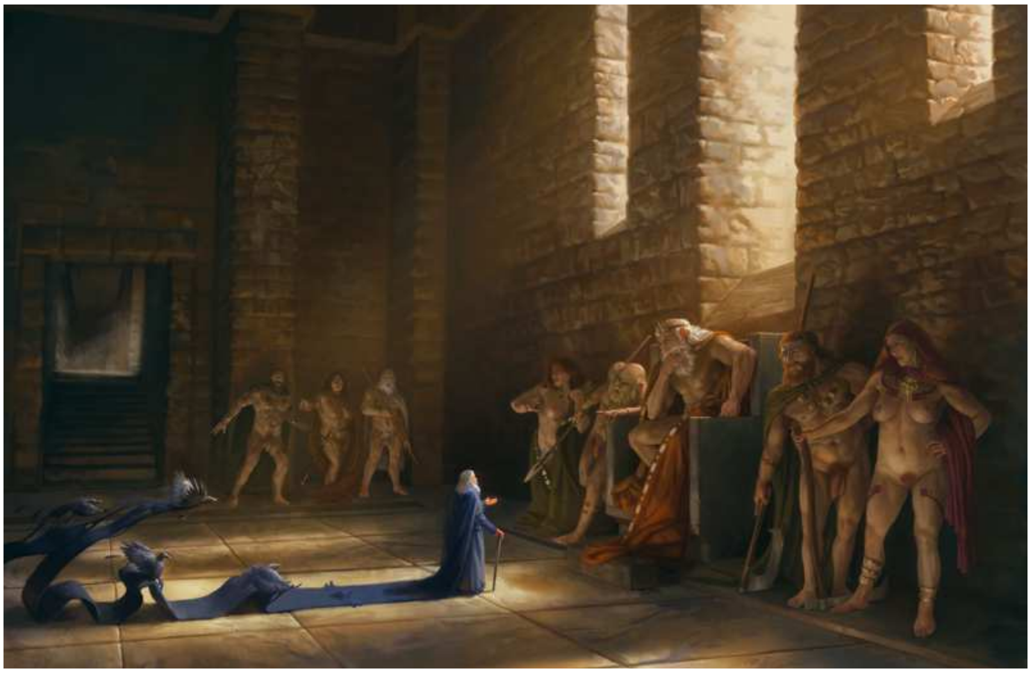
by ANDREW LOOMIS
DRAWING THE HEAD & HANDS

It's more important to build discipline than inspiration

"Trying to fit a personal project of any kind in between work becomes even more difficult when you feel you have to justify every aspect of it. That's the "dark" side to business considerations, when you feel like your interests won't sell well."

BUILD UP A PATTERN

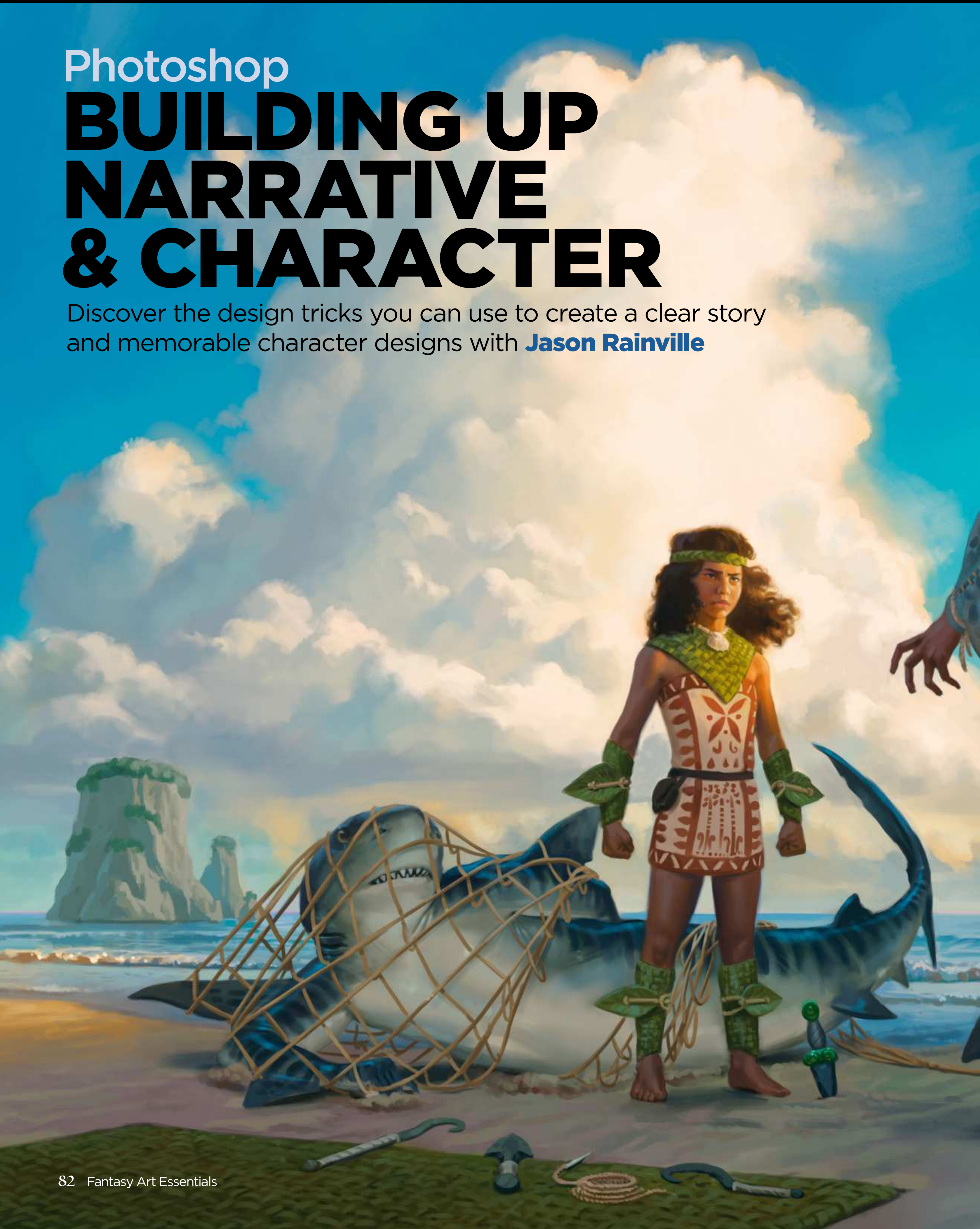
Jason has been working on one illustration for over three years. It features more than 100 characters in a "complex narrative scene." Commercial work always comes first. So he found it hard to spend an extended period of time on this personal piece. Instead, he added to it when not tackling paid jobs. He's finally at the rendering stage.



ODIN IN THE HOUSE OF GIANTS
"A personal piece displaying my love of Norse mythology. I wanted to present something very dramatic and classical."

Jason recently started another project that feeds into his work in an interesting way: bodybuilding. Improving his art, like improving his body, is done bit by bit through dedication and repetition: "This past February, I was in a bad place. I wasn't the person I wanted to be, so I enacted a self-improvement programme that spanned various parts of my life. One such part was my physical fitness.

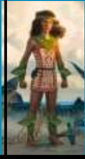
"I'm not rippling with muscles and as a shorter guy I lift less weight in general, but I've noticed progress, which is the point. I'm competing with only my past self. It's an easy regimen to follow and builds up a pattern. It's more important to build discipline than inspiration. I feel the same way about art: build up a pattern and don't just rely on inspiration."



Photoshop

BUILDING UP NARRATIVE & CHARACTER

Discover the design tricks you can use to create a clear story and memorable character designs with **Jason Rainville**



Artist PROFILE

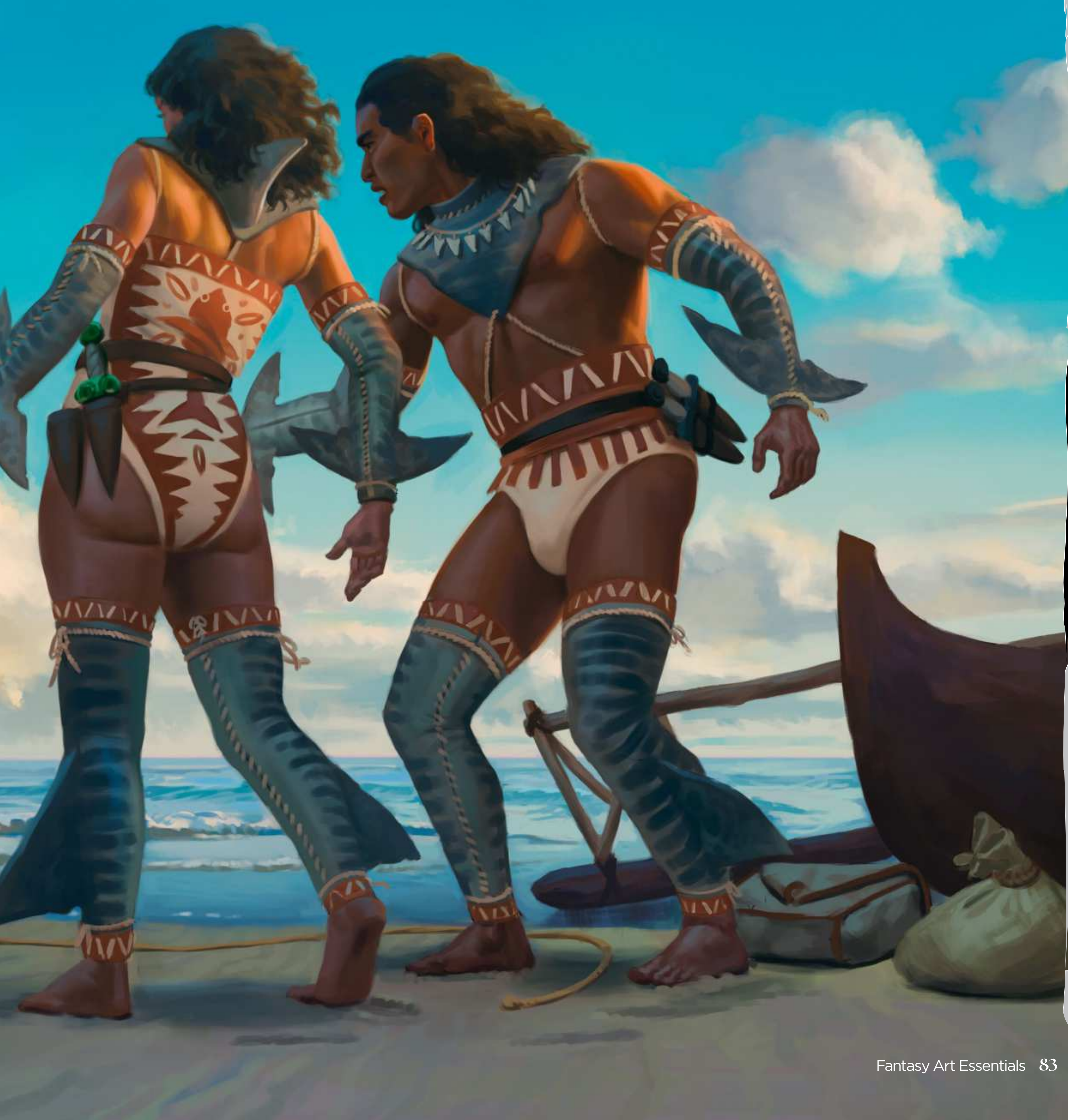
Jason Rainville
LOCATION: Canada

Jason's a freelance fantasy and science fiction artist who strives to incorporate myth and history into his work.
www.jasonrainville.com

I've always loved a good story, and I've come to appreciate just how enjoyable, important and difficult storytelling can be in visual art. I think it connects to the viewer more than something that may simply be beautiful. A glamour shot of your favourite fictional character is fun, but an illustration with a story enables you to journey through the image, to live in the space it creates.

I'm also a strong proponent of clear and memorable design. So much design today tends towards clutter – packing as much detail into a design regardless of whether it serves a purpose or not. We can measure this, too: if I asked you to draw an Imperial TIE fighter or the Starship Enterprise, chances are even if you're not a sci-fi fan you'd be able to doodle a semi-accurate outline. A ship from some of the games/films of today? That might be more difficult.

Both of these ideas – narrative and memorable design – are important things for artists to remember so that their images have a lasting impact with their audience. In the following workshop, I'll go through how I tackle these key concepts.

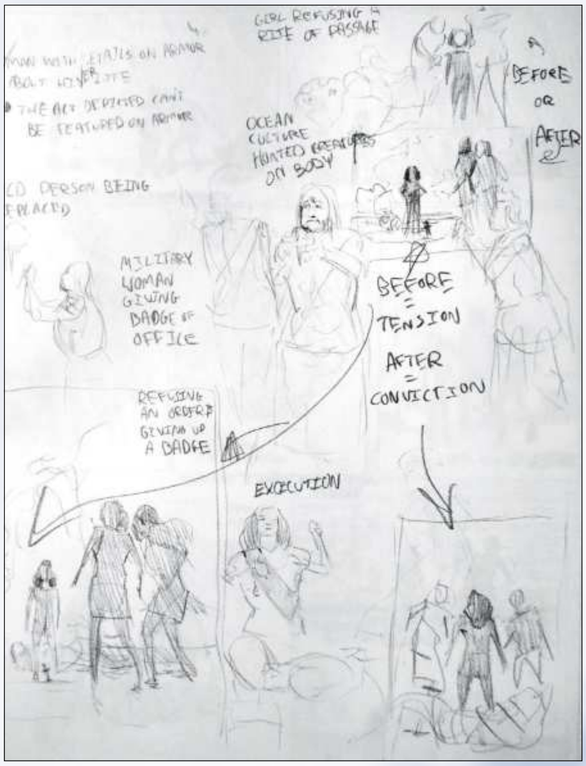


Gallery
Interviews
Workshops
Core skills

PRO SECRETS

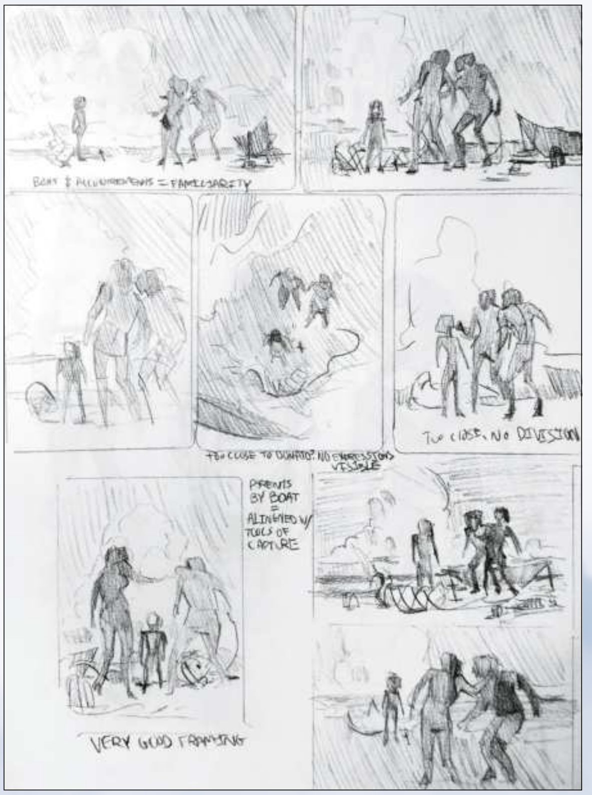
Storytelling advice

Molly Bang's book, Picture This: How Pictures Work, is essential reading for anyone in the visual arts. It's efficiently breaks down all the elements of a picture and how to tell a story with the simplest elements. The entire book is brilliantly illustrated using only cut-out pieces of construction paper. If she can tell a story with those basic tools, imagine what you can do with all of yours!


GIRL REFUSING A RITE OF PASSAGE
THE ART DEPICTED CAN'T BE FEATURED ON ARMOR
BEFORE OR AFTER
OCEAN CULTURE HUNTED CREATURES ON BODY
PERSON BEING REPLACED
MILITARY WOMAN GIVING BADGE OF OFFICE
BEFORE = TENSION
AFTER = CONVICTION
REFUSING AN ORDER & GIVING UP A BADGE
EXECUTION

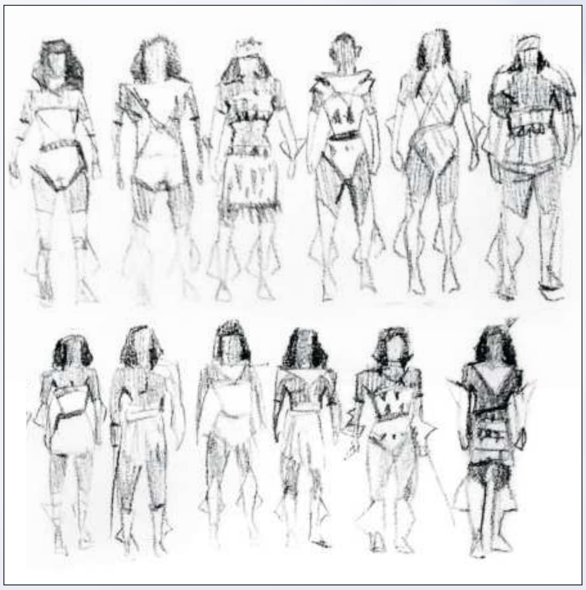
1 Concept possibilities

Coming up with ideas is difficult, especially for narrative-heavy illustrations, but there are a few guidelines you can use, such as including an action and a reaction. I explore some ideas on the page, such as an older official giving her badge of office to a younger woman. The action is the giving of the badge; the reaction would be the sad look on the older woman's face.


TOO CLOSE, NO DIVISION
PARENTS BY BOAT = ALIGNED W/ TOOLS OF CAPTURE
VERY GOOD FRAMING

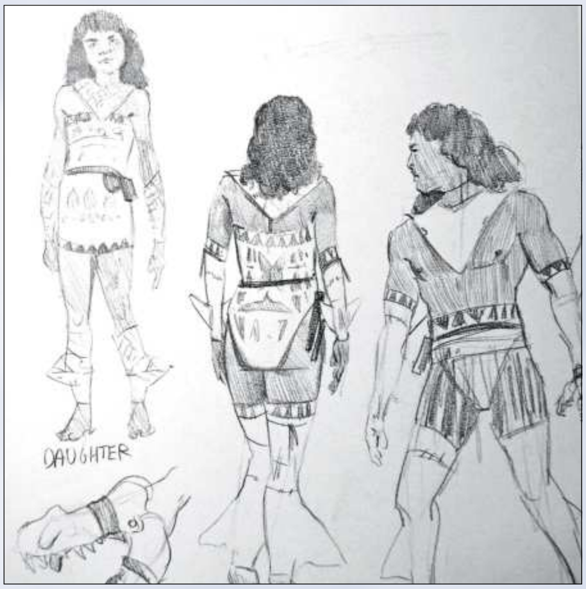
2 Thumbnail exploration

I settle on a scene where a girl refuses to kill a shark-person as a rite of passage. I sketch out simple thumbnails in pencil while trying to reinforce this narrative. Visual closeness creates relationships; visual distance also creates emotional distance. So placing the girl close to the shark and away from her parents shows us whose side she's on.



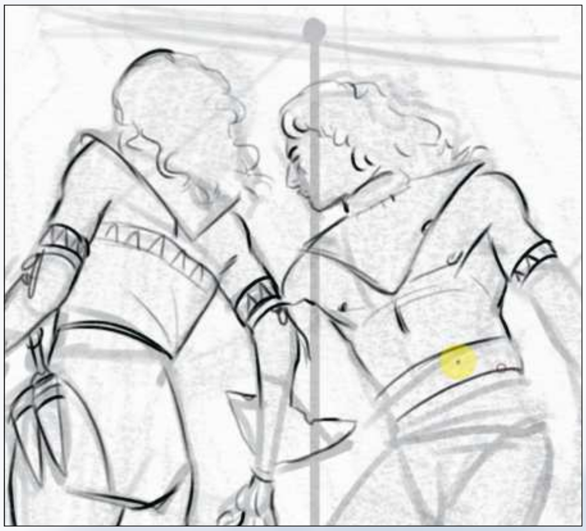
3 Contrast and consistency

When trying to create a memorable design, think about large flat shapes not only for a silhouette, but also within the character. Bright shapes contrast against dark shapes; areas of detail contrast with flat areas of colour. Think about consistency, too. All of these things add up to something that someone can draw roughly from memory.



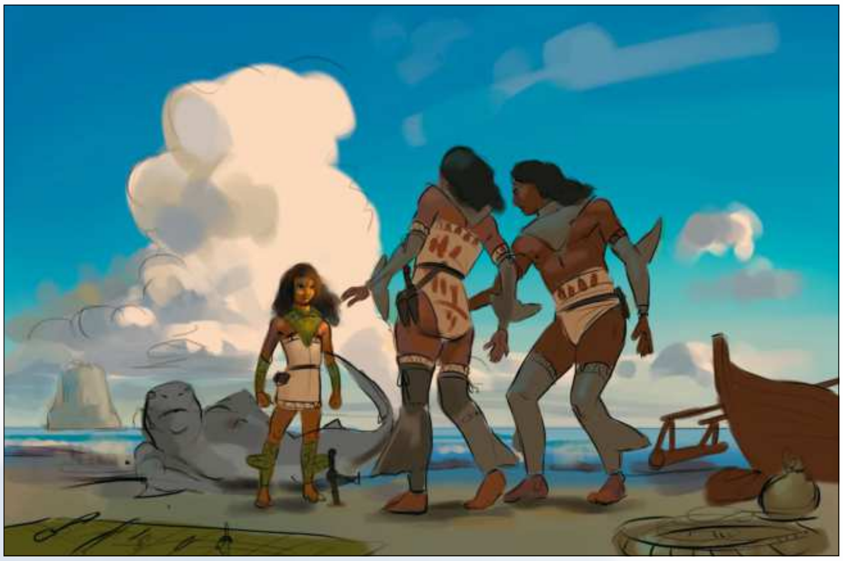
4 Character design

I'm using large simple shapes that are consistent over each person (triangles on chest and jutting from limbs) and areas of contained detail (within their torso clothing) to make these designs memorable. As these are a sea people expected to hunt sharks, their clothing contains details for swimming and repelling shark attacks.



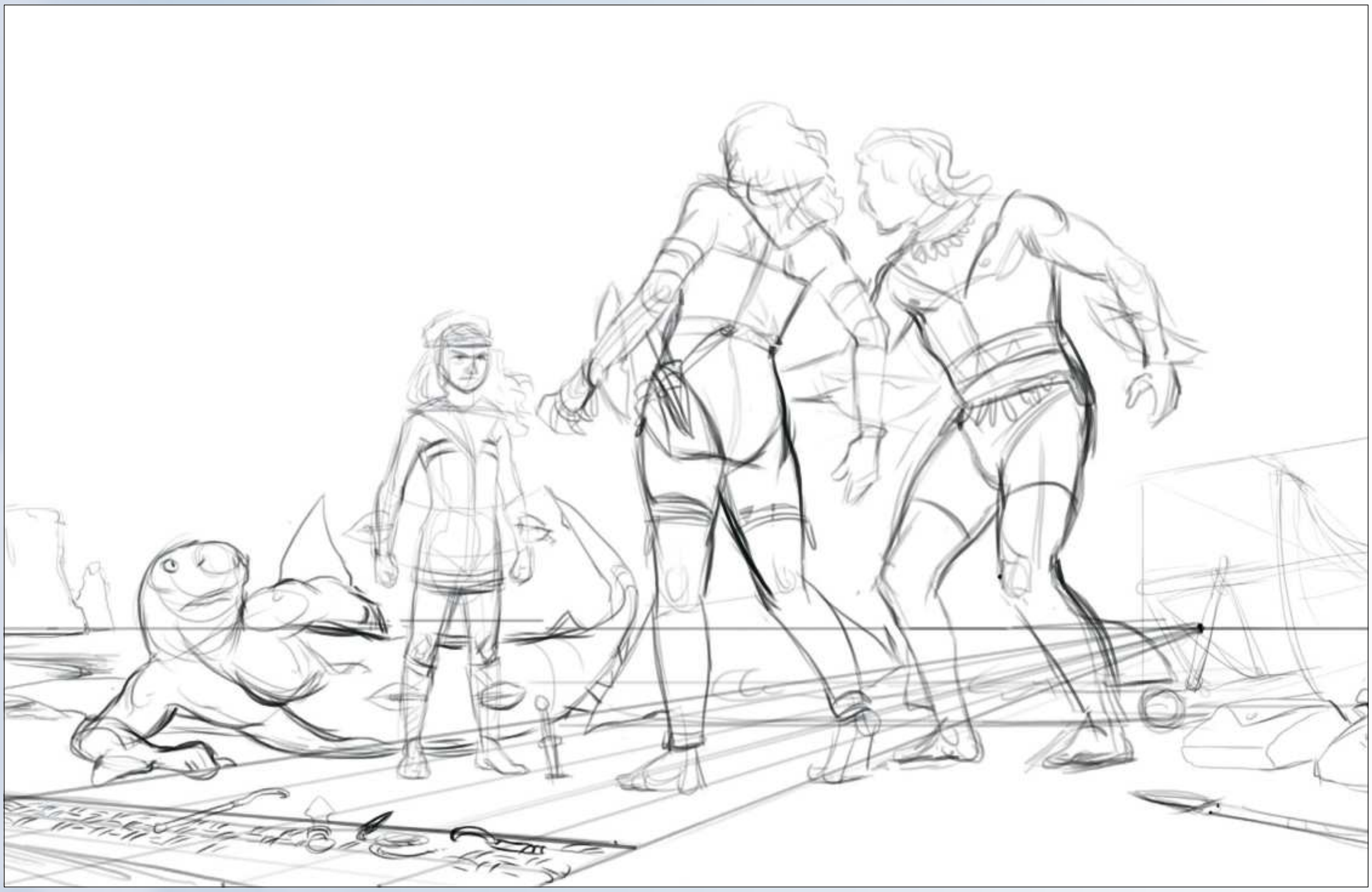
5 Sketching from the concept

Whether for a client or myself, I produce a sketch of the scene (usually quickly and without reference) to give an idea of how it might look. I also take time to solidify ideas about the image: I come up with the idea that the girl would throw a knife given to her into the sand. To reinforce this, one of her mother's knives is missing.



6 Rough colour sketch

I set the lines layer to Multiply and begin painting colours directly underneath. You can see how even now the design is clear and memorable: tan cloth surrounded by their dark skin; then at the outer edge the grey shark and (for the girl who hasn't completed her rite) green plant limb coverings. The tall cloud behind the girl helps frame her and represents her spirit and determination.



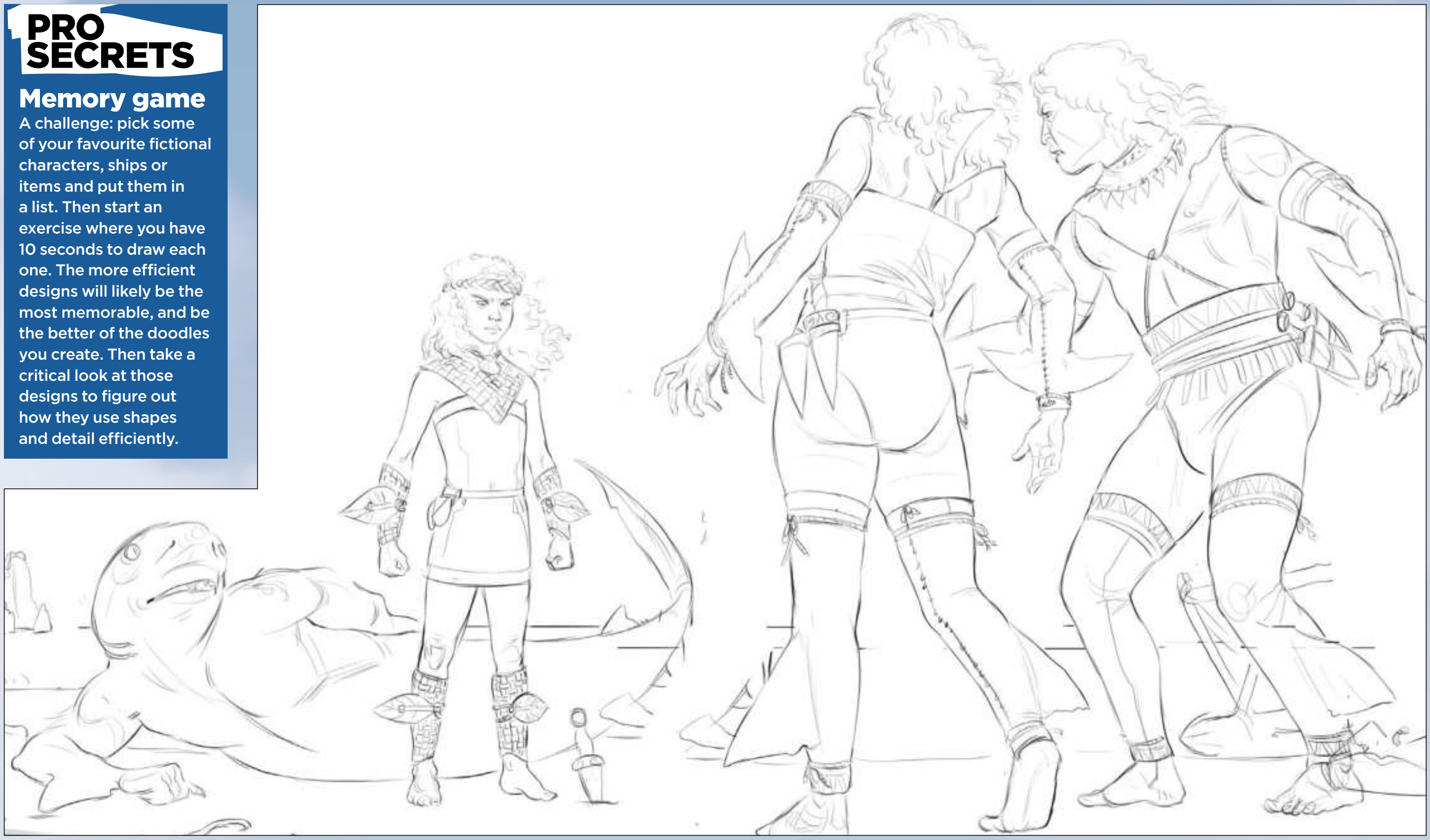
7 Time for a rough resketch

After I gather and shoot some reference, I create a second line drawing over my work. The first was for gesture, while this one is for form and anatomy. I try to wrap lines over the form of the subjects so that I can try to perceive them in three-dimensional space better. I carry out this stage while observing my reference shots, using them to guide my decisions. ➛

PRO SECRETS

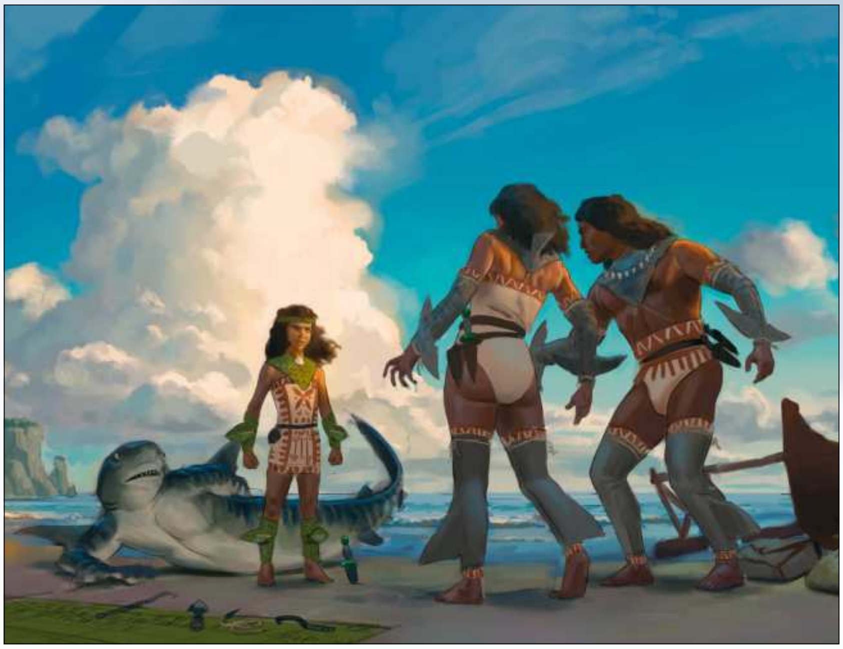
Memory game

A challenge: pick some of your favourite fictional characters, ships or items and put them in a list. Then start an exercise where you have 10 seconds to draw each one. The more efficient designs will likely be the most memorable, and be the better of the doodles you create. Then take a critical look at those designs to figure out how they use shapes and detail efficiently.



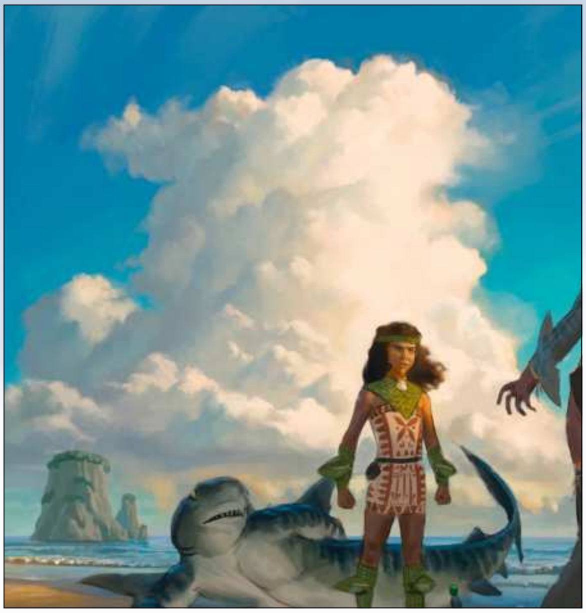
8 Tight resketch helps to sum up my ideas

This last digital sketch focuses on simply crystallising what's there. Here we can see more clearly the girl's outfit compared to her parents. This rite involves killing a shark person in order to get the more sleek and durable shark skin coverings. She's refusing to do this, and her straight pose versus her parents' comparatively flimsy poses makes her seem more strong and stable. Action and reaction.



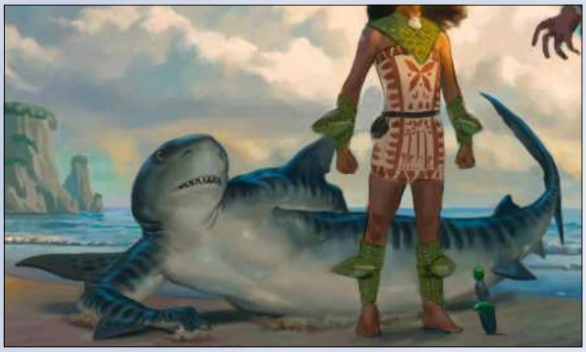
9 Produce a new underpainting

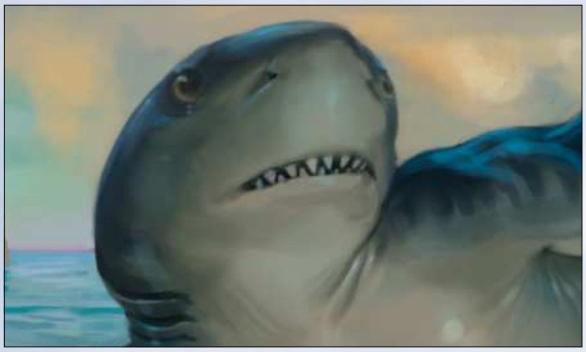
The image looks to be nearly done after this stage. I've coloured underneath the tight sketch using my gathered references. Now I'm just sorting out the overall colours and lighting, making everything harmonious. Notice how the parents overlap with similar values, and the girl and shark overlap? This creates two key groups in this narrative. The distance and knife between them means they're at odds.



10 Clouds and waves

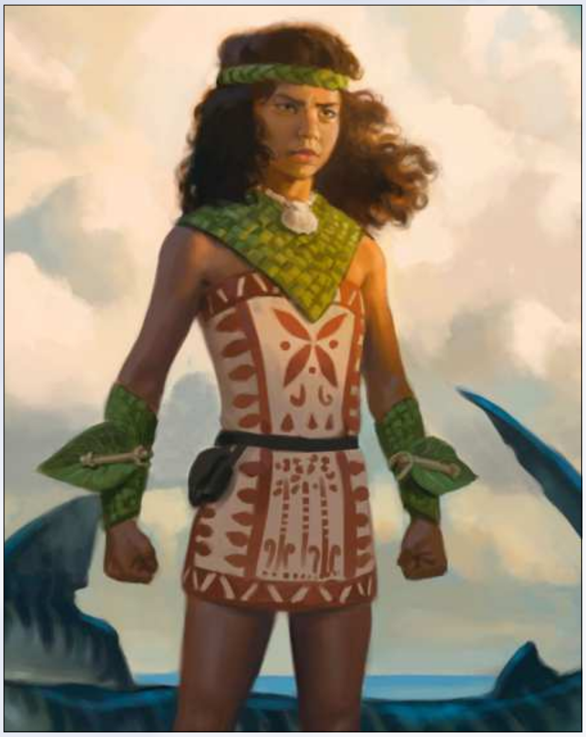
I decide to be more painterly with the clouds and sea. I like the nice chunky details of the waves and surf in the bottom left that I create with my oval brush, and the clouds are a treat to render with a flat chalky brush. While these are invented, all the while I'm keeping my eye on my references to guide the shapes and colours.





11 A shark's tale

The shark presents a unique challenge, because its counter-change colouring (dark on top and light underneath) meant that it's harder to shade realistically when the light source is from above. Again, reference helps. Depicting this creature as sympathetic rather than fearsome supports the story in the scene. While the girl might try to save a scary monster as well, it's easier to hammer home the narrative if it's more docile.



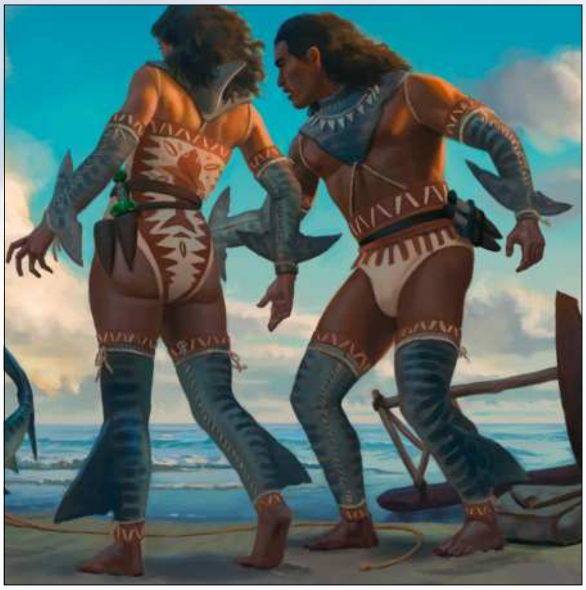
12 A determined daughter

The daughter has her face toward the viewer and illuminated by light, which are more signals that she's the heroine here. The motifs on her clothing are plant based, but she retains the shark-tooth patterns along the edges. There's still a lot of detail to be had here – the tan and ochre patterns, the green woven plants – but they're contained within unified shapes.

PRO SECRETS

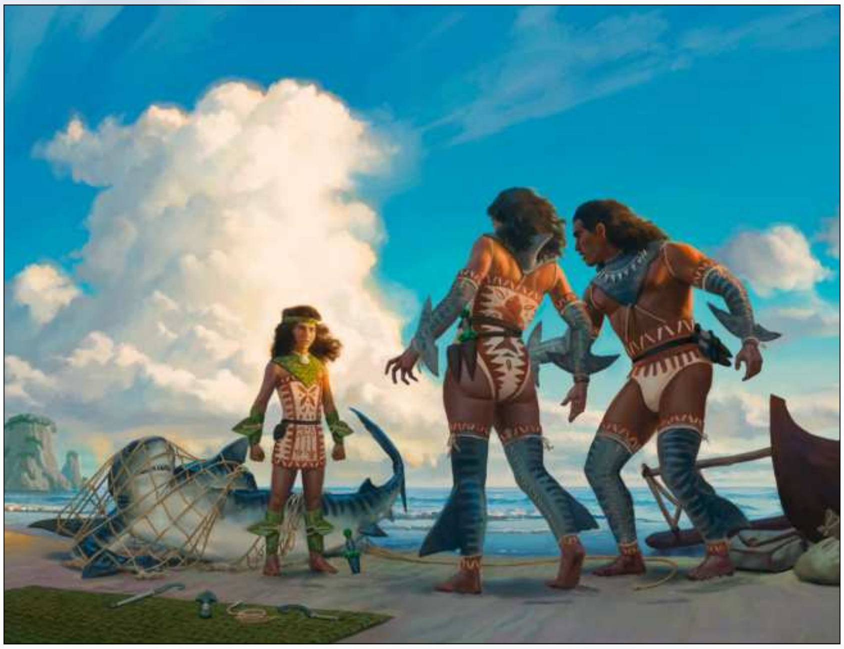
Try out new processes

My process works for me, but it might not for you. I spent a long time trying different approaches and I've settled on this one for my purposes. I love how specific I can get with line, so that I can be more free when applying colour. I like using direct colour rather than greyscale and overlays, because I feel it's easier to control. Experiment!



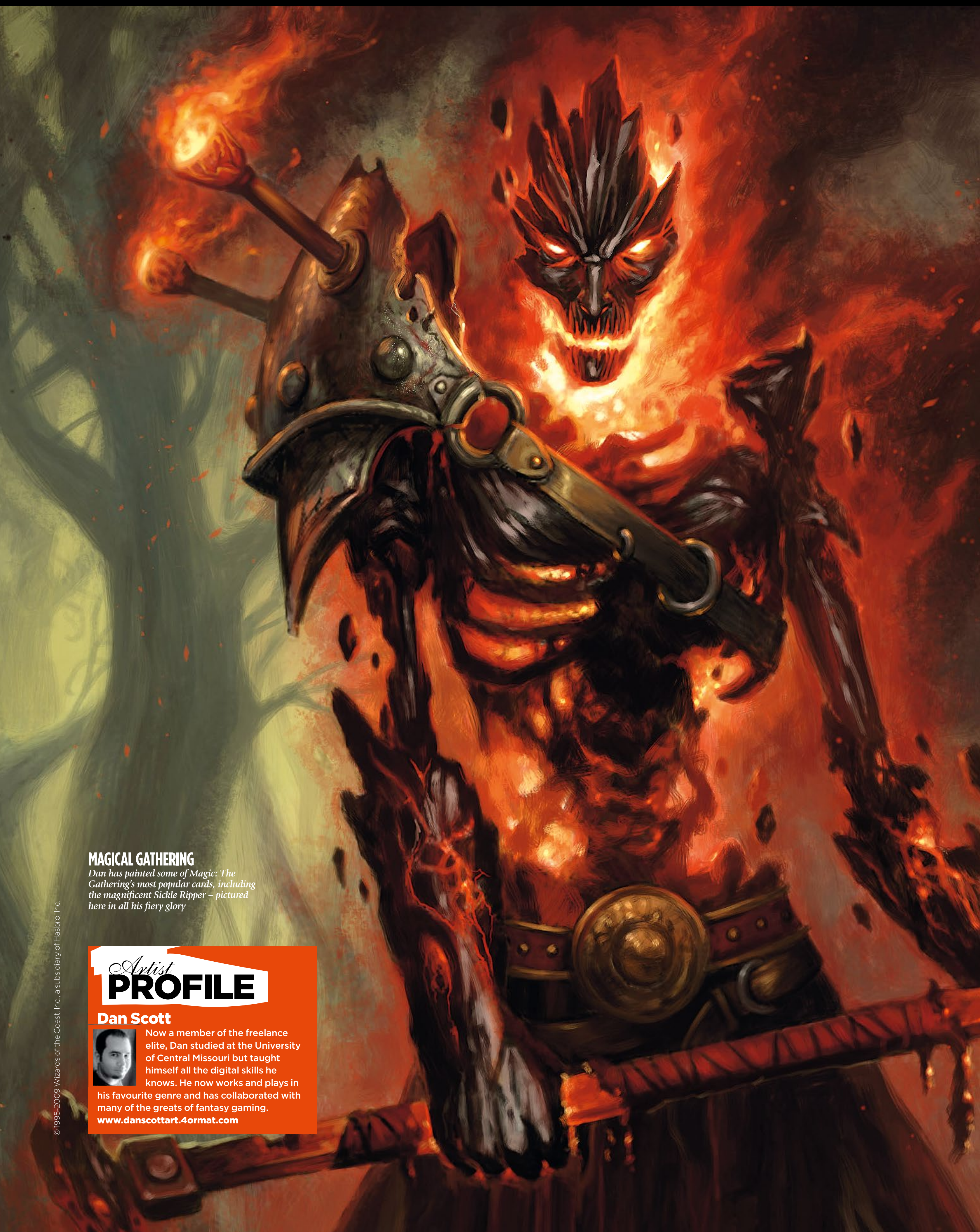
13 Meet the parents

The parents' design is similar to their daughters, which links them to her despite the positioning of the characters. They differ in their arm and leg protection mainly, but also in more subtle ways: for example, the design on the mother's back is of a shark and the father has a shark tooth necklace. Their looks and body language of surprise are essential for telling this story.



14 Adding the final touches

With some tweaks to the values (making the parents' legs darker as well as more contrast in the girl's face) the rendering of the reed mat with some tools (another narrative element, implying what's to be done to the shark) and the addition of an ensnaring net on the shark, we have a final image that tells a clear story and some characters with interesting and memorable designs.



MAGICAL GATHERING
Dan has painted some of Magic: The Gathering's most popular cards, including the magnificent Sickle Ripper – pictured here in all his fiery glory

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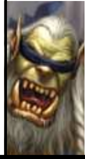
Artist PROFILE

Dan Scott

Now a member of the freelance elite, Dan studied at the University of Central Missouri but taught himself all the digital skills he knows. He now works and plays in his favourite genre and has collaborated with many of the greats of fantasy gaming.
www.danscottart.4ormat.com



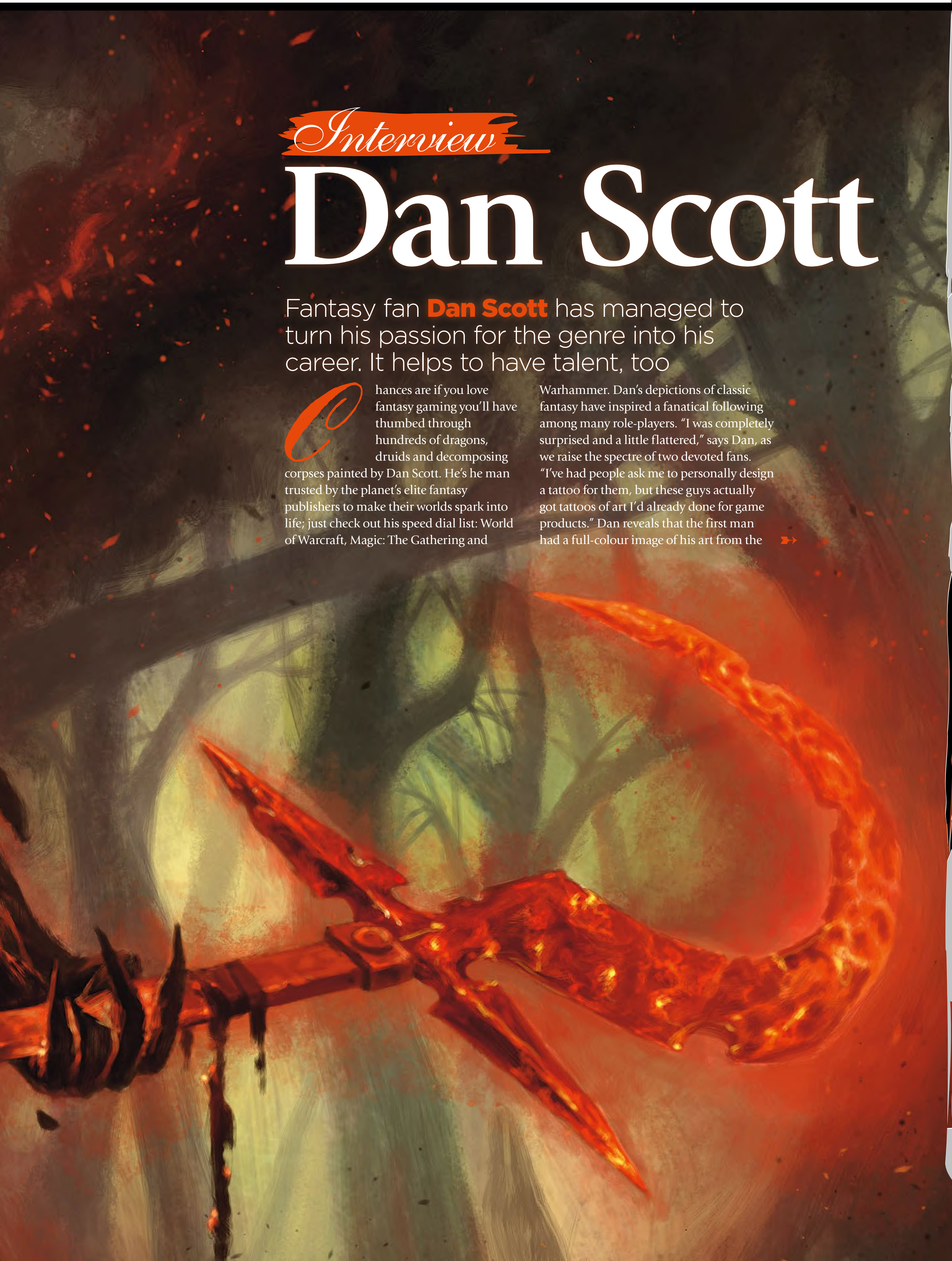
Interview

Dan Scott

Fantasy fan **Dan Scott** has managed to turn his passion for the genre into his career. It helps to have talent, too

Chances are if you love fantasy gaming you'll have thumbed through hundreds of dragons, druids and decomposing corpses painted by Dan Scott. He's he man trusted by the planet's elite fantasy publishers to make their worlds spark into life; just check out his speed dial list: World of Warcraft, Magic: The Gathering and Warhammer. Dan's depictions of classic fantasy have inspired a fanatical following among many role-players. "I was completely surprised and a little flattered," says Dan, as we raise the spectre of two devoted fans. "I've had people ask me to personally design a tattoo for them, but these guys actually got tattoos of art I'd already done for game products." Dan reveals that the first man had a full-colour image of his art from the

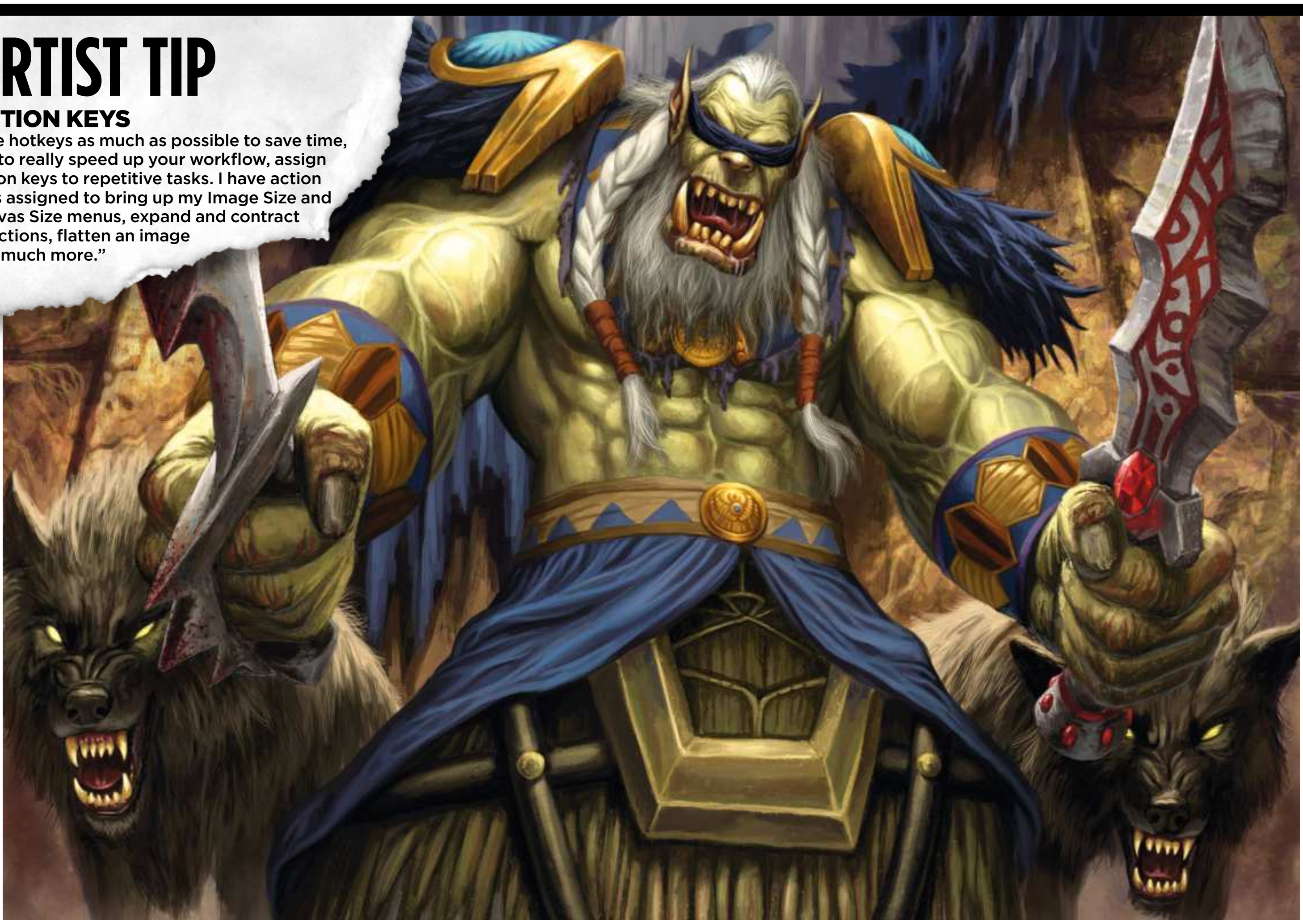
➛➛



ARTIST TIP

ACTION KEYS

"Use hotkeys as much as possible to save time, but to really speed up your workflow, assign action keys to repetitive tasks. I have action keys assigned to bring up my Image Size and Canvas Size menus, expand and contract selections, flatten an image and much more."



POWER PLAY

World of Warcraft's blind shaman Drek'Thar displays elements of both power and wisdom

> **I remember discovering the Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe series and trying to redraw every character**

Magic: The Gathering's Memory Plunder card across his back. The other had WarCry card Fast March on his upper arm.

FAN FAIR

"I spend so much time by myself in my studio, toiling away for hours on end with very little human interaction," says Dan. "It's easy to forget that people actually get to see and enjoy the art I'm producing, so it's really cool to get out and get to meet some of those people." Dan has accepted that developing some kind of fandom is part of the game with the type of art he's creating, and he admits it's something he enjoys. "It's a really nice side-benefit of doing this type of art. I know artists in a lot of other fields don't ever get to interact with or meet fans of their work."

What's refreshing about Dan is his devotion to fantasy art and role-playing-game illustration. Like the two fans who had his work inked forever across their bodies, Dan is a fantasy fanatic. Before turning pro, his interest in fantasy art was spiked by the comic *Dragon Slayer*, which led him to play Dungeons & Dragons – and from there to discover the art of Keith Parkinson, Larry Elmore and Fred Fields. "Early on, though, it was definitely comic books that were the biggest inspiration," he says. "I was a big Marvel comics fan and would draw all the characters. I remember discovering the *Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe* series as a kid and trying to redraw every character in it in my own version of the books."

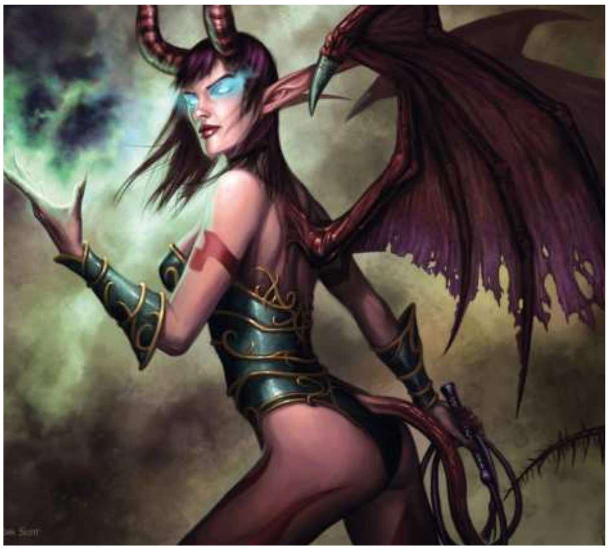
At school, Dan was a dreamer, his head stuck in Marvel art books while his maths notes were fodder for doodles (what is it about squared paper that's just so hard to resist?) – and, like most boys, *Star Wars* turned his head. "It sounds clichéd but I've always drawn, as far back as I can remember," he says. "I just never stopped. Most people do as they grow up." Putting down his graffiti-strewn maths books, Dan attended the University of Central Missouri for five years, where he majored in commercial art and illustration. As well as introducing the basics *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe* couldn't teach, the course opened the door on digital art – and Dan jumped through.

SOFTWARE SUCCESS

"It turns out digital ended up being the best fit, but I learned almost nothing about it in college," Dan explains. "I was there in the early- to mid-90s, so digital just wasn't used by artists nearly as much as it is now. Almost everything I've learned digitally has been self-taught, through ➳

INSANE ART

Dan's rendition of Salia from World of Warcraft shows off his eye for provocative poses



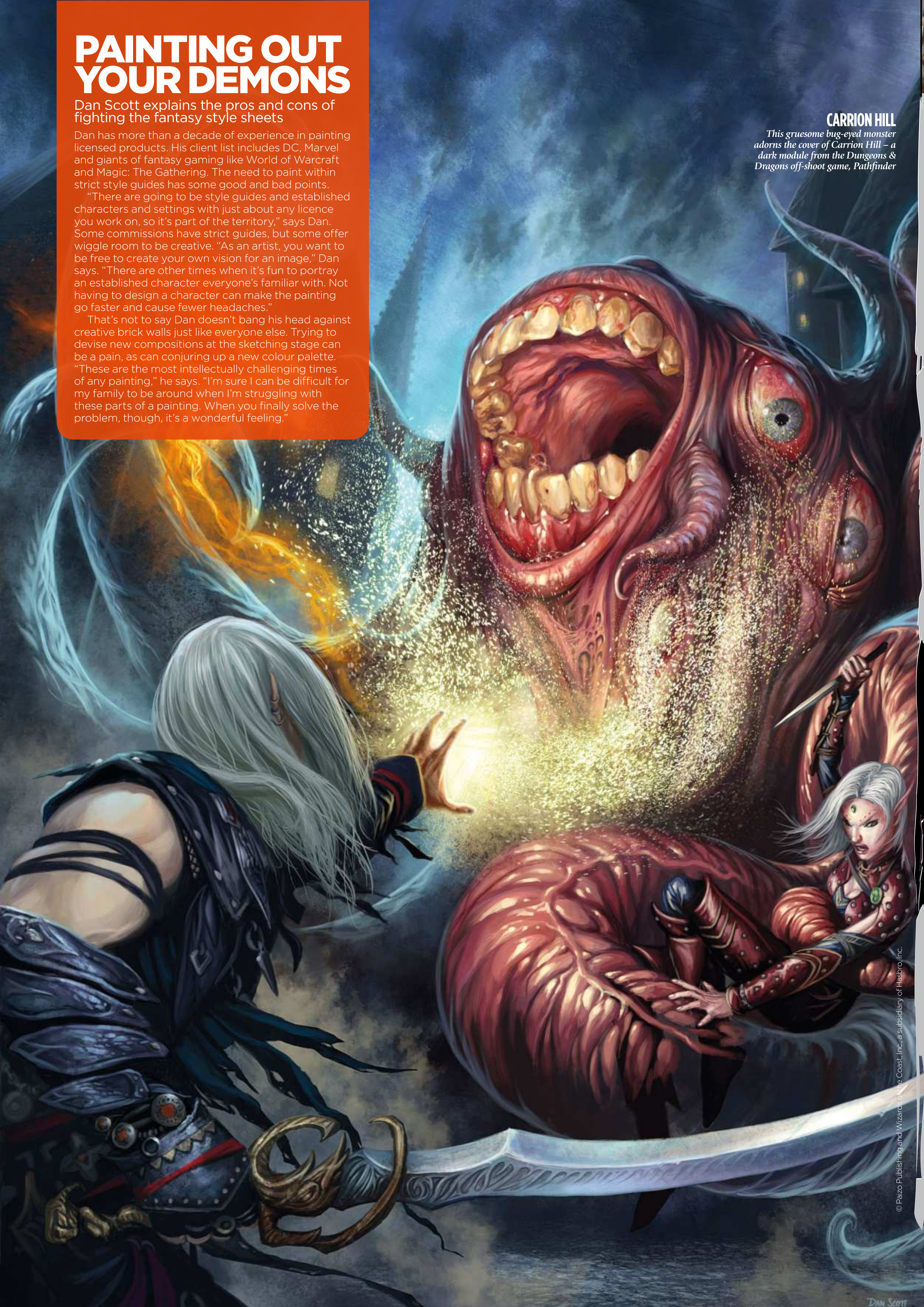
PAINTING OUT YOUR DEMONS

Dan Scott explains the pros and cons of fighting the fantasy style sheets

Dan has more than a decade of experience in painting licensed products. His client list includes DC, Marvel and giants of fantasy gaming like World of Warcraft and Magic: The Gathering. The need to paint within strict style guides has some good and bad points.

"There are going to be style guides and established characters and settings with just about any licence you work on, so it's part of the territory," says Dan. Some commissions have strict guides, but some offer wiggle room to be creative. "As an artist, you want to be free to create your own vision for an image," Dan says. "There are other times when it's fun to portray an established character everyone's familiar with. Not having to design a character can make the painting go faster and cause fewer headaches."

That's not to say Dan doesn't bang his head against creative brick walls just like everyone else. Trying to devise new compositions at the sketching stage can be a pain, as can conjuring up a new colour palette. "These are the most intellectually challenging times of any painting," he says. "I'm sure I can be difficult for my family to be around when I'm struggling with these parts of a painting. When you finally solve the problem, though, it's a wonderful feeling."



CARRION HILL
This gruesome bug-eyed monster adorns the cover of Carrion Hill – a dark module from the Dungeons & Dragons off-shoot game, Pathfinder

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ARTIST TIP

SET GOALS

“Give yourself small, realistic and achievable goals, like ‘work for (fill in the blank) company’, and large lifetime goals like ‘write an art book’. Achieving your ambitions gives you a sense of progress and having goals you haven’t achieved keeps you motivated to always improve as an artist.”

trial and error, examining others’ work and instructional videos, books… and great magazines like *ImagineFX*.”

Working in Photoshop and Painter, Dan sings the praises of both software packages, but admits that in the early days Painter was a bewildering option. “The interface was confusing and nothing seemed to work the way I expected,” he says, offering a tip for first-timers: “It helped me to pick one brush I felt comfortable with and use it for a while. Over time I branched out to using more and more brushes.” Photoshop was more intuitive, but Dan confesses that it’s been an easy-to-learn, hard-to-master journey for him, which has thrown up its fair share of hideous filter and lens flare experiments. Not that you’d find them in his finished paintings. “It’s absolutely amazing all the things you can do with both of those programs. I learn something new at least once a week. The trick is remembering everything you’ve learned and when the best time is to apply it.”

> “I’d played Magic since college, so it was kind of a lifetime goal”

Skill with the stylus is important, and Dan says he now uses it more than a traditional pencil. “It’s become second nature,” he explains, “even to the point that it sometimes takes me a while to get used to sketching with a pencil when doing conventional sketches.” However, in his mind there’s no excuse for not mastering the basics. Learning colour theory, proportions and composition were Dan’s bedrocks, and he reminds us that research is crucial too. “It ensures your image is accurate, but can also serve as inspiration,” says Dan. “Whether you’ve painted horses dozens of times or you’re doing it for the first time, you probably have some preconceptions in your head about what they look like. Doing a little research may make you try a different skin pattern, muscle structure, colour, pose, angle or even how the light interacts with the skin. It can help keep you from falling into the same patterns every time.”

BIG BREAK

Armed with traditional training, self-taught digital artistry and a fan’s eye for fantasy art, Dan embraced the world of freelance illustration. There wasn’t much work straight out of school, but his first commission, from an internet-published collectible card game called Chron X ,was invaluable in offering him a taste of deadlines, contracts and working with art directors. Then the big boys came calling.

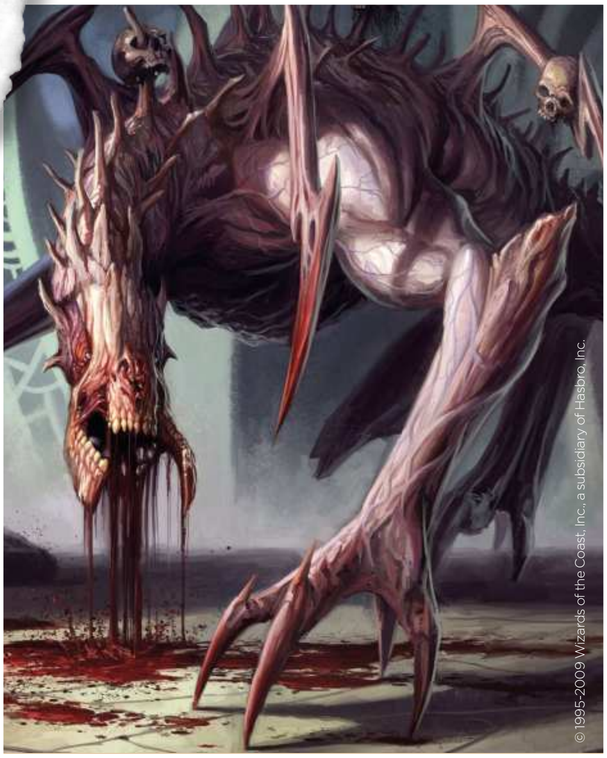
Dan’s break came with a commission for Warhammer 40K. “It was the first work I’d done for a major licence and paid much better than anything else I’d done at the time,” he says. There’s a sense, though, that he considers his first commission for Magic: The Gathering to be the moment his career took off. “I’d played Magic since college, so it was kind of a lifetime goal to do art for that game,” he says. “It was such a thrill to finally get to do it.”

Dan’s career seems to be driven by his love of the fantasy genre. The first cover he painted was for *Dragon* magazine, a D&D bible for many, including Dan. “Growing up playing D&D, I was familiar with *Dragon* magazine,” Dan explains, “so it was very exciting to get to do a cover for them.”

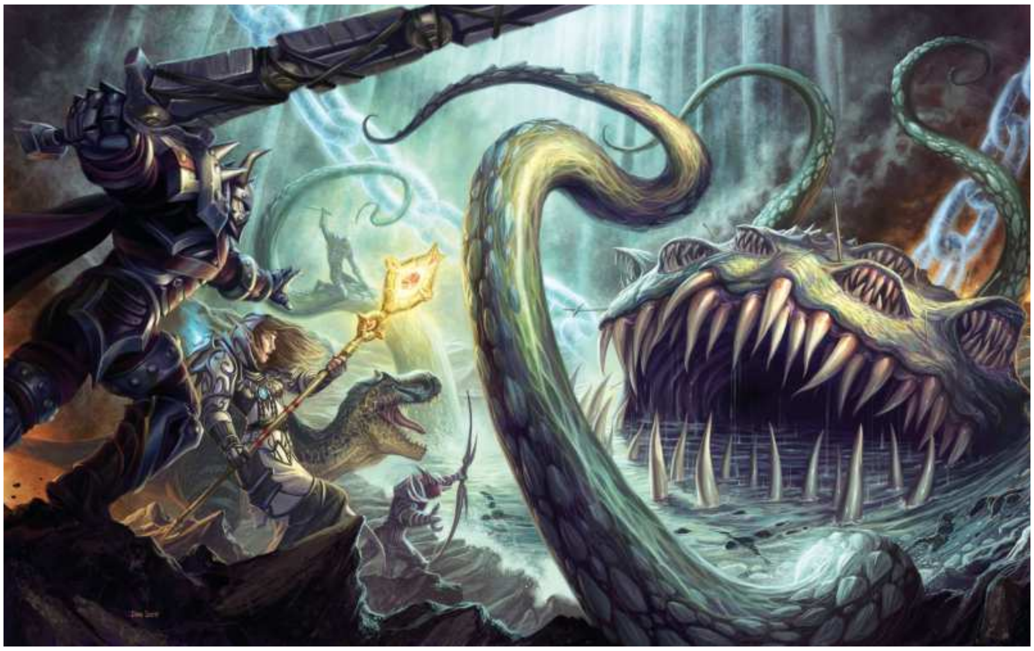
His current commissions only serve to secure his place in the fantasy genre elite. He’s continuing to work on Magic: The Gathering and World of Warcraft, but his well-thumbed copy of the *Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe* certainly came in handy when he painted an issue of *What If?* for Marvel, with Dave Ross pencilling. “It would be nice to paint over my own pencils but I know I could never make the deadline if that were the case,” says Dan. You can see the results in *Spider-Man: House of M*, volume 1.

Asked about life as a freelancer, he says: “If you’re a workaholic personality then it can be very difficult to have any sort of personal life.” Dan lists the troubles of a jobbing artist, including the health insurance nightmare in the US, irregular paychecks and the lack of formal benefits – so don’t expect bulging pension pots, bonuses or sick pay if you take up the stylus. “Despite all these pitfalls,” says Dan, “it’s a deeply enjoyable job and I really hope I’m able to do it for the rest of my life.”

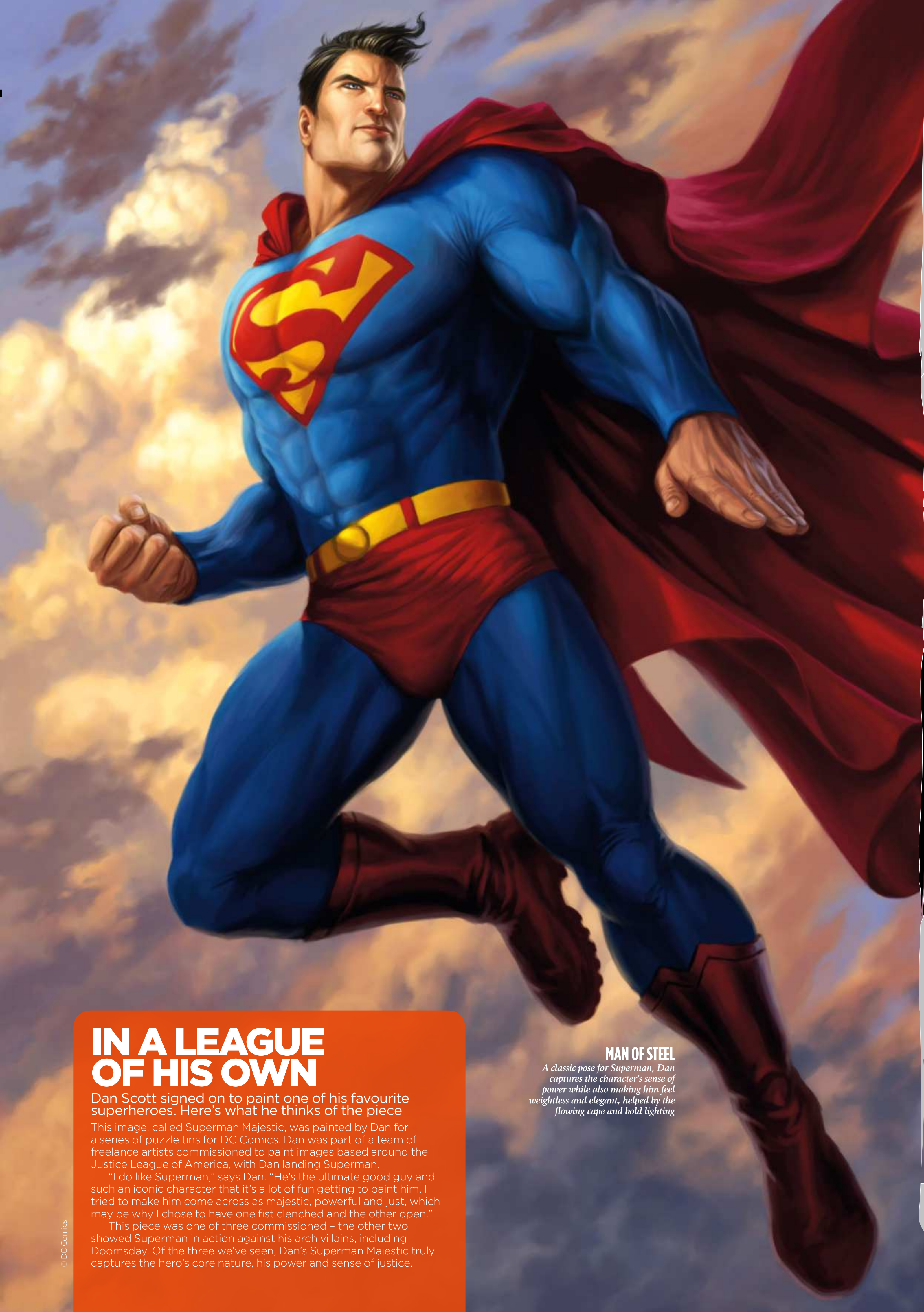
Turn the page to learn to paint like Dan Scott


© 1995-2009 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc.

SKULL & BONES
An unusual creature, the Kederekt Parasite from Magic: The Gathering oozes acid. The skulls of its victims are a neat touch, hanging from its bony body


© Brady Games and Blizzard Entertainment.

COVER STORY
This lavish painting was commissioned for the cover of BradyGames’ World of Warcraft Dungeon Companion III and showcases Dan’s talent for storytelling



MAN OF STEEL

A classic pose for Superman, Dan captures the character's sense of power while also making him feel weightless and elegant, helped by the flowing cape and bold lighting

© DC Comics.

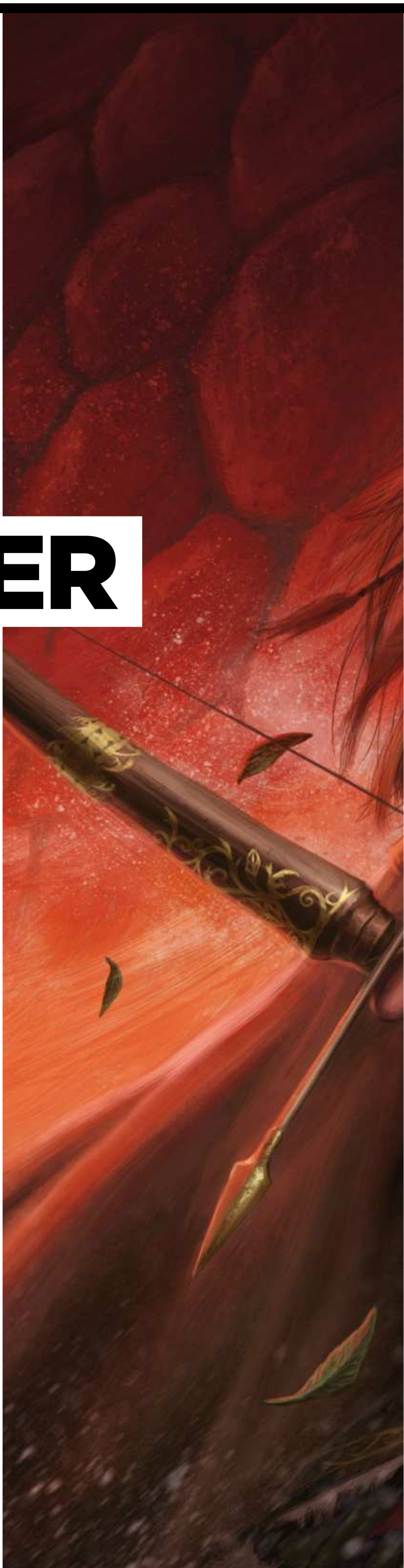
IN A LEAGUE OF HIS OWN

Dan Scott signed on to paint one of his favourite superheroes. Here's what he thinks of the piece

This image, called Superman Majestic, was painted by Dan for a series of puzzle tins for DC Comics. Dan was part of a team of freelance artists commissioned to paint images based around the Justice League of America, with Dan landing Superman.

"I do like Superman," says Dan. "He's the ultimate good guy and such an iconic character that it's a lot of fun getting to paint him. I tried to make him come across as majestic, powerful and just, which may be why I chose to have one fist clenched and the other open."

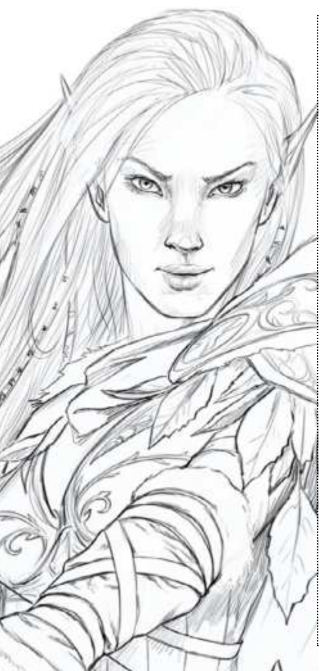
This piece was one of three commissioned – the other two showed Superman in action against his arch villains, including Doomsday. Of the three we've seen, Dan's Superman Majestic truly captures the hero's core nature, his power and sense of justice.



Photoshop

CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF A D&D CHARACTER

A strong D&D image is always a crowd-pleaser. **Dan Scott** takes aim at a classic character class

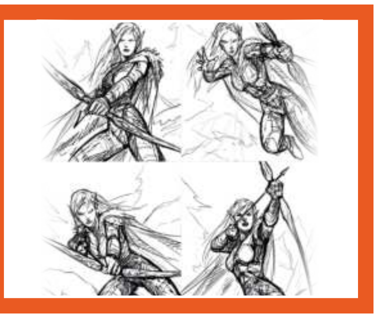


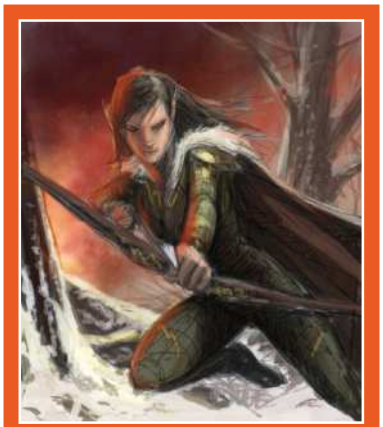
The *ImagineFX* team contacted me to ask if I'd like to do a cover image focusing on Dungeons & Dragons imagery. I'm a big fan of the magazine, owning every published issue, so I was excited to work with the team. I was comfortable with the subject matter, having played my fair share of D&D through the years and painted several interiors and covers for D&D products.

The art brief was for a female Elf Ranger in a snowy setting with some sort of red and green colour scheme, because this was originally for an issue coming out at Christmas. My main goals were to make her beautiful, powerful, confident and hopefully have some connection with the viewer. I also know that a red-green colour scheme could easily look garish or cartoony if handled too harshly. With these aims in mind, I set out to create the best image I could muster.

Gang of four

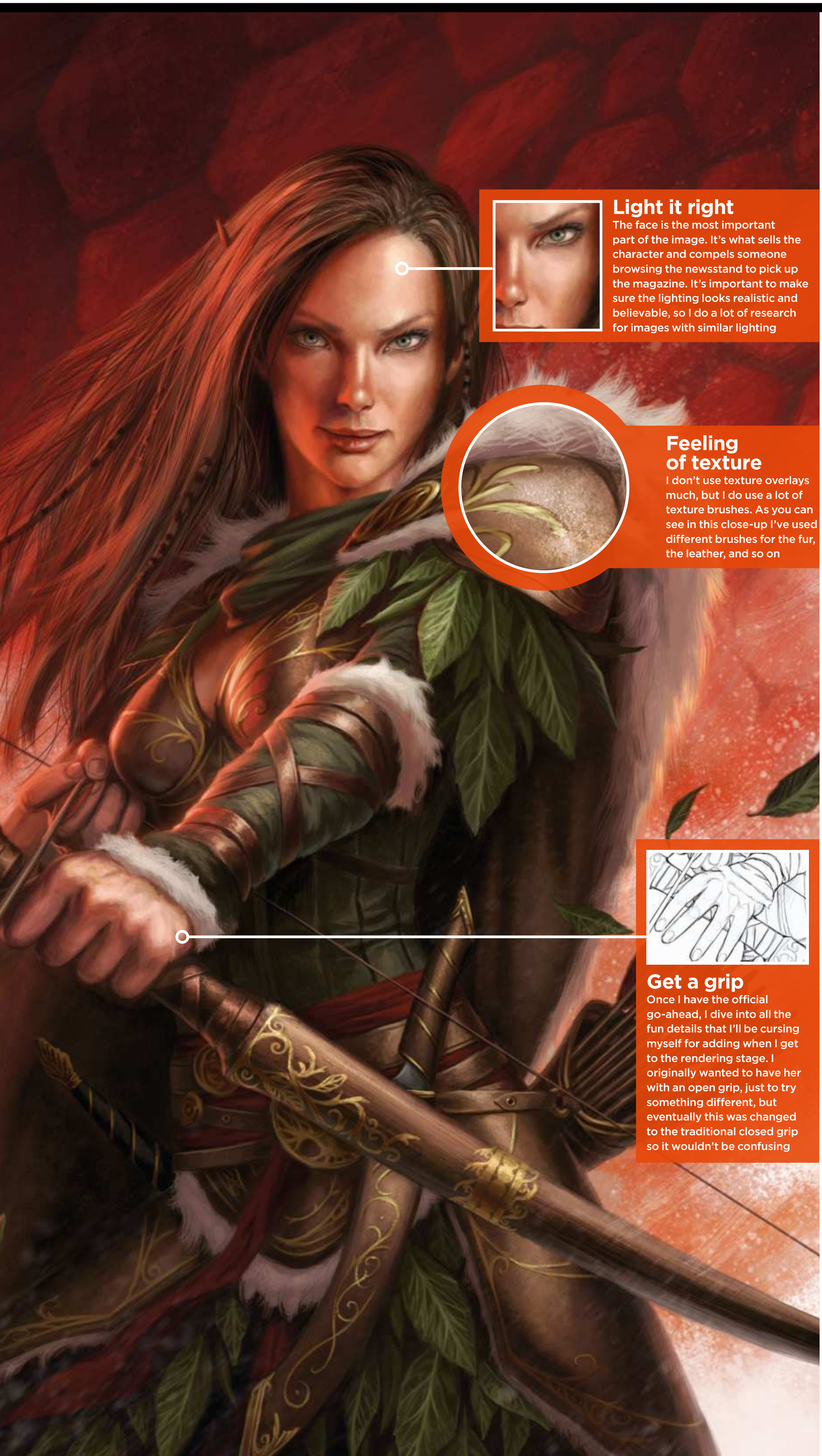
First I submit four rough thumbnail sketches. These are quick, loose sketches. They are simply to convey the general pose and composition. I'm not too worried about what she's going to be wearing at this point. I also keep the background pretty sparse, because I want the image to focus on the character.





Down to two

I usually do a tight sketch and add greyscale values before I start working in colour, but the art editor wants to see two of the rough sketches in colour before deciding on which of the images to go with. This image, featuring the Elf Ranger in an action pose, is eventually rejected on the grounds that her body angle would look awkward on the cover. In addition, the snowy background might obscure the text that will eventually be superimposed on to the scene.



Light it right

The face is the most important part of the image. It's what sells the character and compels someone browsing the newsstand to pick up the magazine. It's important to make sure the lighting looks realistic and believable, so I do a lot of research for images with similar lighting

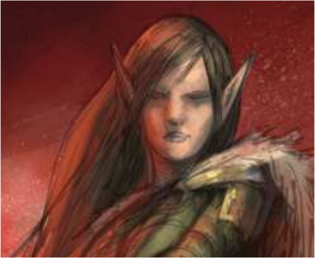
Feeling of texture

I don't use texture overlays much, but I do use a lot of texture brushes. As you can see in this close-up I've used different brushes for the fur, the leather, and so on

Get a grip

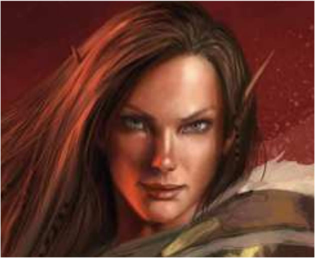
Once I have the official go-ahead, I dive into all the fun details that I'll be cursing myself for adding when I get to the rendering stage. I originally wanted to have her with an open grip, just to try something different, but eventually this was changed to the traditional closed grip so it wouldn't be confusing

How I create...
AN ELF RANGER



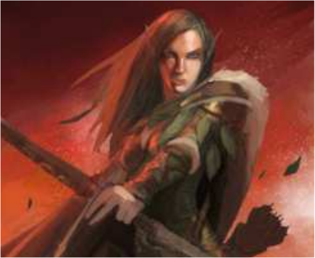
1 Surface tension

I now apply colour to my tight sketch. All the linework can still be seen and the basic colour scheme is all intact. I can't mess it up too badly at this point, so it's now time to render out all of the different surfaces and details.



2 Face the facts

I start defining the face. I spend a lot of time trying to get the lighting and expression just right. Other parts of an image can be less defined if need be, but the face is what's going to grab the viewer's attention.



3 Scaling it up

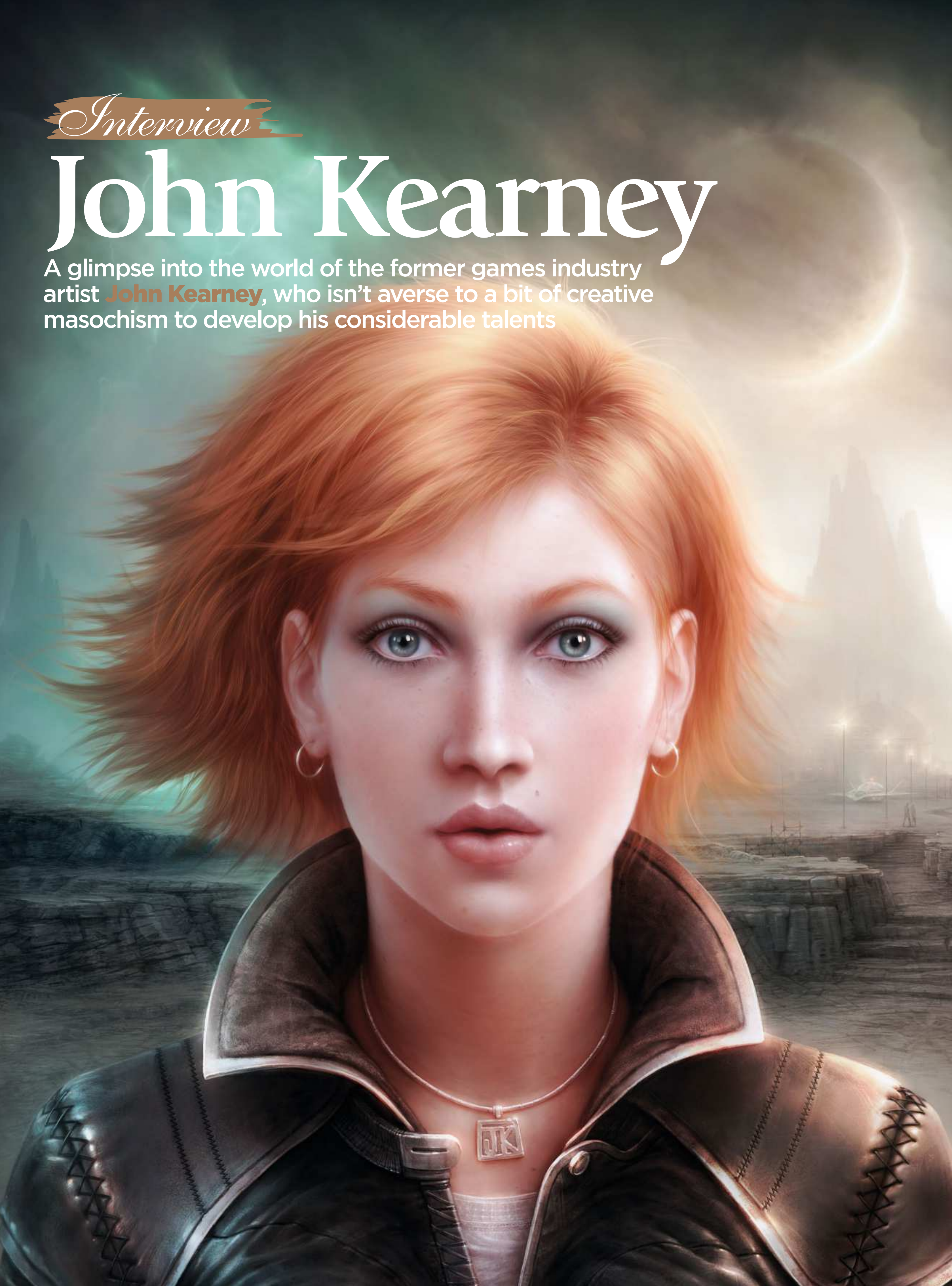
All of the rendering is now done. At this point, I step back from the piece as a whole and see what areas need tweaks in values, colour, detail, and so on. I try a version with dragon scales in the background, as if she's standing in front of an enormous red dragon that she's just conquered. The art editor likes this version and decides to go with it.

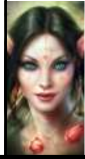
Gallery
Art legends
Art masters
Core skills

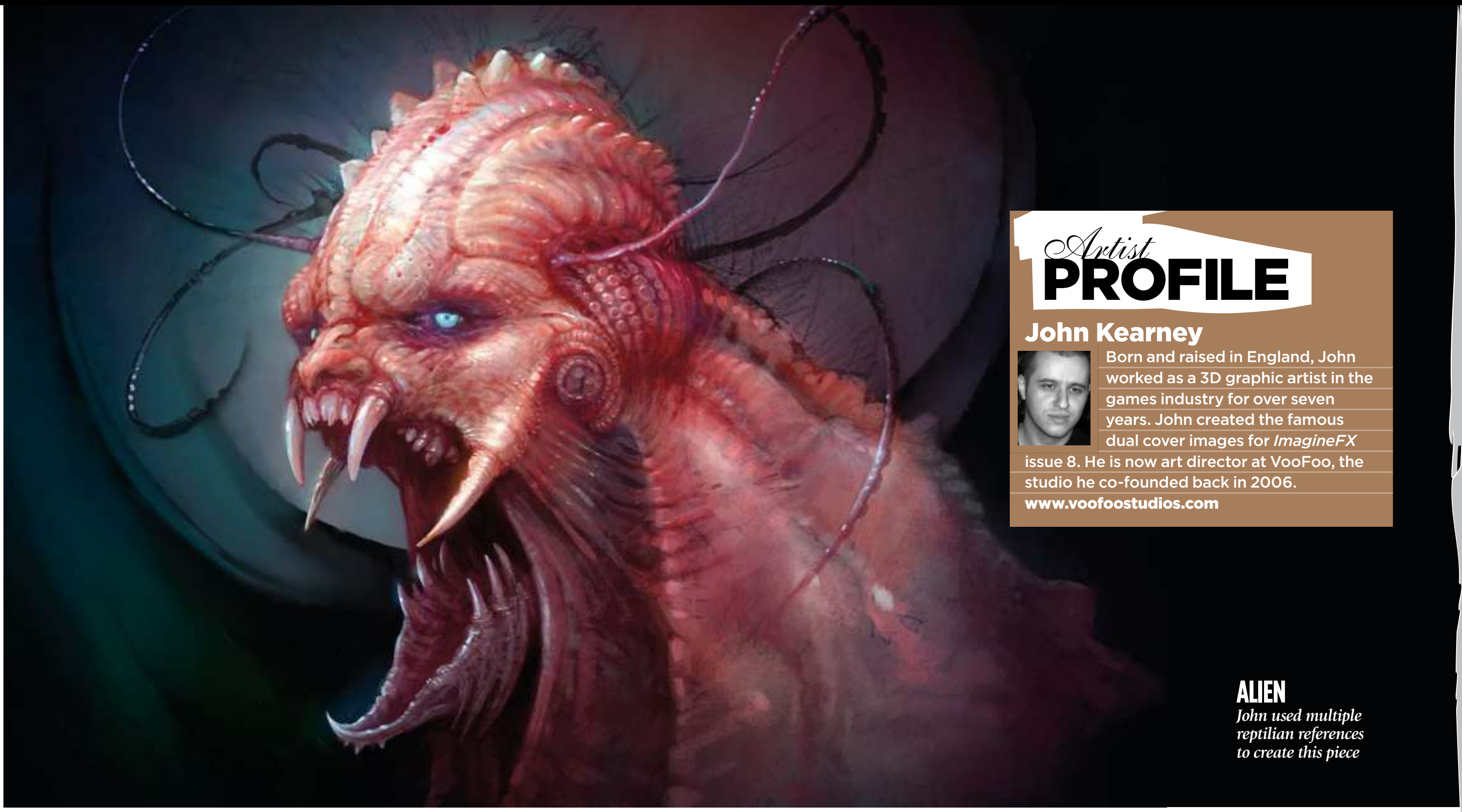
Interview

John Kearney

A glimpse into the world of the former games industry artist **John Kearney**, who isn't averse to a bit of creative masochism to develop his considerable talents







ALIEN
John used multiple reptilian references to create this piece

Artist PROFILE

John Kearney

Born and raised in England, John worked as a 3D graphic artist in the games industry for over seven years. John created the famous dual cover images for *ImagineFX* issue 8. He is now art director at VooFoo, the studio he co-founded back in 2006.

www.voofoostudios.com

Talking to John Kearney, it's clear that John's somehow managed to unearth something really and truly remarkable within himself; a natural ability that has enabled him to create work that ranks alongside the very best fantasy art.

"I remember reading about the artist's 'First Fire'," he enthuses, "a sudden flash of inspiration that all artists experience at some point. It's a moment of crystal clarity and vision, a tantalising glimpse at something exceptional in your subconscious. Whatever it is, it's important to try to capture the essence of that intensified moment of perception by sketching down all you can before it's gone."

QUICK LEARNER

While this kind of inspirational epiphany might be a common stage in artists' development, what is unusual in the case of John is how quickly he has developed the associated technical skill to commit his visions to canvas. "Bizarre as it may sound now," he says, "for many years I'd never completed a 2D digital painting. I'd dabbled and messed about, but I never had the opportunity to take it further than that in a professional capacity."

For the first part of his career, John had been employed full-time as a 3D texture artist in the games industry, which didn't offer him the opportunity for expression he needed. He describes it as "soul destroying."

"I completely lost all of my creativity and passion for the job," he says. "I started out like most young artists do, with a romantic vision of how great it would be to create art professionally. After realising how cynical and disillusioned I'd become, I quit my job and decided to go freelance as a 3D/2D artist to try and recapture my motivation."

Freed from the constraints of the 9-5, John set about developing his portfolio. He completed a number of paintings and posted them to the 2D art site **ConceptArt.org**, and quickly garnered praise.

"I was unbelievably surprised by the support I received," he says. "I had offers of work almost immediately and it enabled me to continue expanding my portfolio and improving my ability at the same time."

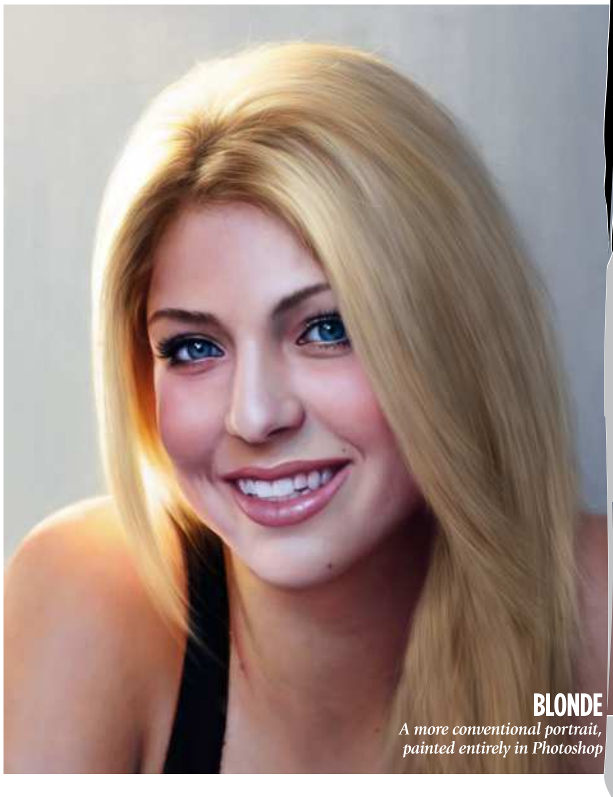
It was through his work on **ConceptArt.org** that he came to the attention of *ImagineFX*, and he has become a regular contributor, a highlight of course being painting the stunning Beauty and Beast dual covers for issue 8 of the magazine.

John works primarily in Photoshop, though he dabbles with Painter occasionally. The hours he put in at his first job using Photoshop have meant it has become second nature to him.

"I know the program and its tools well enough to forget I'm actually using software when I'm painting," he explains of how much of an advantage that knowledge is:

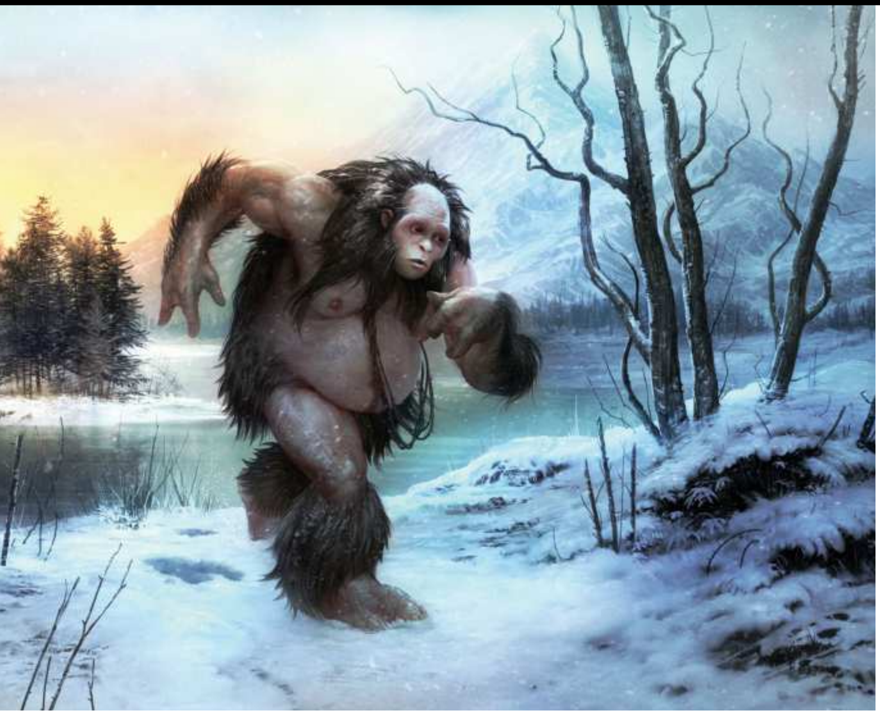
➸

> "I had offers of work almost immediately, and it enabled me to expand my portfolio and improve my ability"



BLONDE
A more conventional portrait, painted entirely in Photoshop

BOUDICCA 3060AD
John's most ambitious work so far, this is a futuristic version of the flame-haired Celtic warrior queen. John didn't use any references, creating this iconic character image from scratch



> “At no point do I have to stop and work out how to do something, which means I’m able to get into the flow and paint at my full potential”

BIGFOOT
John used this in a Photoshop Q&A for ImagineFX about creating realistic snow

“It becomes like a traditional pencil or a paintbrush, at no point do I have to stop and work out how to do something, which means I’m able to get into the flow and paint at my full potential.”

Though the majority of his work is created digitally, John doesn’t think the tools are all that important. “I feel I could do whatever I do digitally to a similar level with traditional media,” he assures us. “It’s crucial to improve your eye and judgement for any art related discipline, digital is just another outlet for that fundamental ability.”

NATURAL MEDIA

So while many Photoshop artists create their own custom brushes, John opts mainly for Photoshop’s default Natural Media brush set and would rather try to paint details than let snazzy brushes do the work.

To keep up the momentum, rather than slavishly working on a single, big project John often works on several paintings at the same time, using reference material for one, while another will be created entirely from his imagination.

“In the long run, I feel it’s going to benefit me and improve my overall technical ability,” he says. “I’m certainly not sure whether it’s the best approach, but I don’t really care – I feel it works for me and it’s a personal challenge that motivates me.”

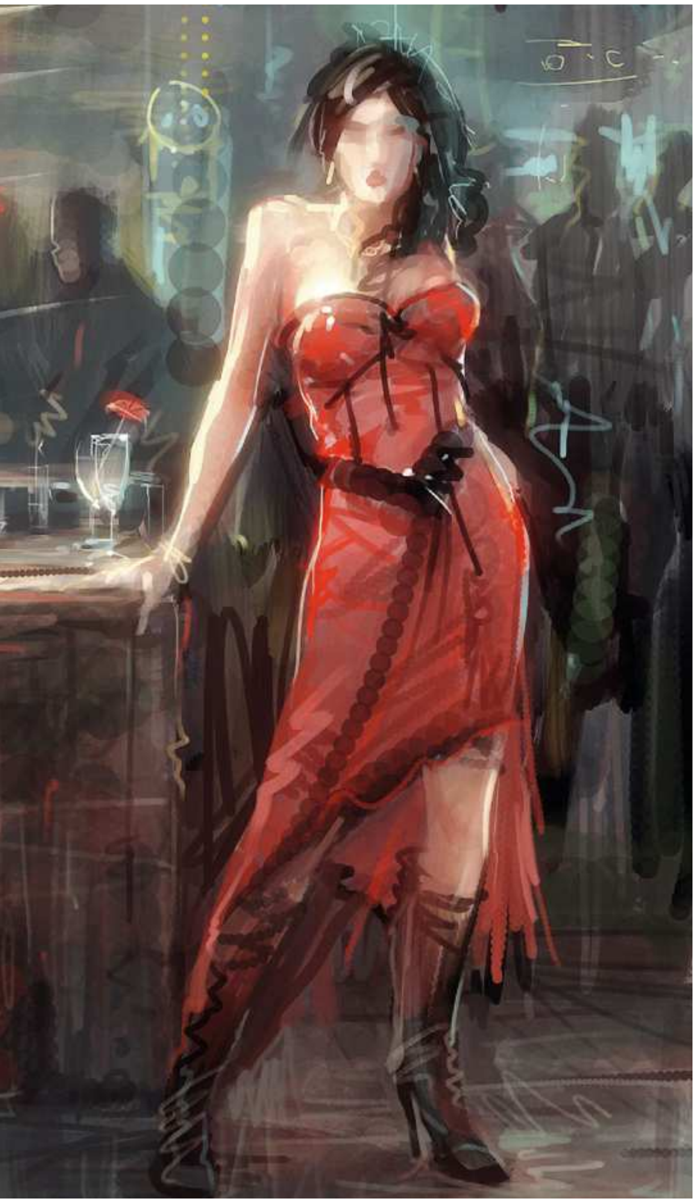
John is self-taught for the most part and admits his formal education hasn’t really been relevant to his eventual career path.

During his studies John undertook a placement at game studio Elite Systems and, impressed by his portfolio, they offered him a job immediately. At the tender age of 18, John describes his move in to the world of work having been “a baptism of fire”, but it was clearly a formative experience.

“The professional experience I gathered through working full-time with other artists helped me immensely,” he says. “There’s nothing like milestones and deadlines to get your arse into gear.”

Right now, John’s art director at VooFoo, the studio he co-founded in 2006. It was always Jon’s dream to return to the collaborative atmosphere of the design studio; “I love being part of an art team with a lot of potential and ability,” he says. “Film work would also be of huge interest to me, designing creatures for the movies would be a dream come true.

“I’ll keep my options open, continue doing the best work I can and see what arises. Whatever I do, I’m going to grasp it with both hands and see how far I can push myself.”



BAR GIRL
A more loose style, created with Hard-edged brushes

QUEEN TRIFFIDIA

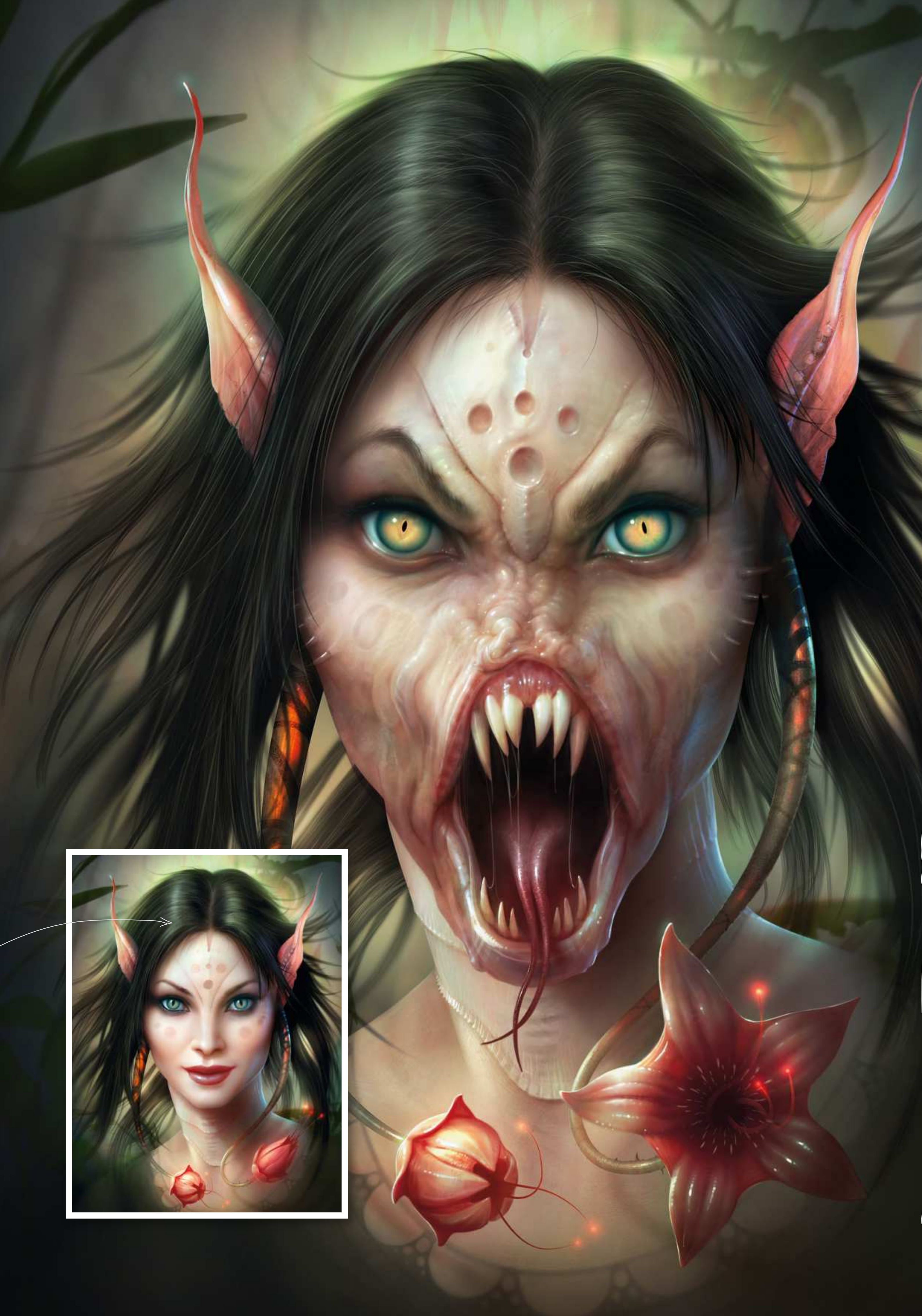
A tale of two covers, nine days and 70 hours

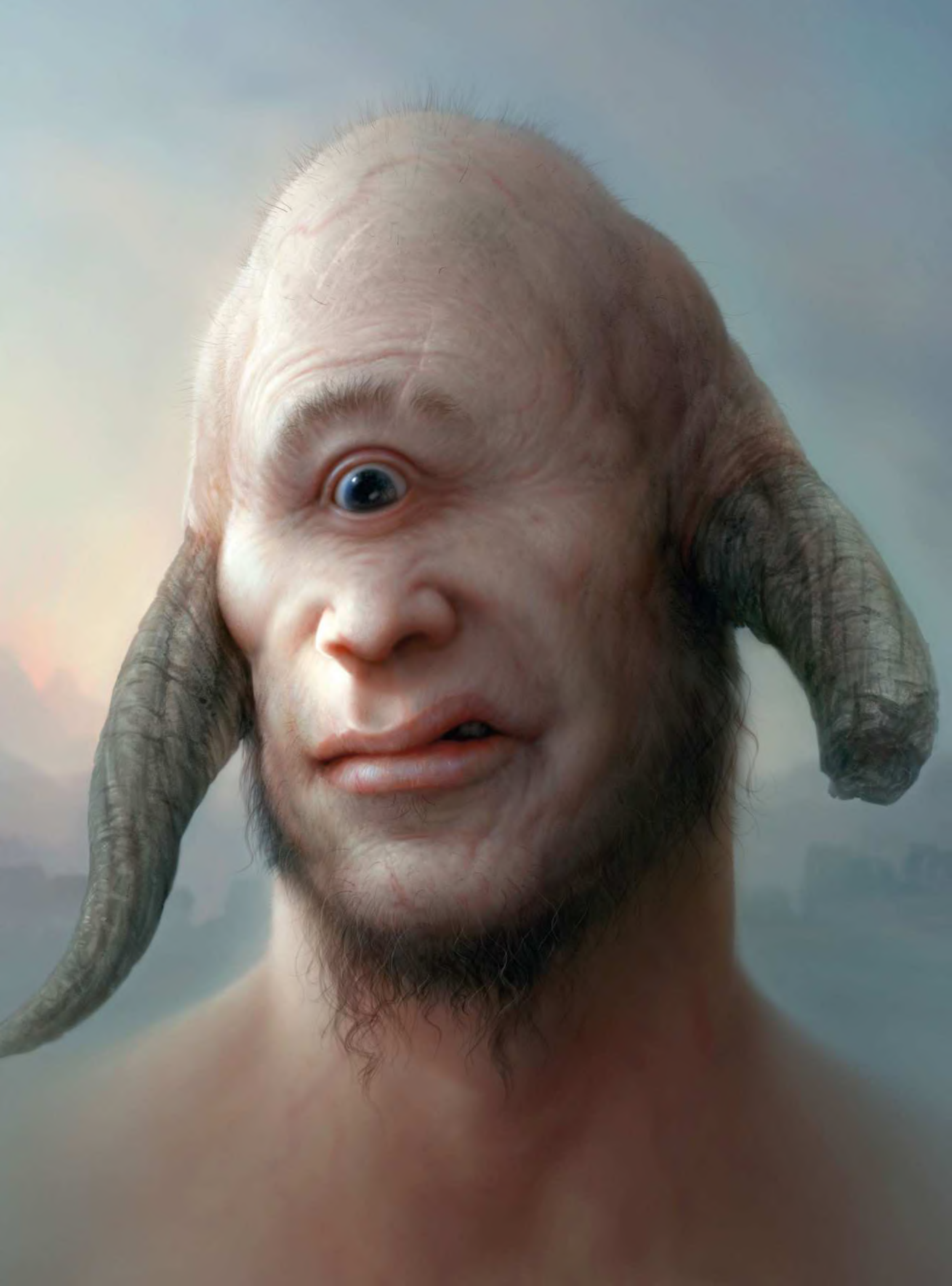
In July 2006, John received a call from *ImagineFX* offering an ambitious commission, with an even more ambitious deadline. John accepted, and the idea for Queen Triffidia soon materialised. John turned around the concept sketches for the then-untitled image in a matter of days. John explains further, showing the investment each of the images needed.

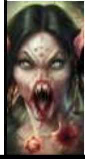
“The paintings took me around 70 hours over nine days,” he says. “The majority of the time was spent on detailing the paintings, which can feel like forever when working at large print resolutions. The most critical period is always the first two or three days when the concepts have to be nailed.”

As for his favourite out of the two: “Definitely the monster version! The beautiful version might be just as aesthetically pleasing, but the real creativity and challenge came in designing the monster, which had to look just as realistic and believable. Finding a balance between the quality of the cover images was imperative, otherwise it would have been a pointless exercise to offer readers a choice.”

Turn the page to learn to paint like John Kearney







Photoshop

BEAUTY IS ONLY SKIN DEEP

Discover how to give your fantasy characters realistic skin using Photoshop. **John Kearney** fleshes some ideas out

Of all the surfaces an artist can paint, skin is traditionally one of the hardest to get right – and it becomes even trickier when your character is not human! Through experience, I have realised that there are no gimmicks, tricks or Photoshop hacks that can be used to make life easier when it comes to painting convincing flesh. I believe the key to improving is investing some time and effort into the subject matter, so that you can gradually train your eye to solve problems without reference. It may be worth doing this in the hope that when the stabilisers come off your bike, you're able to ride it without falling off.

Luckily, there are some things you can do to help improve your ability to render skin; it's less about your painting style and the tools you use, though, and more about what's in your mental library. With that in mind, I'd like to share some observations that may help.

Like most materials, skin colour is relative to the light conditions that are taking place around it. All light illuminating your character's skin will directly affect its colour and its properties. You can have any colour as skin, still recognisable as such because of its fleshy attributes. Therefore, the base colour of the skin is only as important as its inherent properties and the surrounding light. What are its properties, I hear you say? It helps to think of the surface in a more complex way, so that you're thinking a little deeper than just surface colours.

1 Skin properties

Flesh is one of many materials capable of absorbing and scattering light rays (other examples include wax and soap). The effect is commonly known to 3D artists as sub-surface scattering (SSS), an essential quality that should be taken into account when attempting to paint believable skin.

It sounds complicated, but it isn't if you consider this practical example: press a torch under your fingers and look at the way the light has penetrated your flesh and made your blood visible. Although it may be an extreme example of SSS in action, the same effect is visible in human skin even when the light is less intense. It may not be immediately recognisable in the same way, but it is there to some degree, and forms one of the properties that's responsible for giving flesh a radiant glow.

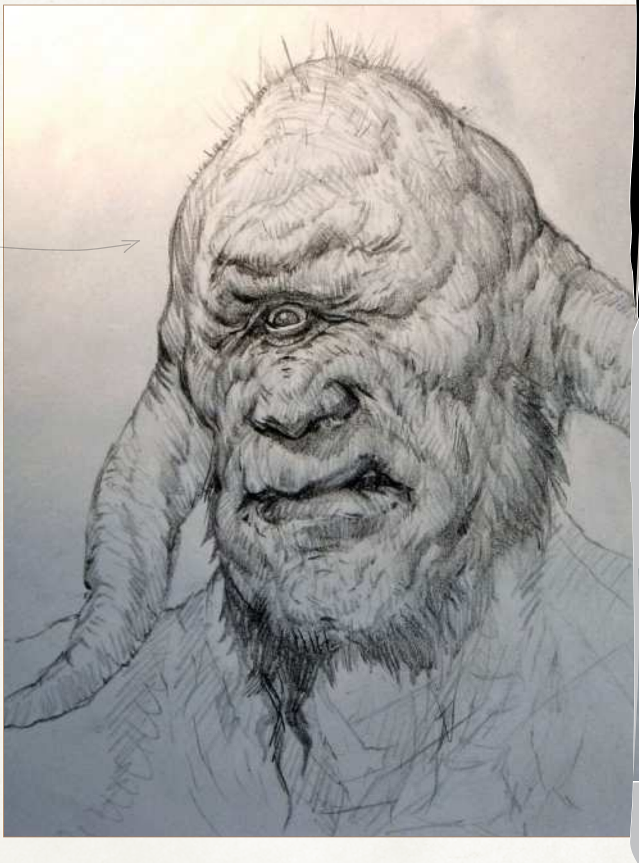
Another significant attribute of skin is its capacity for reflectivity, which results in specular highlights picking out details such as wrinkles, furrows or natural bumps on the surface. The reflectivity of skin can vary greatly, and the amount depends on how oily or wet the skin is. Generally, dry skin tends to be matte, with highlights being very scattered and diffused. On the other hand, oily or wet skin is a lot more reflective – highlights appear much sharper, more focused, and more intense. Keeping these things in mind help me approach the next stages with more confidence and assurance.

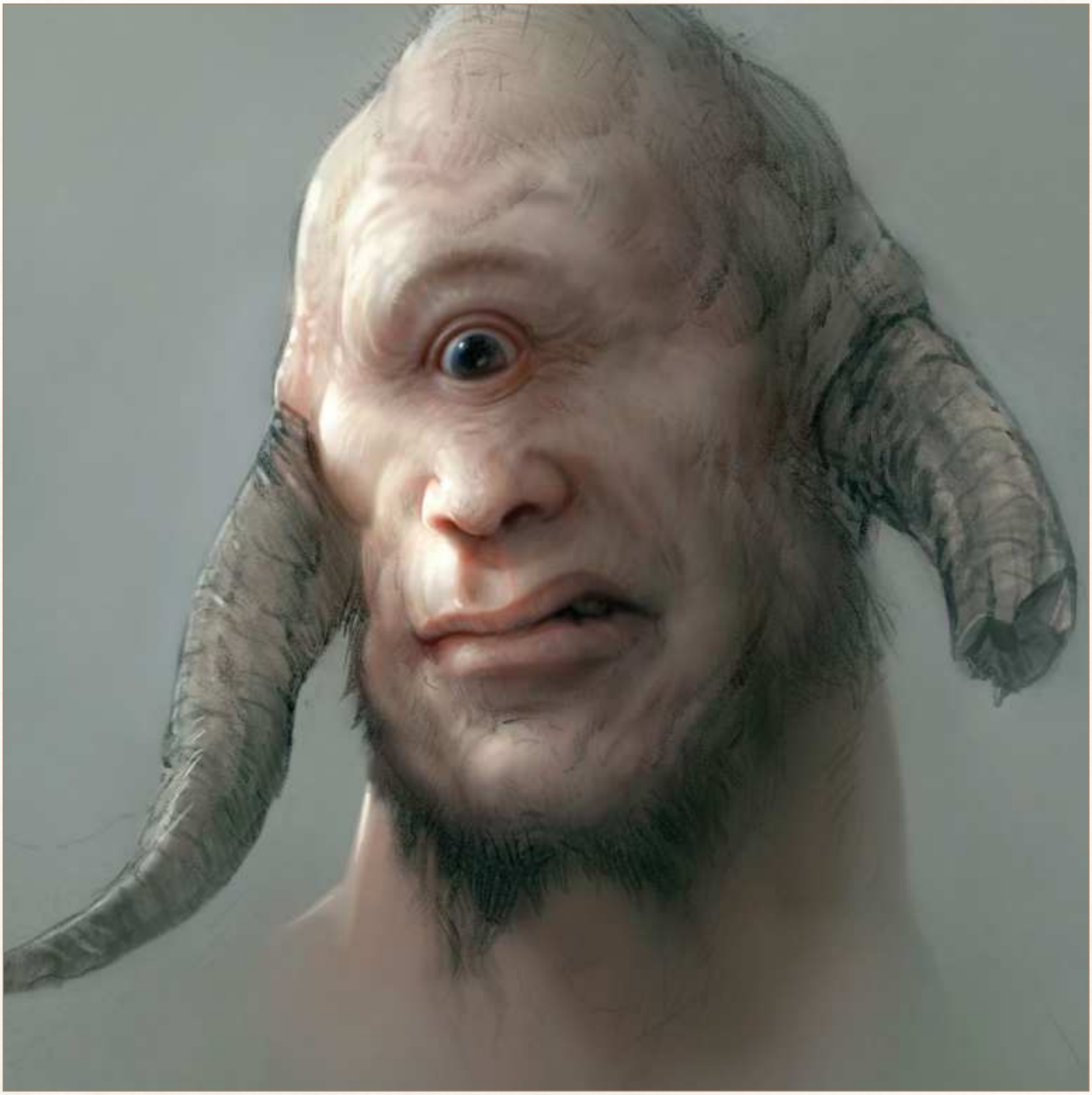
2 Concept and foundations

To start, I like to nail my character concept. I rough out some thumbnails using a pencil, and then choose one that works best. After this, I will either draw a refined version, or scan my thumbnail directly into Photoshop. With the ideas in place, I am a step closer to visualising the finished character, minimising the chances of something going wrong.

3 Lighting considerations

Lighting is a key factor. I think carefully about what I want the painting to achieve and then work out my light directions. In this case, I wanted to show a close-up of my Cyclops character with his flesh clearly exhibiting the properties of SSS. To achieve this, I decided that a key light and some reflected ambient lighting would illustrate things clearly.



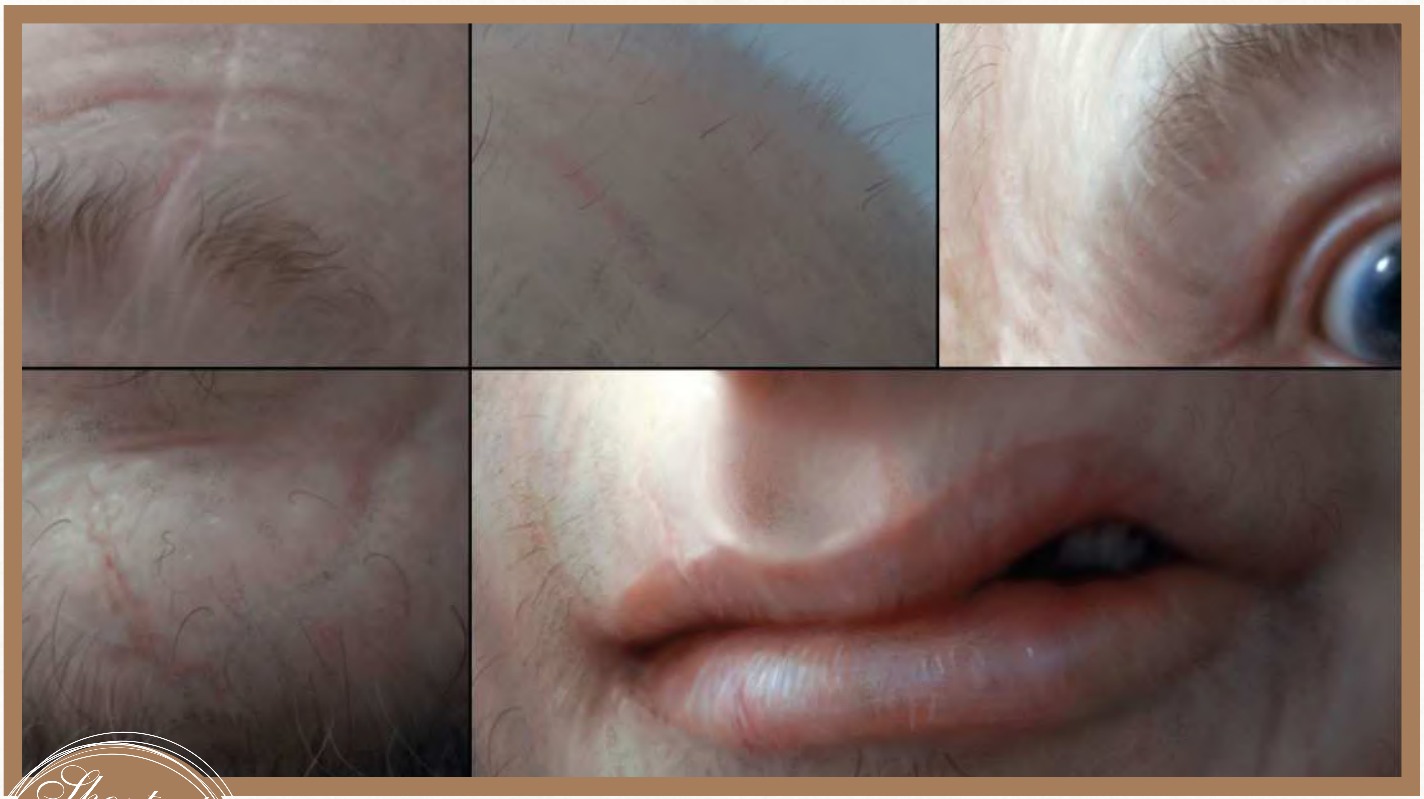


4 Blocking it in

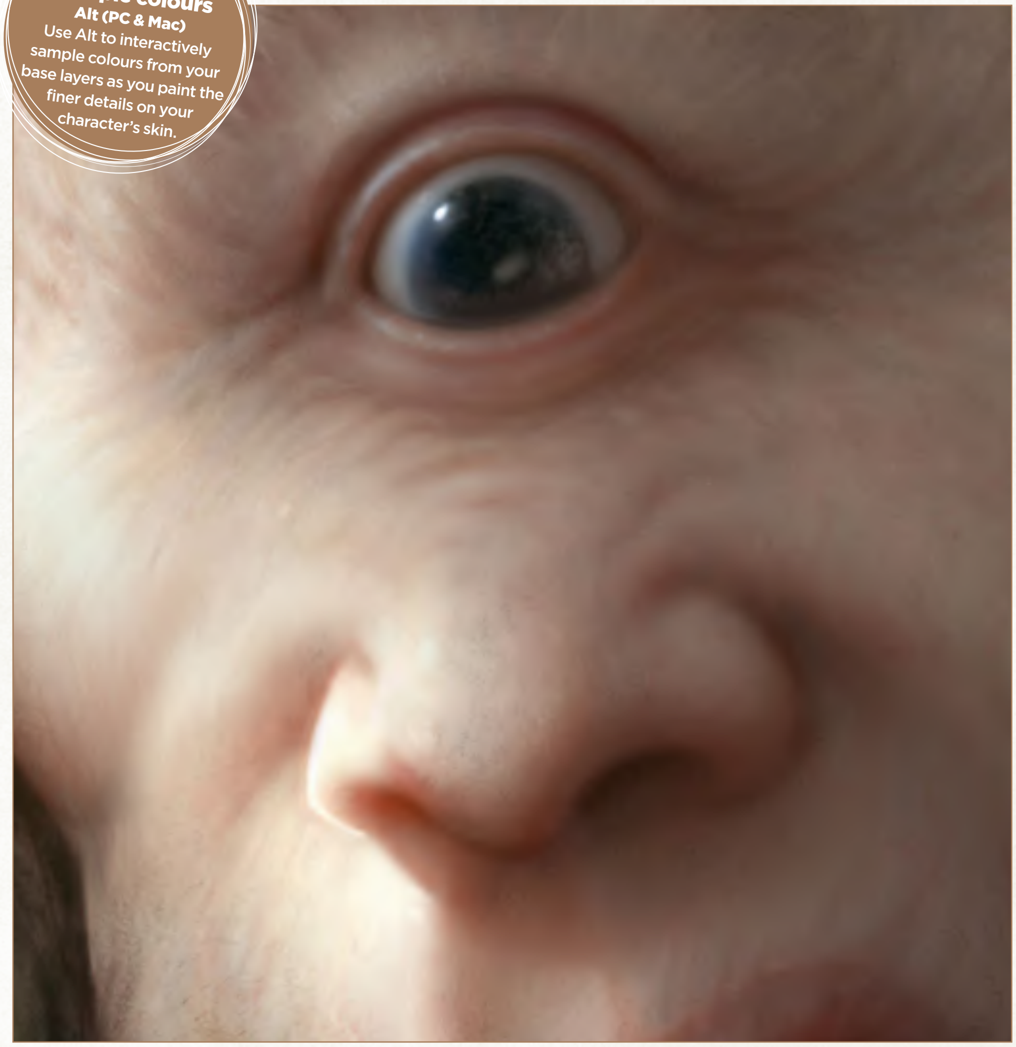
Starting with a rough concept sketch will often mean little or no direct reference material, so it's time to rely on research and preparation. The stabilisers are off, and I'm all too aware from previous accidents that the best approach is usually to start simply. If my intention is to paint a lot of detail, then I am prepared to do it in several passes. I start in a way that gets the core foundations down so that I have something to build on. Initially, I use the Soft-edged and Hard-edged brushes for the base colours and values. They enable me to paint the first pass without having to think too much about texture or detail. At this stage, my focus is on light direction, colour, intensity, and shadows.

5 Rendering the skin

After blocking in the basics, I begin to think about injecting more life into the flesh by carefully using colour and tone. Because colours are relative, I always think of them in terms of warm and cool. On thinner parts of his flesh (such as eyelid and nostrils), I tried to show the penetration of light by painting the transition into shadow a little warmer. I also do the same for any raised areas of flesh that would catch the light. The shadow side of the full head would be virtually impervious to light penetration, which means the skin colour will be tinted by the ambient light. This means building up the different tones in several passes.



Shortcuts
Sample colours
Alt (PC & Mac)
Use Alt to interactively sample colours from your base layers as you paint the finer details on your character's skin.



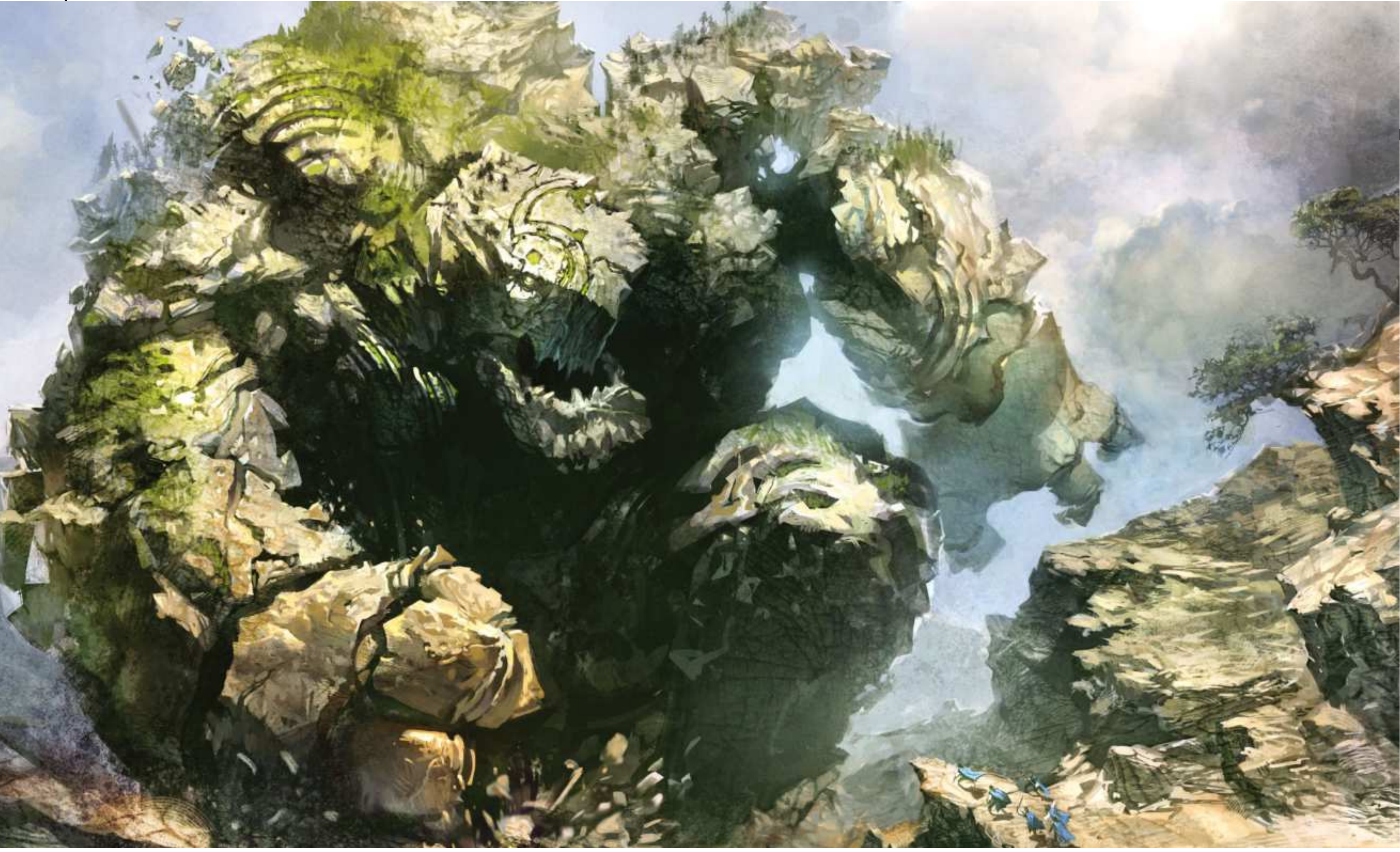
6 Skin details and refinement

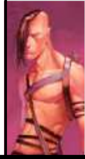
If you like painting macro details, there are other things you can do to take the realism of the surface even further. Although not for the faint of heart, pores, scars, moles, spots, hairs, veins and other natural occurrences and irregularities will make it look highly refined and lifelike. I usually paint them once I am happy with the way the light is reacting to the skin's surface. I utilise Photoshop's natural media brushes with a low Opacity setting for roughness and texture. I hope you found this mini-workshop useful and I wish you the best of luck with future creations!

PRO SECRETS

Tweak colours

If part of your concept sketch isn't working as well as you would like then don't be afraid to change it for the better. Allowing yourself to continually improve what you're working on is all part of the process, and helps to fine-tune your artistic judgement. One example is to colour correct your painting. I regularly tweak the colours as I go along, or I do it right at the end by adjusting the Levels or using a photo filter for a particular mood.





EARTH ELEMENTAL
Svetlin's subject matter has remained similar to when he started but his technique has developed. Looser shapes and lines as well as light tones prove powerful

Interview

Svetlin Velinov

Illustrator, animator and comic artist, **Svetlin Velinov** uses dramatic colour and even more striking characters to convey the emotions behind his artwork

To those who instructed Svetlin Velinov in his formal art studies, the fact that he creates graphics on a computer is pure heresy. Yet the Bulgarian artist, whose comic art and distinctive fantasy artwork has been wowing fans for years, now says that he uses nothing else.

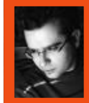
"My professors, educated in the staunchly academic tradition, felt that painting is all about getting dirty with paint and materials," he says. "However, for good or for ill, I knew my own mind and followed my own path."

Instead of indulging in his early aptitude for painting and continuing his education at the National Academy of Arts, Svetlin chose instead to study animation in the New Bulgarian University in Sofia. It was here that he was exposed to then new digital techniques and discovered what is now an enduring love for the comic art form. From the these early experiences, Svetlin knew where he wanted to take his career.

But, just like any other student, Svetlin needed to earn a living from his chosen path, so he found a job at one of the most prestigious advertising agencies in Sofia, where he worked for three years as their creative designer. These early years proved pivotal for the fresh artist.

Artist **PROFILE**

Svetlin Velinov



One of the most sought-after fantasy artists currently working, Svetlin is the new breed of artist who has embraced digital techniques and isn't afraid to incorporate them into his workflow. With a client list that includes various video game companies as well as Wizards of the Coast, it doesn't seem as if Svetlin's star is going to wane any time soon. Look out for more!
www.velinov.cgsociety.org

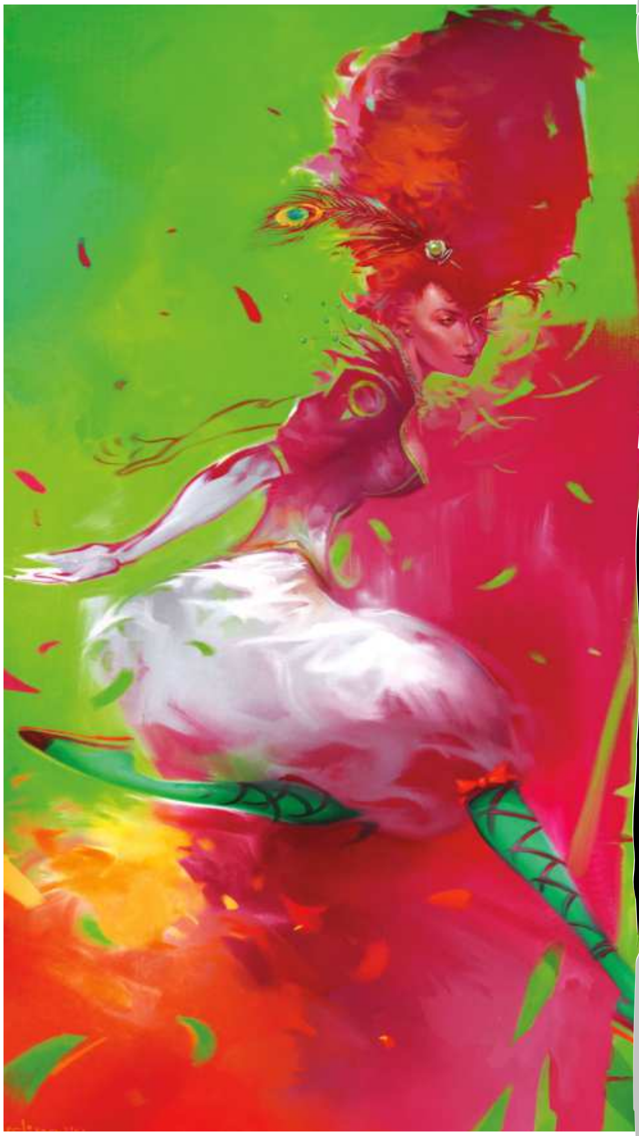
GETTING STARTED

"Over time, my interests expanded," he recalls. "I found myself drawn to fantasy illustrations, character design and concept design. The lively and dynamic drawing style, typical of the comic genre, impacted on my general approach to art and helped me build an individual graphic style."

In 2003, Svetlin quit his job and dedicated himself to drawing. He now works as a freelance artist, a role that enables him to work on a variety of personal and professional projects. Svetlin doesn't pretend that his

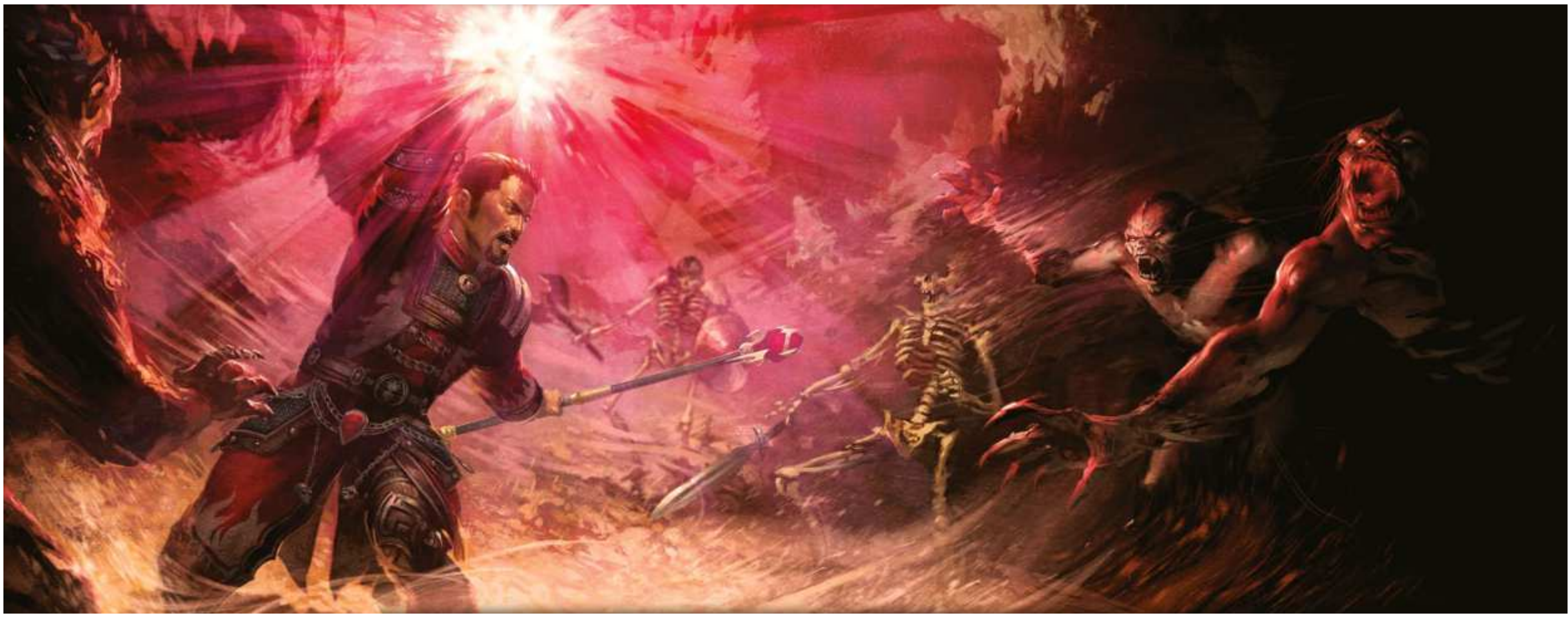
➳

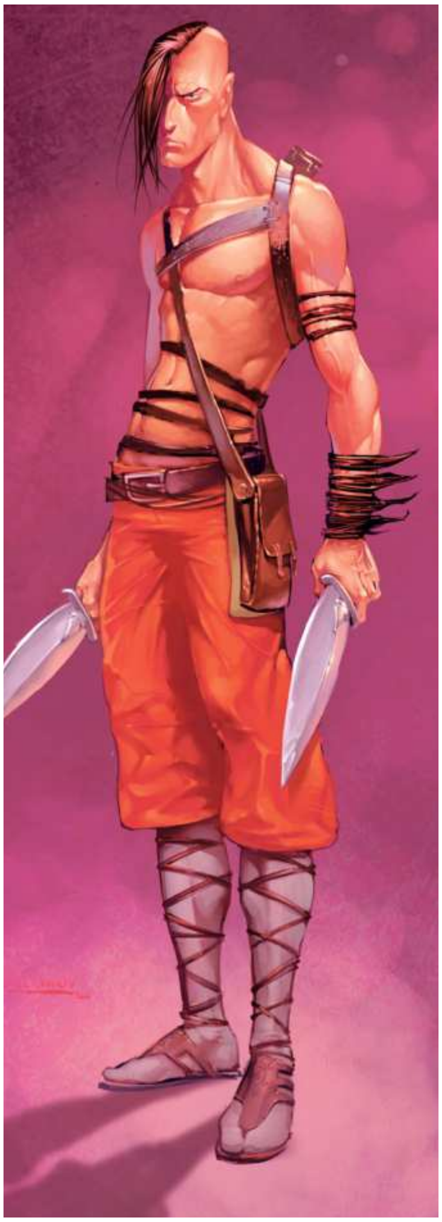
BUG BOLTER
There's still room for some traditional goblins for trading card games in Svetlin's new and numerous freelance projects



JUMP GODDESS
This personal project showcases Svetlin's eye-popping use of colour, it's quite different from his freelance work

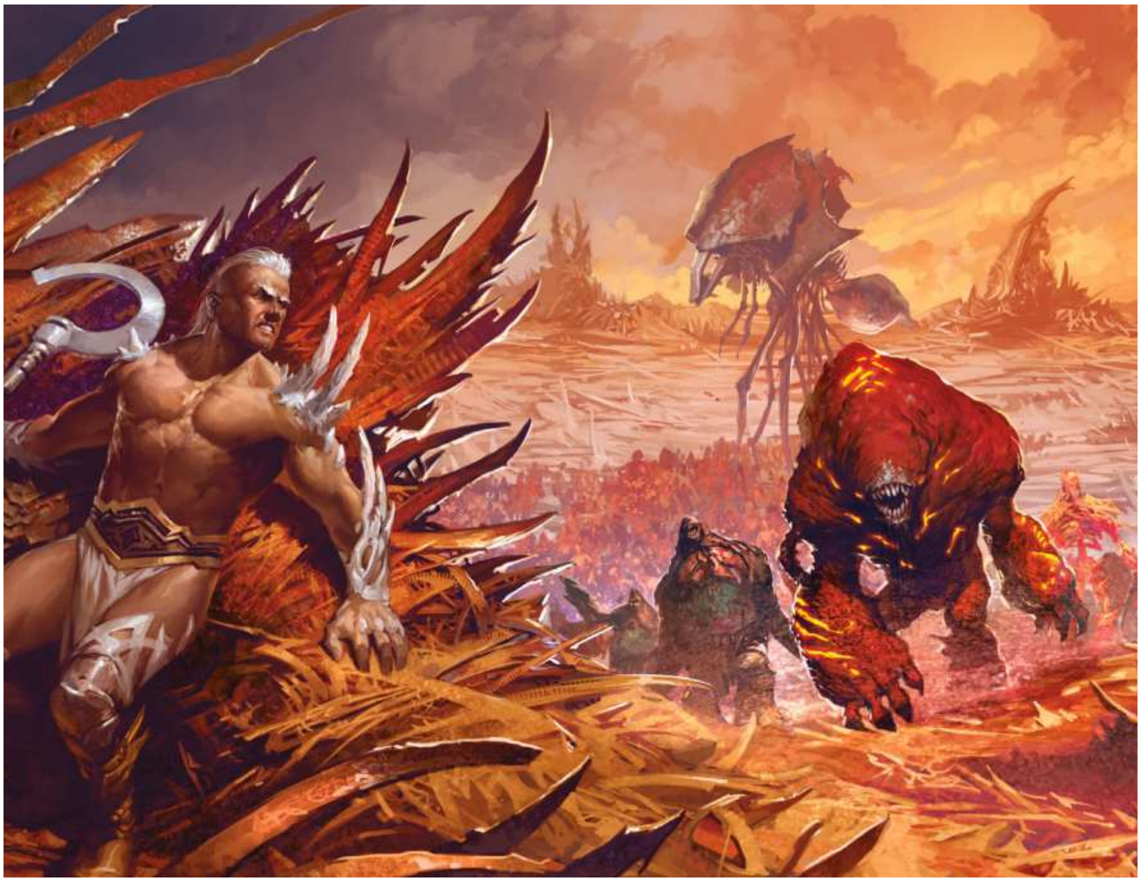
> “The lively and dynamic drawing style, typical of the comic genre, impacted on my approach to art”





> To be really good at 3D art, it's not enough to just have talent. You need to think in a 3D way

HELLBREED
Stunning use of colour and contrast highlight why Svetlin is one of the world's best new fantasy artists



BONE KILLER
Though not created for any special project or client, the colours in this piece and the strong characterisation bear all the hallmarks of Svetlin's distinctive style

UNCONTESTED INVASION
Overtures to the late, great Frank Frazetta are clear in this beautiful painting from Svetlin

background is grounded in the comic art and fantasy genres, rather he says he was influenced by the classicism of Bulgarian and Russian art. "Only when I discovered artists such as Luis Royo, Brom and Simon Bisley, did I decide I wanted to experiment in this aspect of painting," he explains.

Running concurrently with Svetlin's journey into the world of comic graphics was his departure from the analogue world of art production. "In time, I was totally turned off from using paper," he continues. "The scanner became useless. I now do everything with the computer."

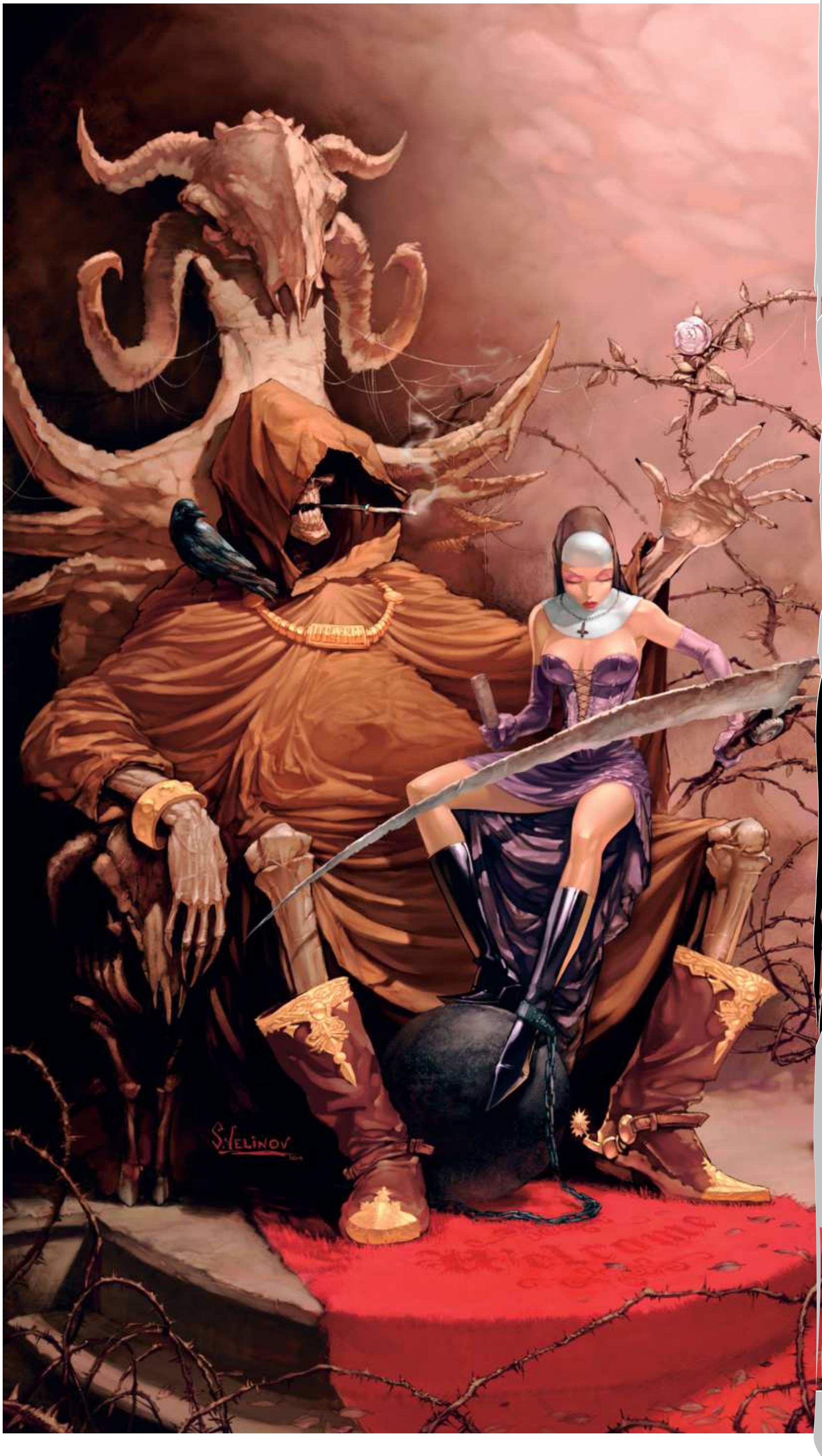
A PHOTOSHOP FAN

For this digital approach, Svetlin prefers to use Photoshop. "This is the program I feel most comfortable using, and with which I feel I can best develop my artistic potential," he says. "I use Painter, too, but unlike Photoshop, my confidence with this program is much weaker, and so the environment feels less intuitive."

On the 3D side of things, Svetlin says he's a big fan of ZBrush. "I really fell in love with this software," he says. "To be really good at 3D art, it's not enough to just have talent. You need to think in a three-dimensional way. That's why there are so few artists who are really good at both 2D and 3D art. ZBrush provides the 2D artist with an accessible way to get in touch with this 'unknown domain' and really takes the fear factor out of manipulating 3D objects."

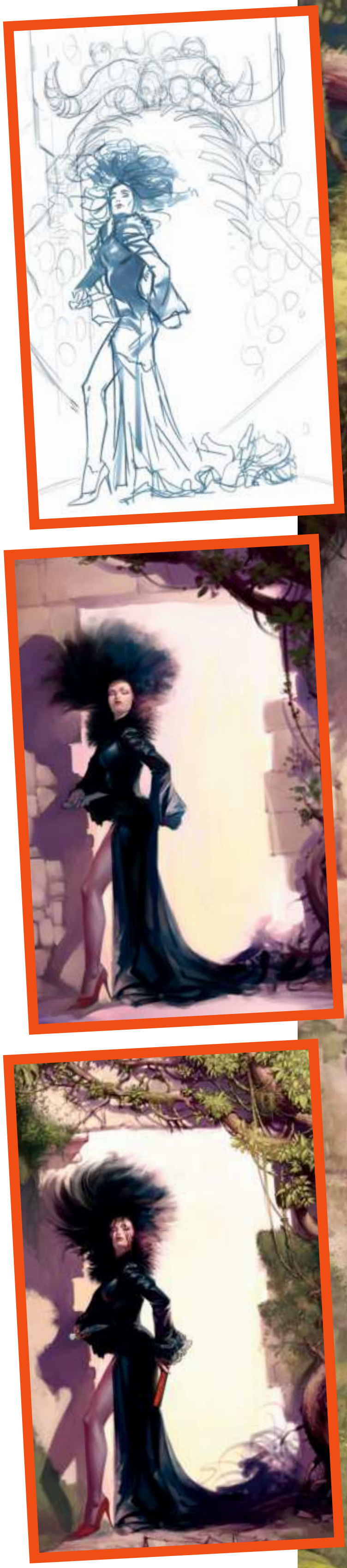
THE PROCESS

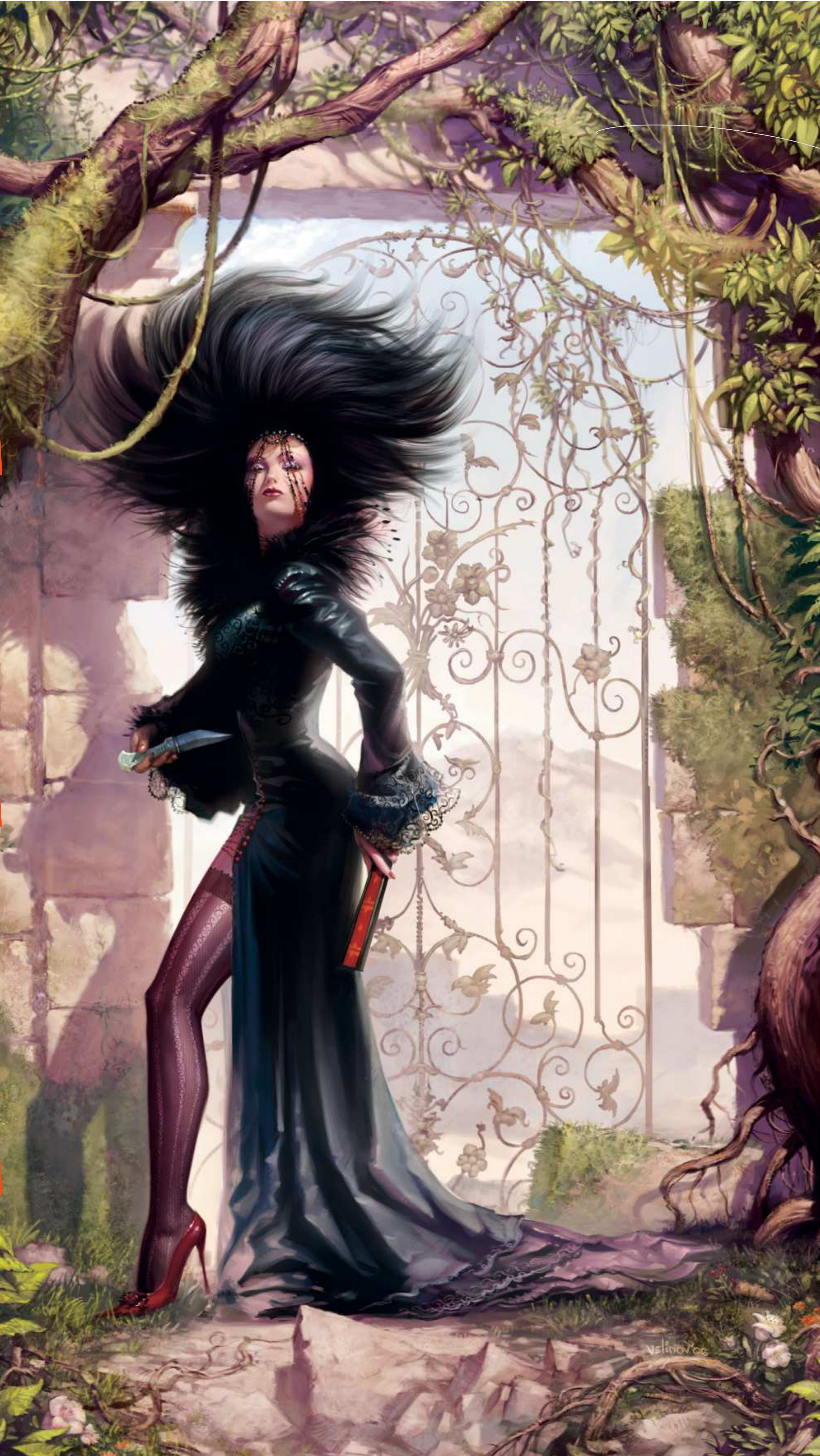
After taking the plunge and going freelance, Svetlin honed his style and improved his drawing techniques. He says it's difficult to generalise when describing how he creates his unique artwork, however, he reveals the basics: "I begin by roughly sketching with the brush."My approach depends on whether I have a concrete idea or I'm just looking for an outline or another form to provide inspiration. After the rough sketch, I try to clear up the composition, working on specific sections. I lighten and flesh out the dark silhouette, then set the form in stone, designing the character and background, and further developing the colour. Applying the right lighting is very important in my pictures. It gives life to the drawing and creates the necessary ambience. Then comes the fine detailing stage and the addition of any important



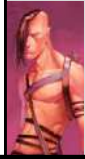
MASTER AND SERVANT

One of Svetlin's favourite pictures, this was created for his participation in a CGTalk competition. "Could there be the slightest hint of love between these characters, or are they are damned to be master and servant?" he says





SOUL DANCER
Svetlin describes his greatest achievement: "If I had to describe my art, I'd say it is a mess of vibrant feelings, full of pain thoughts and suicidal happiness, and all this is in Soul Dancer"



SOUL DANCER

Svetlin looks deep into the character

"I've always wanted to create a picture with a deeper and enduring feeling," says Svetlin. "I hope that with this one I've conveyed the hidden emotions under the heroine's haughty mask. I wanted people to understand the loneliness of her solitary reign in this 'lost world' kingdom and the hidden despair on her stony face."

Svetlin started with a rough drawing and explored some ideas for the setting.

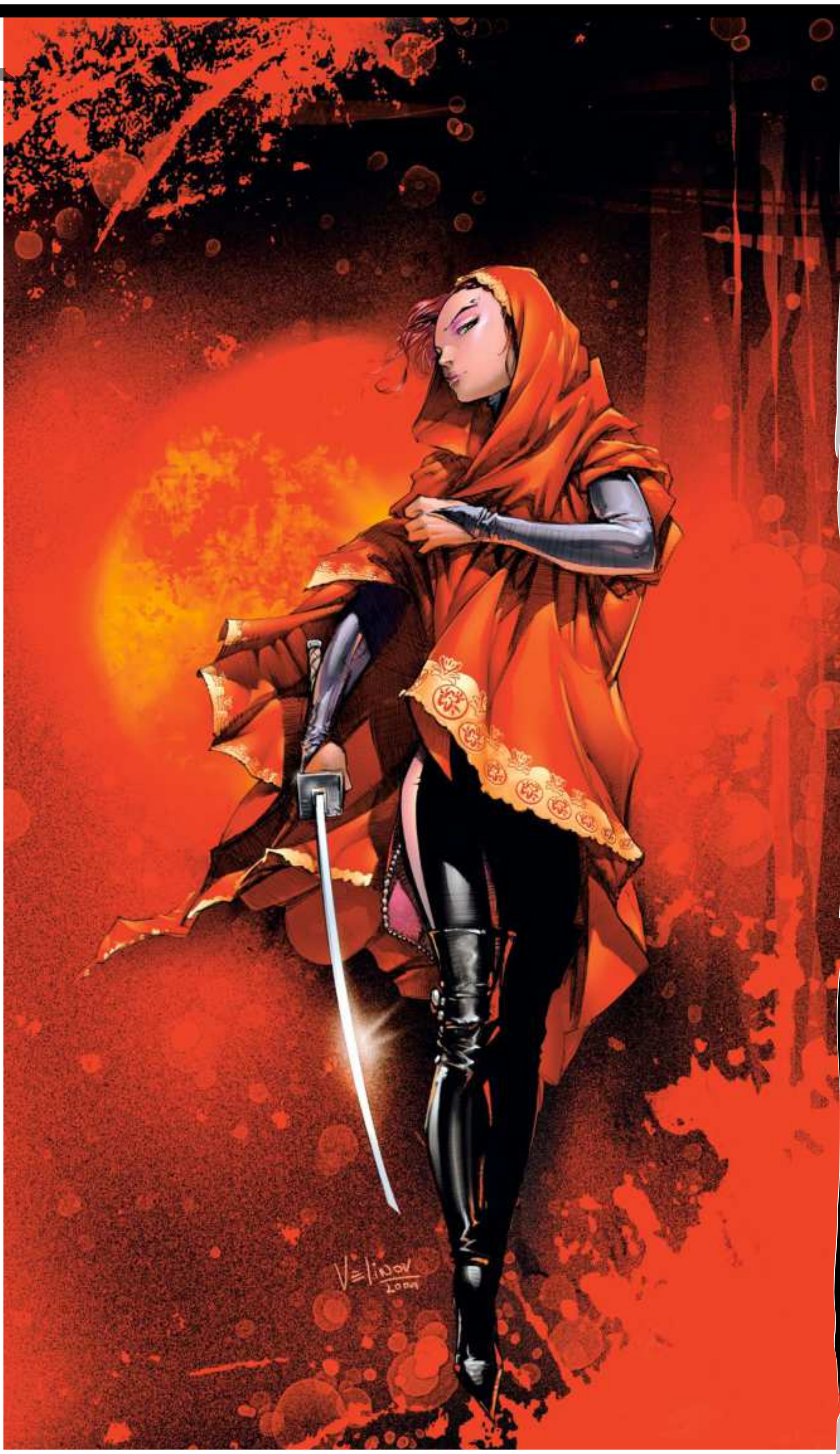
"I wanted to show contrast between the character and the background using colours, and also conveying contrasting ideas, such as good and bad, life and death," he explains. "The demonic door symbolised a lost soul. The knife in her hand is the link with the dead. The entry door leads to her ultimate salvation, though what's hidden behind this door may be worse than before."

The next step changed the whole concept and idea behind the piece. Svetlin decided to express contrast through the internal conflict of the character. "I used the fan as a link with life, a counterbalance to the deathly radiation of the character," he says. "I decided to replace the demonic door with a neutral environment. I now wanted the background to be melancholic, a place where time has no meaning, it's just waiting to be rediscovered."

The last step was to pull everything together. "This was the key moment where I harmonised and balanced the whole drawing," says Svetlin. "There were many 'busy' areas that I had to calm so that important accent colours could emerge. I scattered the plants and gave the environment a much more intense feeling.

"The loftiness of the character and the sense of superiority was the best way to show that behind this stone mask, which lacks emotion, there's a desperate and hurt, but also a strong and definite, woman."

Svetlin isn't sure that he achieved his initial goal with Soul Dancer, but says it's enough if it manages to provoke some feeling and emotion in the viewer.



RED MOON

"This was created when I worked as a designer," says Svetlin. "I didn't expect the impact this illustration would have on my development as an artist. Maybe this piece marks the beginning of the dream"

accent colours," he explains. Red Moon was the first piece of work that Svetlin published online, at the CGTalk forum. It garnered huge interest and received good feedback. "I know that the forums aren't objective enough and one can often receive praise," he says. "However, this feedback made me believe in my capabilities and my potential. It made me look seriously at becoming a digital artist."

In the early days Svetlin says his biggest challenge was his time spent working on the environmental concept work for video game *Death Jr. 2* by Konami. "This was probably my first brush with the professional market and it defined my working style," he reveals. "It taught me a lot and made me more disciplined, because I had to be exact and work to a tight deadline. I succeeded because I just couldn't afford to fail."

During the last few years Svetlin's career has taken off dramatically, he has worked on illustrations for leading products such as Warhammer 40K and Warmachine. "The work on the projects was a real challenge, but fun," he says. Since then Svetlin has worked on a video game project for the Nintendo DS and a character concept for an MMO video game. He has also become a regular *World of Warcraft* illustrator and worked with Dark Horse on one of their editions.

"I have a stimulating and interesting work schedule, which provides me with real pleasure and satisfaction," he says.

Since his early success Svetlin has gone on to refine his digital art, creating more stylised images and experimenting with the toolset. In 2009 he created a series of digital paintings for the Facebook App *Castle Age*. He's also become a regular illustrator for Wizards of the Coast, creating card art and illustrations for Magic: The Gathering, with his art for the Scars of Mirrodin game showcasing his skills.

That's not to say Svetlin is content just yet. "In the future, I hope to produce a book showcasing the best of my work," says the artist. We can't wait to see what else this artist has to offer.

> **"In the future, I hope to produce a book showcasing the best of my work"**

Turn the page to learn to paint like Svetlin Velinov

Photoshop

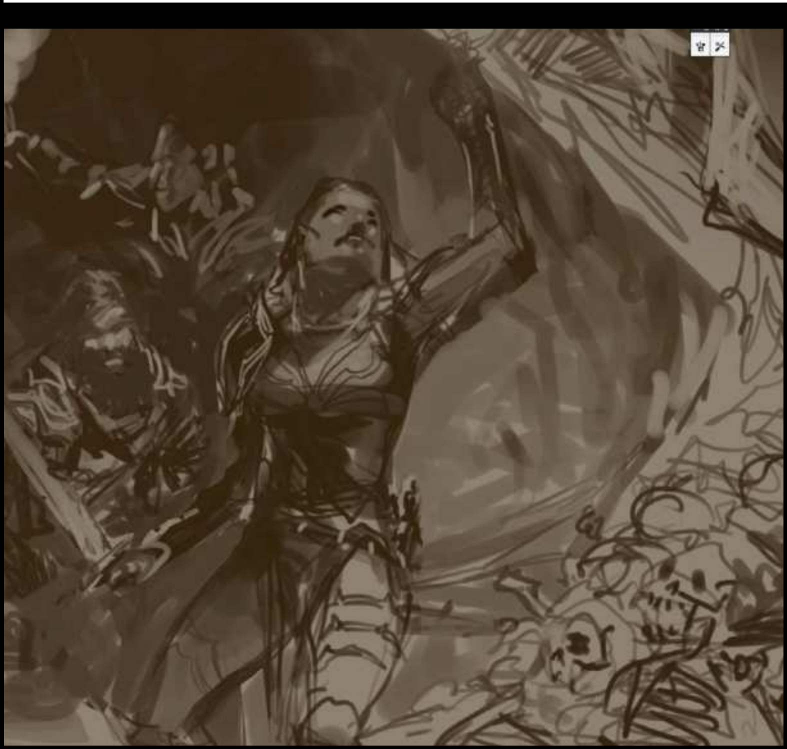
CREATE A CLASSIC FANTASY SCENE

Svetlin Velinov takes staple fantasy ingredients – a band of heroes, an evil lair and an unspeakable horror – and brings them to life with ease

The starting point of every illustration is the story, which needs to be told as objectively and clearly as possible. In this case, it's a timeless fantasy scene, which made choosing what to draw fairly easy. I took the classic ingredients – a pretty and gutsy heroine, her trustworthy companions and a stalking, insidious evil – and combined them in an exciting setting.

At first glance, the beast has the advantage, hiding in the darkness of its lair, preparing for a surprise attack. However, the selflessness and strength of the heroes should enable them to gain the upper hand – unless one of them makes a mistake. I try to emphasise the calm moments before the storm when I put the characters in an environment. For example, the danger present in the dark cave contrasts against the light from the outside world, which is mirrored in the brave hearts of the three friends as they prepare to confront their adversary.

Because it's a classic approach to the subject that's been done countless times, I attempt to inject suspense into the story. The struggle between good and evil is an ambiguous affair and it's the shades of storytelling in a painting that catch the viewer's eye. After all, he or she may not always side with the forces of good.



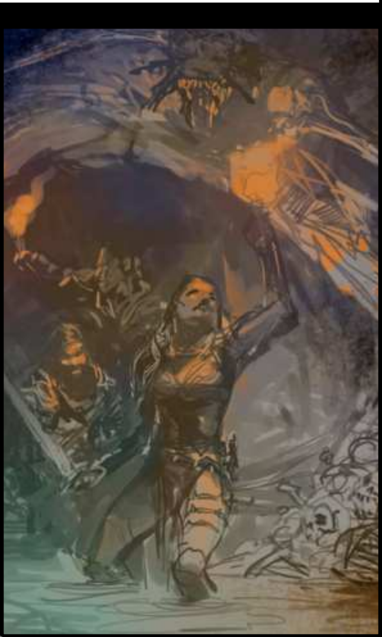
1 Covering the basics

I do a quick sketch that enables me to check that the concept and composition are clear. There's no need to make it a detailed drawing. Many artists do an intricate sketch – an accomplished drawing in its own right – only to overpaint it later on.

PRO SECRETS

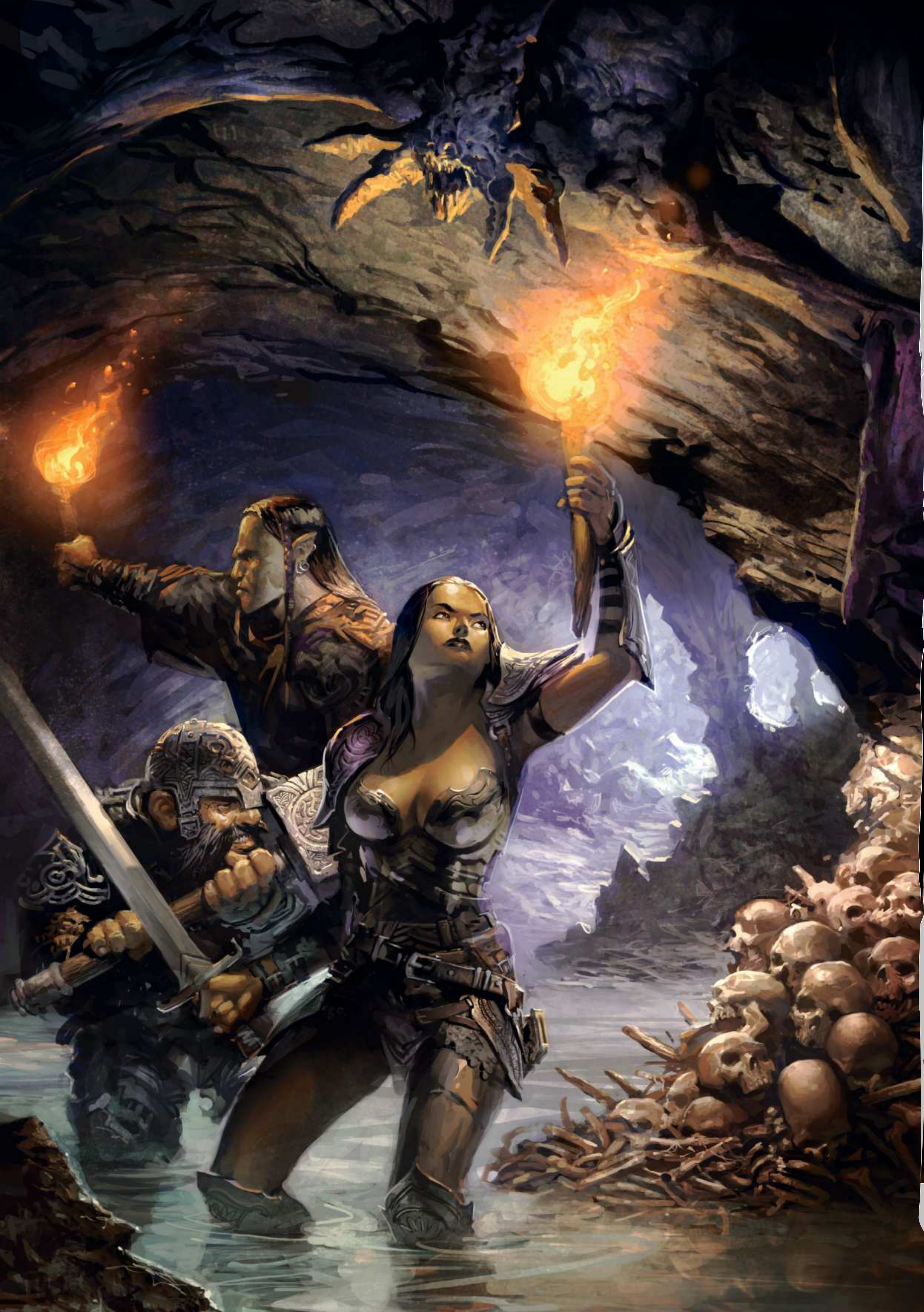
Quick colours

Once you've created a monochrome image, you can easily select the tone you want to work with using the Colour Range option. Furthermore, use the slider to define the range of undertone colours. This is useful when you're colouring or overpainting.



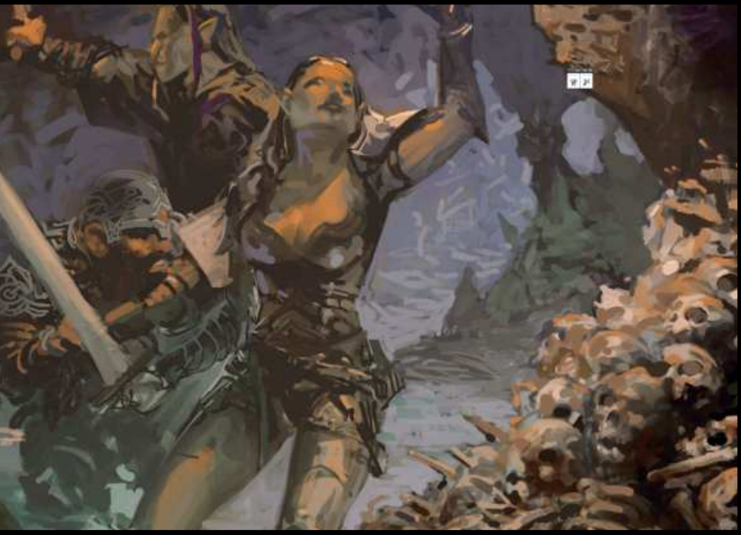
2 Colour choice

The right colour scheme will support the mood, content and ideas of the drawing, so it's crucial to sort this out sooner rather than later. I mark the various areas of colour on a new layer, set to Color mode, and regularly refer to this until the painting is complete.



3 Laying the foundations

I develop the colour scheme further at this stage, and add more details to the scene, making corrections to the figure and environment where necessary. Everything's now in place for me to start work on the painting in greater detail. If I find myself deviating from the foundations that I've laid here, then something's gone wrong!



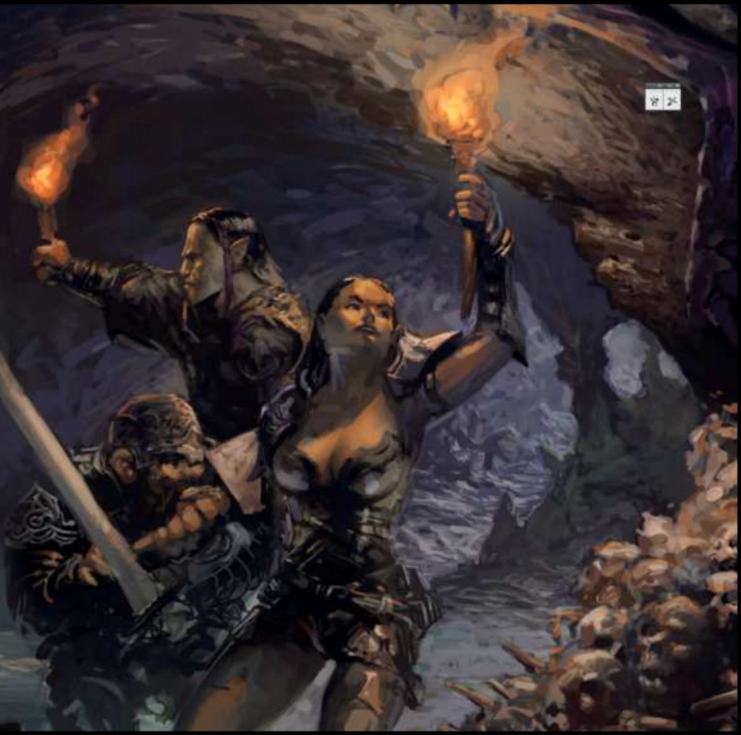
PRO SECRETS

Brush sizes

If you use a Wacom Intuos 3 or 4 tablet, the touch pad can be used to control the size of the brush. You can set this feature up in the tablet's control panel.

4 Colour values and light sources

Next, I create a Multiply layer and start drawing in it, while determining what the lighter areas of the composition would be, based on where the various light sources are, such as the entrance to the cave. Once this important step is out of the way, then the real work on the illustration can begin.



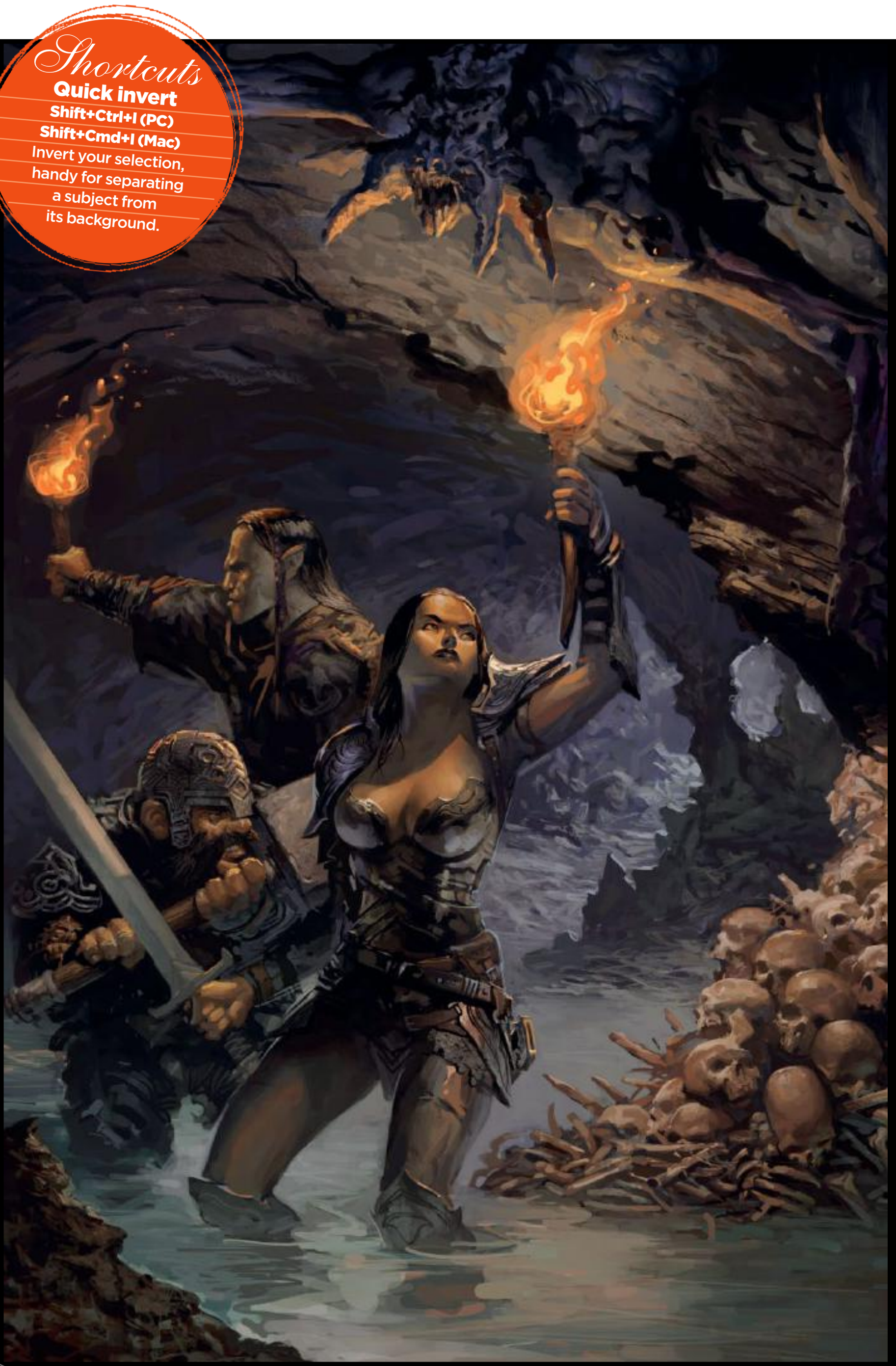
Shortcuts

Quick invert

Shift+Ctrl+I (PC)

Shift+Cmd+I (Mac)

Invert your selection, handy for separating a subject from its background.

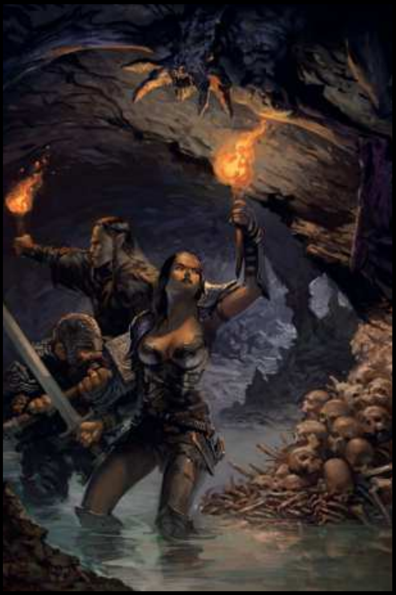


5 Overpaint the image

The painting's elements are defined and its concept as a whole is evident. Although there's a lack of detail, a clear message is sent to the viewer: "You're looking at a critical moment in a classic fantasy adventure." It now needs me to strengthen and focus the visual script. I start by overpainting the elements to create the necessary emphasis.

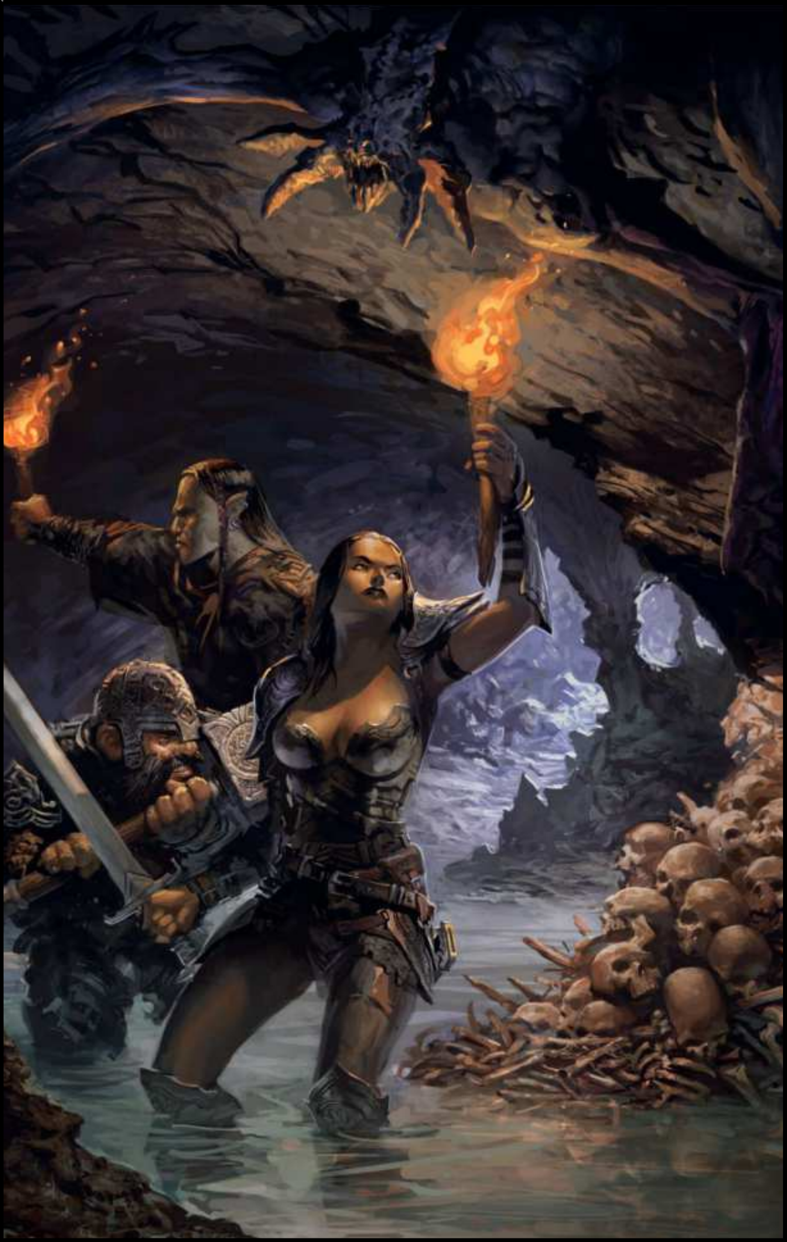
6 Refining the details

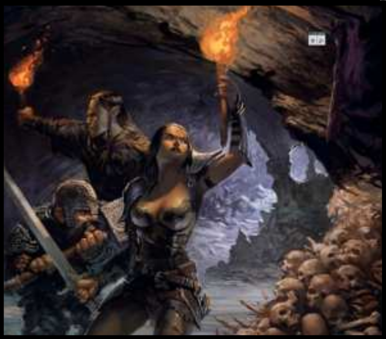
This is my favourite stage; it's like putting the cherry on the cake. Skipping this bit would result in a perfectly acceptable painting, but there would be a sense of incompleteness. It's now that I have fun defining the character of the three heroes by embellishing their armour and weapons. As well as this, I'm improving the figure detail in general.



7 Define the surfaces

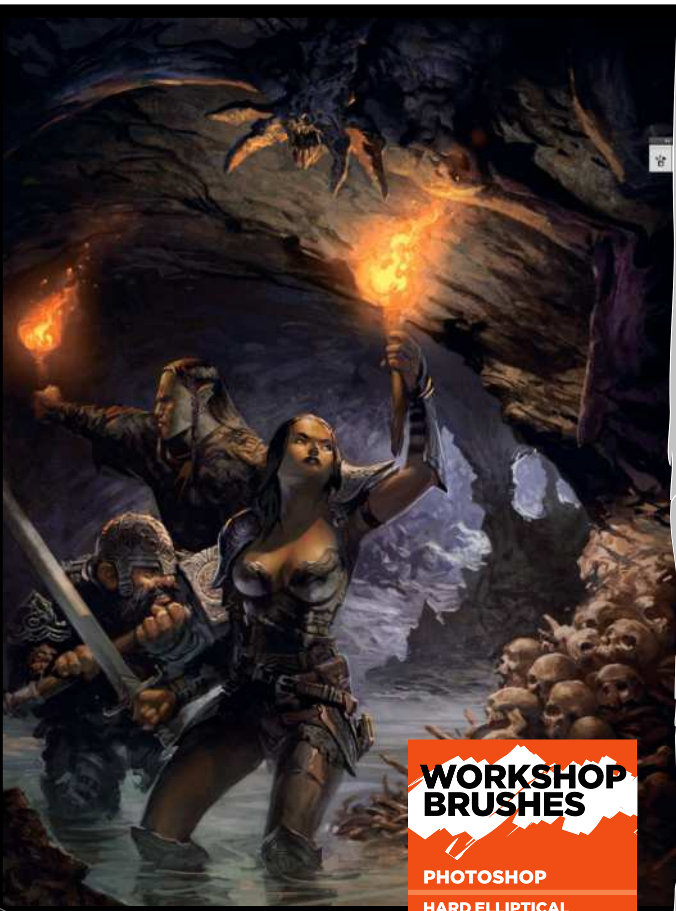
I can use one of two methods to make the surfaces of the environment look more realistic. I could apply a Gaussian blur, or alternatively use different colours. In the latter case, I can apply a sense of warmth and cold, and add appropriate colours to the foreground and background. This helps to convey the idea that our small band of heroes is the only source of heat in an otherwise chilly, waterlogged cave system.





8 Add some subtle textures

Applying textures is usually an important stage in my work. However, in this particular painting, there was no need to go overboard on textures. In order to add substance and completeness to the various objects in the composition, I have used some textures, but these are barely noticeable. I've added a subtle degree of noise, as well as some gentle textures on the rocks.

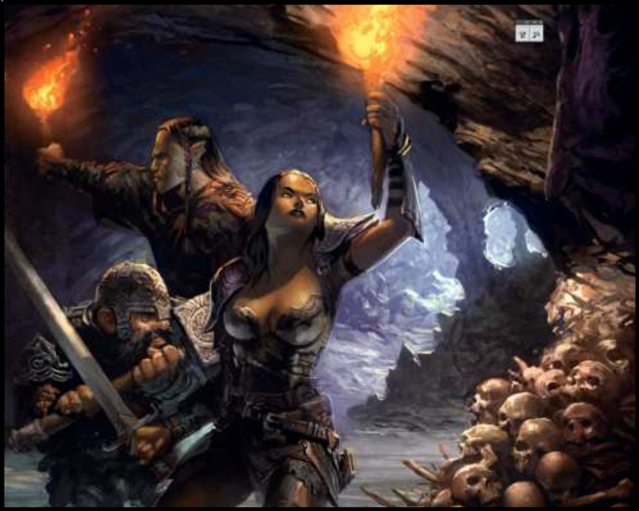


9 Tweaking the lighting

As a finishing stage, I shape and emphasise the light sources. I achieve the glow with the help of a layer set to Linear Dodge. There's light coming from the outside through the cave's entrance and into the monster's lair. It's a metaphor of good versus evil, maintained through the heroes' torches, which are ready to cast light on and defeat any malevolent entity lurking in the darkness.

10 Correcting colour

The last stage of this workshop involves using several Adjustment Layers. With these, I strengthen the contrast by controlling the intensity of the changes with the help of Layer Masks. ●



WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

HARD ELLIPTICAL

HARD ROUND

PLASTIC WRAP

ROCKY

SAMPLED TIPS

These are the brushes that Svetlin used to create this scene.

CORE SKILLS

Tips, advice and techniques from leading artists

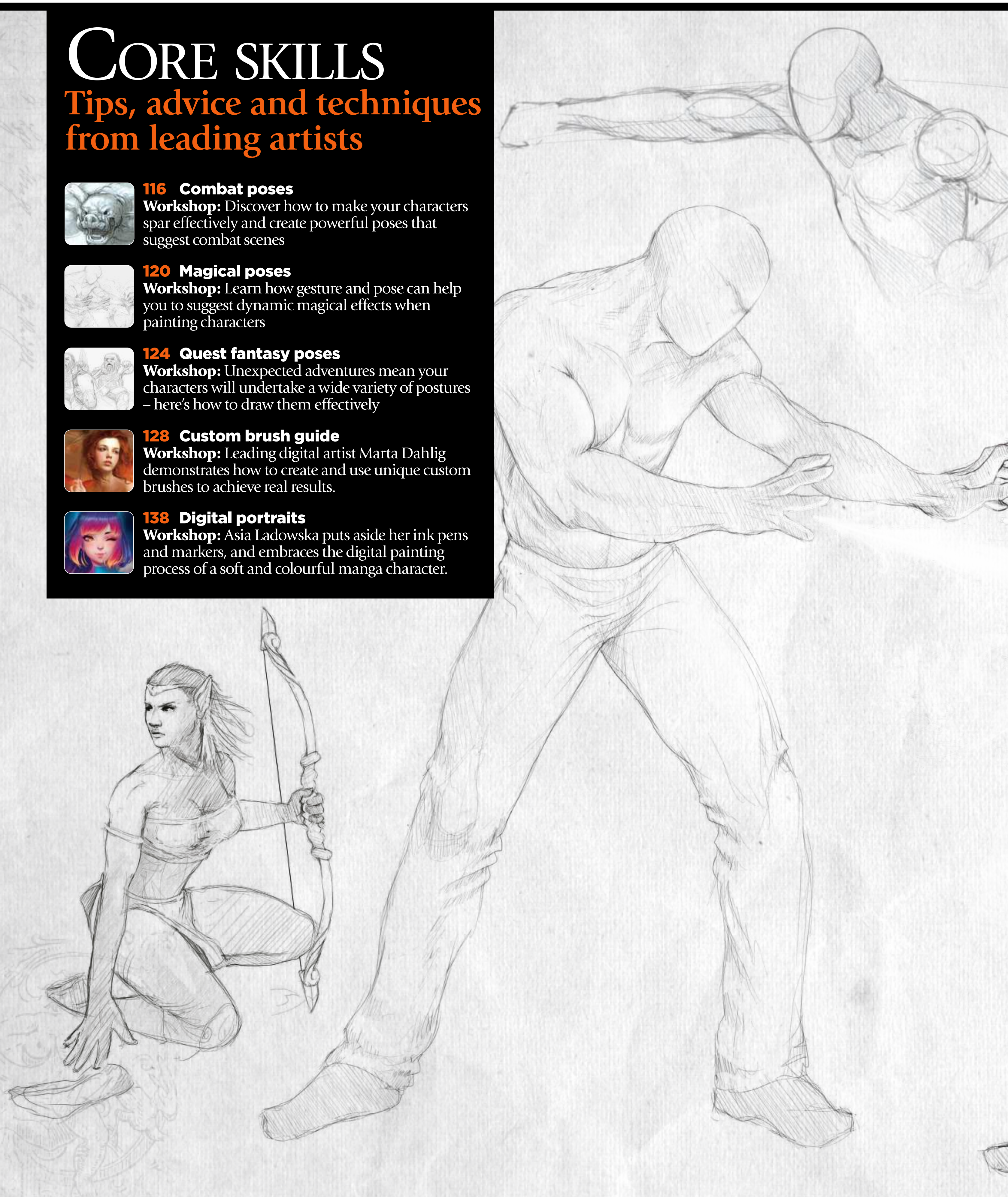
116 Combat poses
Workshop: Discover how to make your characters spar effectively and create powerful poses that suggest combat scenes

120 Magical poses
Workshop: Learn how gesture and pose can help you to suggest dynamic magical effects when painting characters

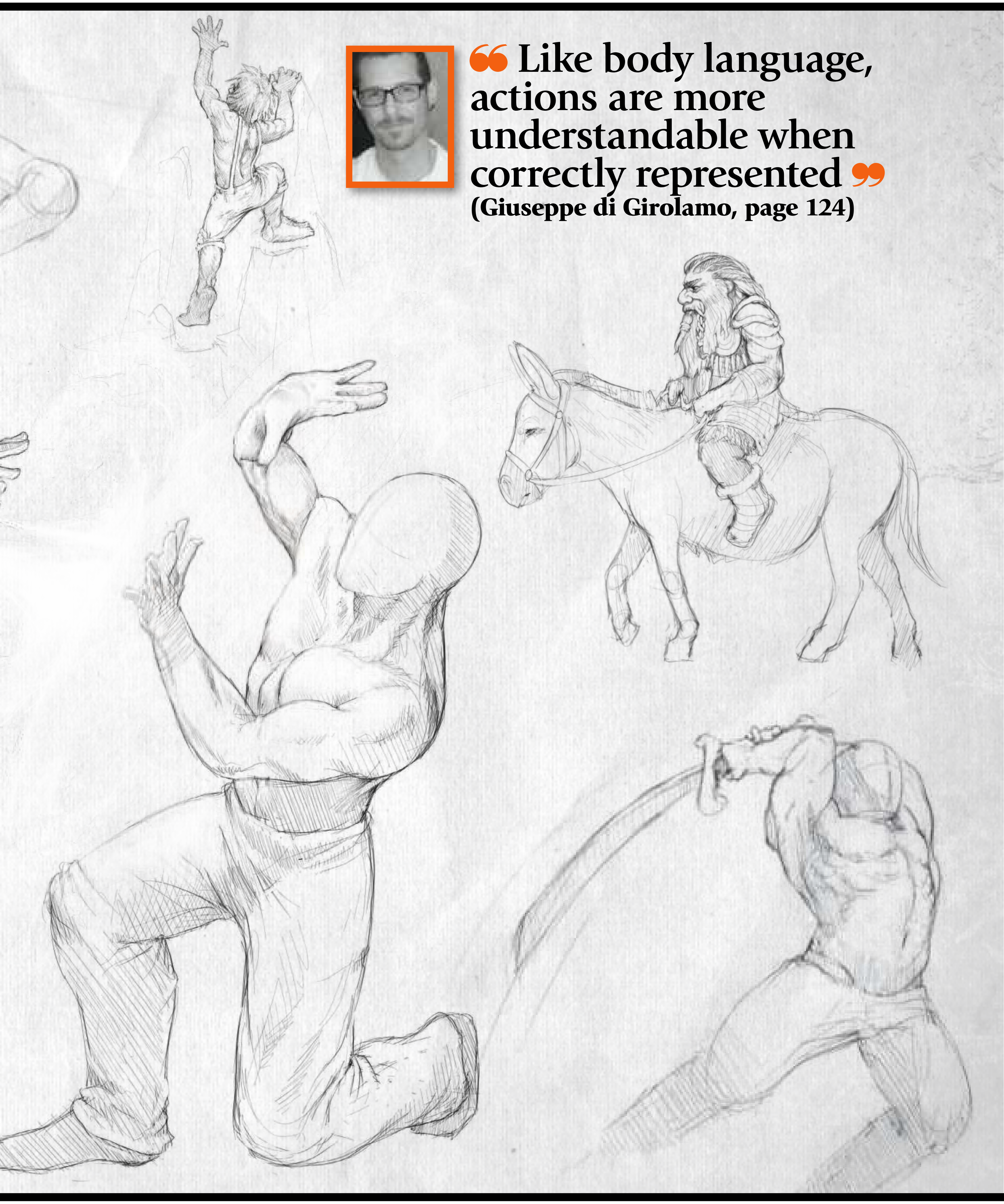
124 Quest fantasy poses
Workshop: Unexpected adventures mean your characters will undertake a wide variety of postures – here's how to draw them effectively

128 Custom brush guide
Workshop: Leading digital artist Marta Dahlig demonstrates how to create and use unique custom brushes to achieve real results.

138 Digital portraits
Workshop: Asia Ladowska puts aside her ink pens and markers, and embraces the digital painting process of a soft and colourful manga character.



> “Like body language, actions are more understandable when correctly represented”
> **(Giuseppe di Girolamo, page 124)**



HOW TO DRAW COMBAT POSES

In this tutorial we'll explain how to make your fighting scenes as lively as possible

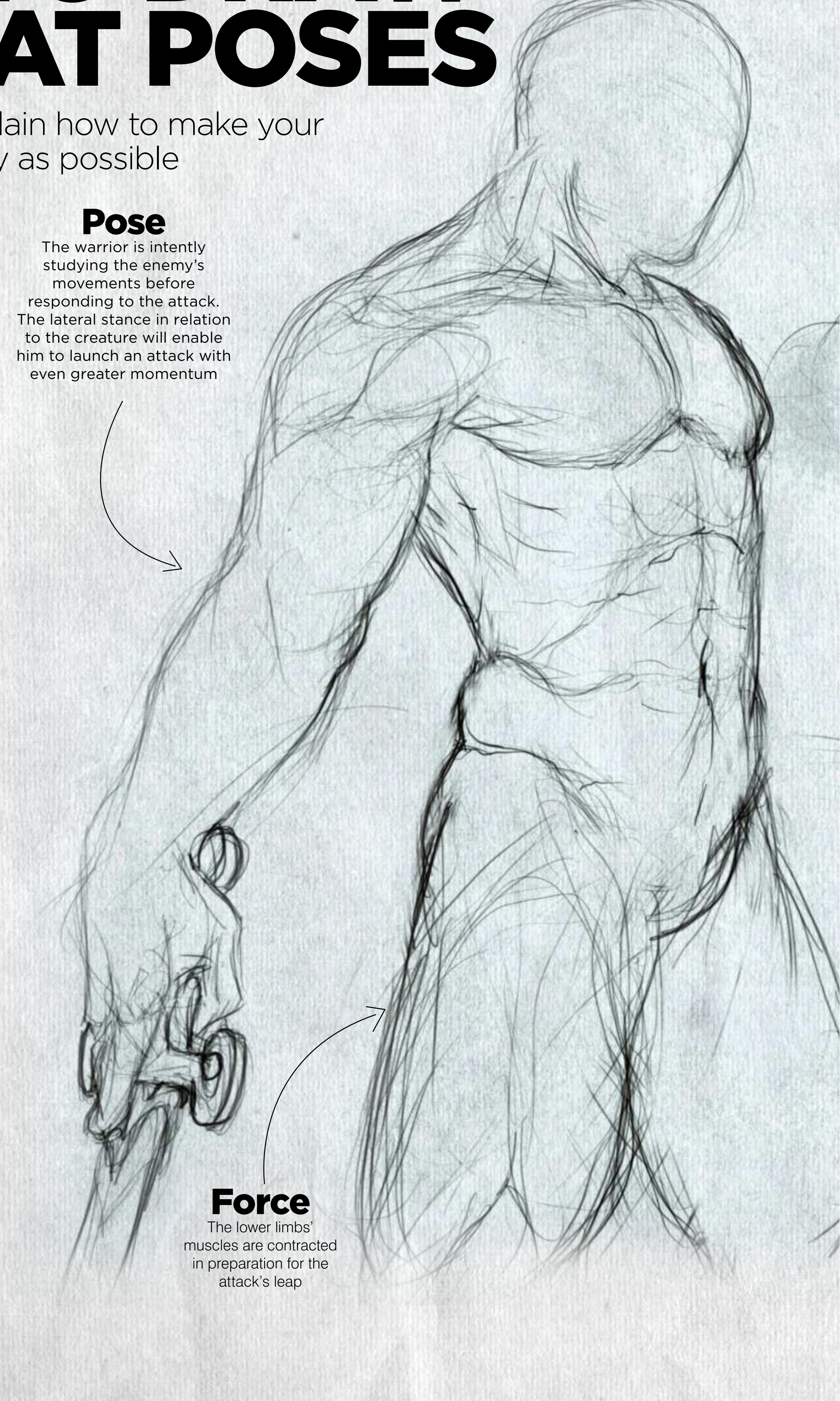
Every muscle, every vein, every line of force is pure expression. So, starting from there, you might ask how we can make a fighting scene both expressive and alive, so that all of that compiled energy in it is apparent to the viewer.

The first key element is muscle structure. As this is extremely important it would be better to gain some knowledge of human anatomy, which can then be easily applied to any figure you might want to draw, such as human beings, mythological creatures or even mythical monsters. Knowing muscle structure and its correct representation will enrich your images and make it easier for the observer to read the drawing and all of its elements.

Tissue characteristics will also add expressivity to the structure. There are hard tissues (such as bones, contracted muscles or tendons) and soft tissues (such as relaxed muscles, adipose tissue and so on). These features can be drawn using a range of techniques, shadows or line thickness, colours or simple shades. For example, a contracted muscle can be rendered by augmenting its volume and increasing the detail and sharpness in the muscle borders on an arm or leg.

As with facial expressions, the body is able to communicate feelings and moods through its pose. For this reason choosing the right pose for your character is extremely important, as every single movement and body stance will enhance the visual sense of their personality. In a fighting scene, minute body details can help the viewer understand who's attacking (for example by the body and fist being hurled forward) and who's defending (for example by a curved bust and hands in front of the face).

To choose the right pose for your drawing, use a real-life model or, alternatively, photos and images from the internet or art and anatomy books. It's crucial to remember that the expressivity of the body is the result of the relationship between, and positioning of, all its parts: limbs, head and hands.

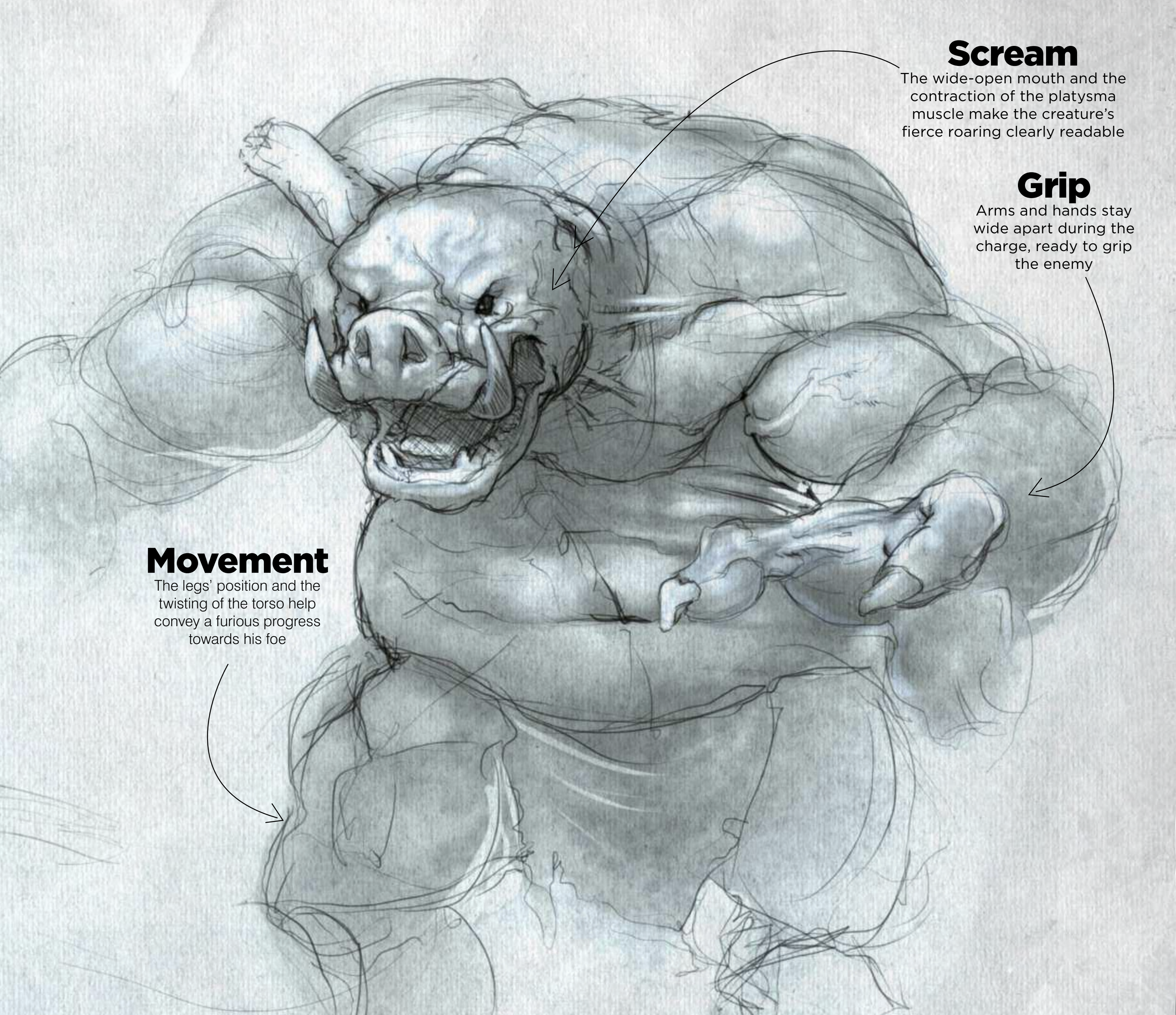


Pose

The warrior is intently studying the enemy's movements before responding to the attack. The lateral stance in relation to the creature will enable him to launch an attack with even greater momentum

Force

The lower limbs' muscles are contracted in preparation for the attack's leap



Scream

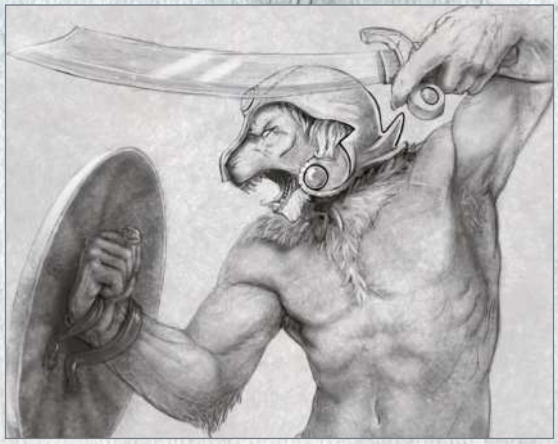
The wide-open mouth and the contraction of the platysma muscle make the creature's fierce roaring clearly readable

Grip

Arms and hands stay wide apart during the charge, ready to grip the enemy

Movement

The legs' position and the twisting of the torso help convey a furious progress towards his foe



USE LIGHT AND SHADE TO MAKE MUSCLES LOOK TENSE

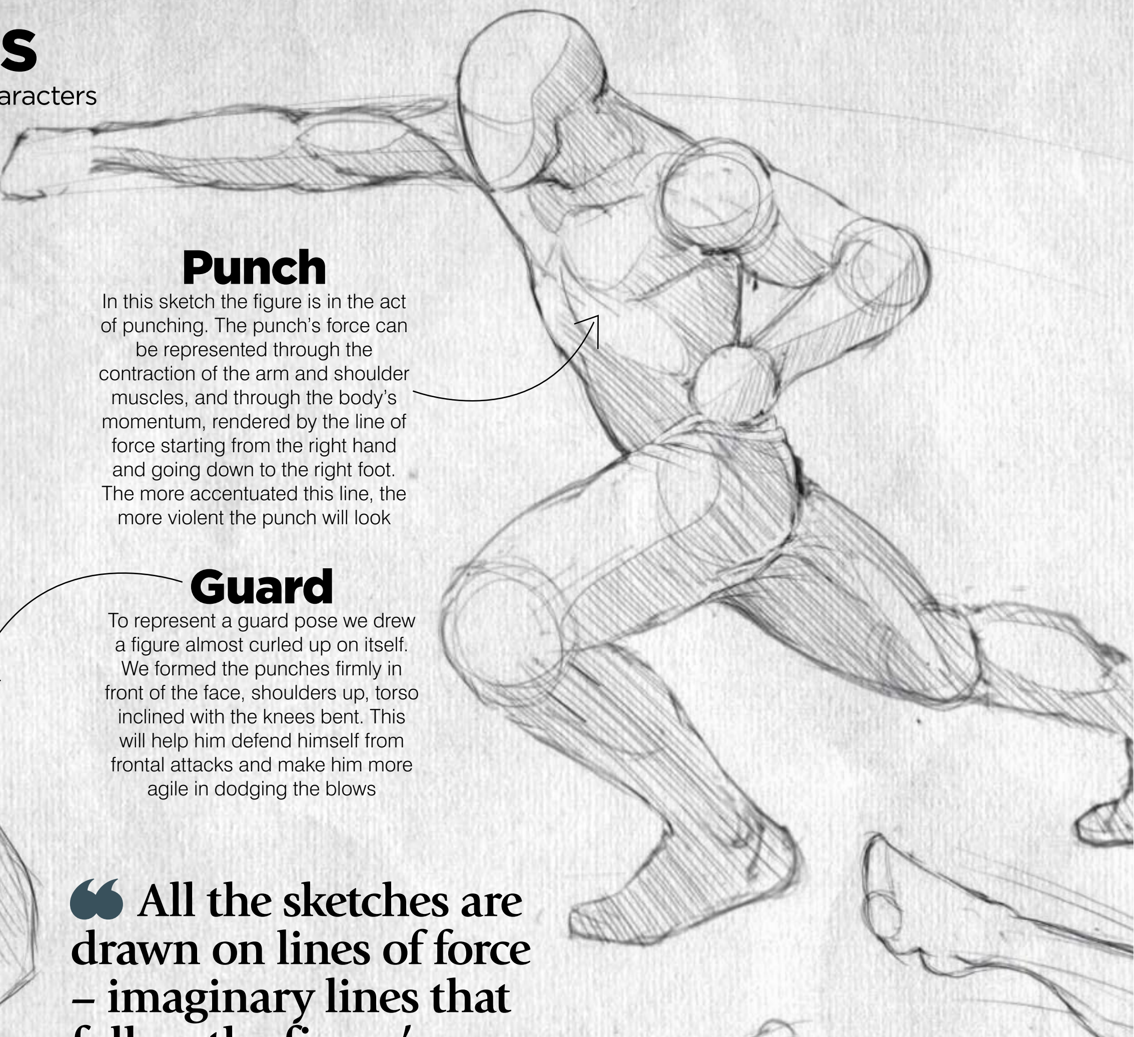
In this drawing, representing a warrior in the moment preceding an attack, you can see how simple lines and a light chiaroscuro effect can give expressivity and tone to the muscles. The right bicep for example, swollen with a faintly outlined vein, has well-marked borders defined with light shadows. The same effect is present in the tendons of the right forearm, contracted to firmly grip the shield. The elongated chest muscles, defined by simple lines, highlight the torso's flexure towards the right.

COMBAT POSES

Understand the different poses characters can take in combat scenes

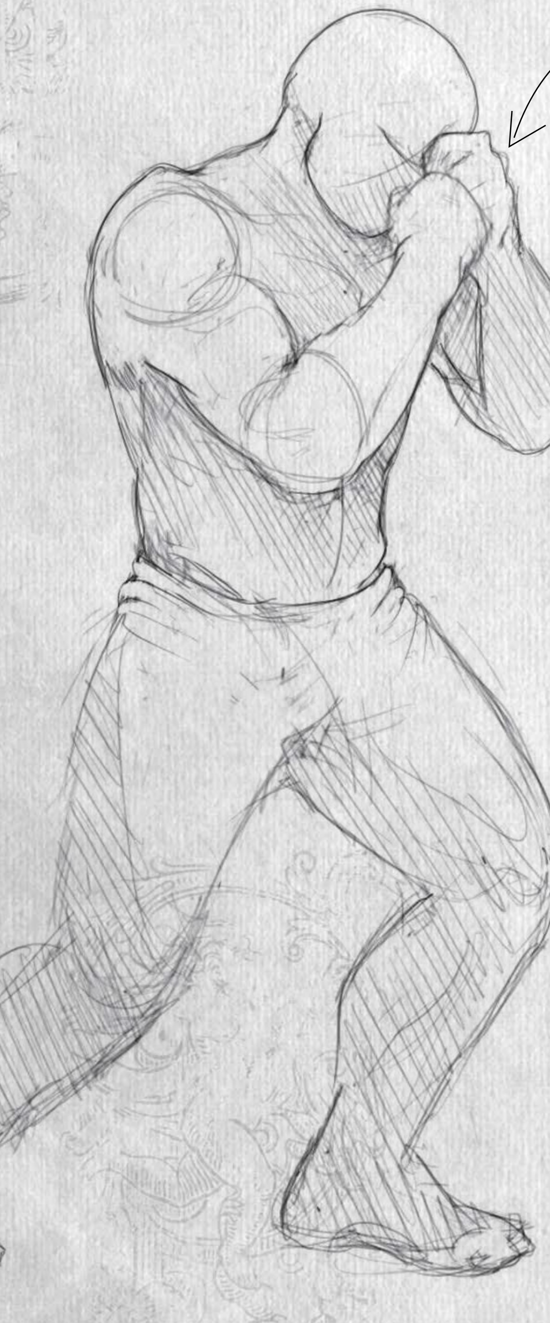
Here we'll show you how to draw a few basic fighting poses and how to give them character and expressivity. We have six sketches, each with a different pose and a different theme: punch, kick, guard, sword attack and magic attacks.

These are simple sketches, without details or ornaments and backgrounds, but they're forceful and expressive thanks to a few lines and one crucial element; all the sketches are drawn on lines of force – imaginary lines that follow the figure's shape and direction – giving each the necessary boost to make the simple pencil version really come alive.



Punch

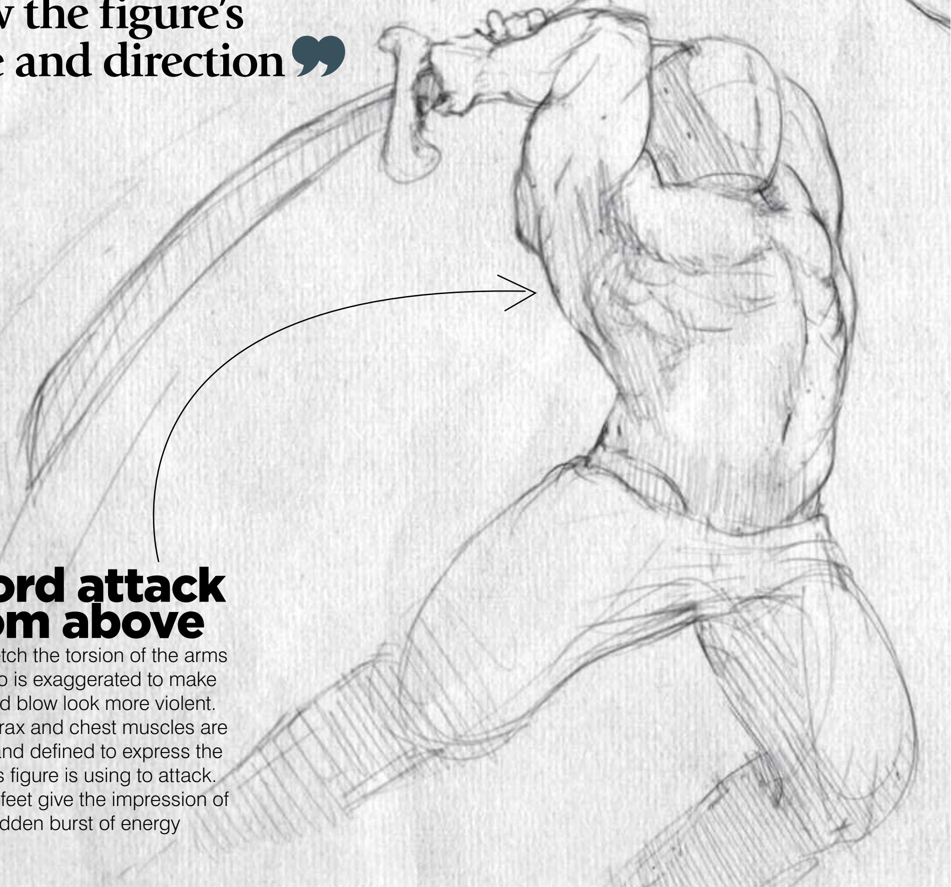
In this sketch the figure is in the act of punching. The punch's force can be represented through the contraction of the arm and shoulder muscles, and through the body's momentum, rendered by the line of force starting from the right hand and going down to the right foot. The more accentuated this line, the more violent the punch will look



Guard

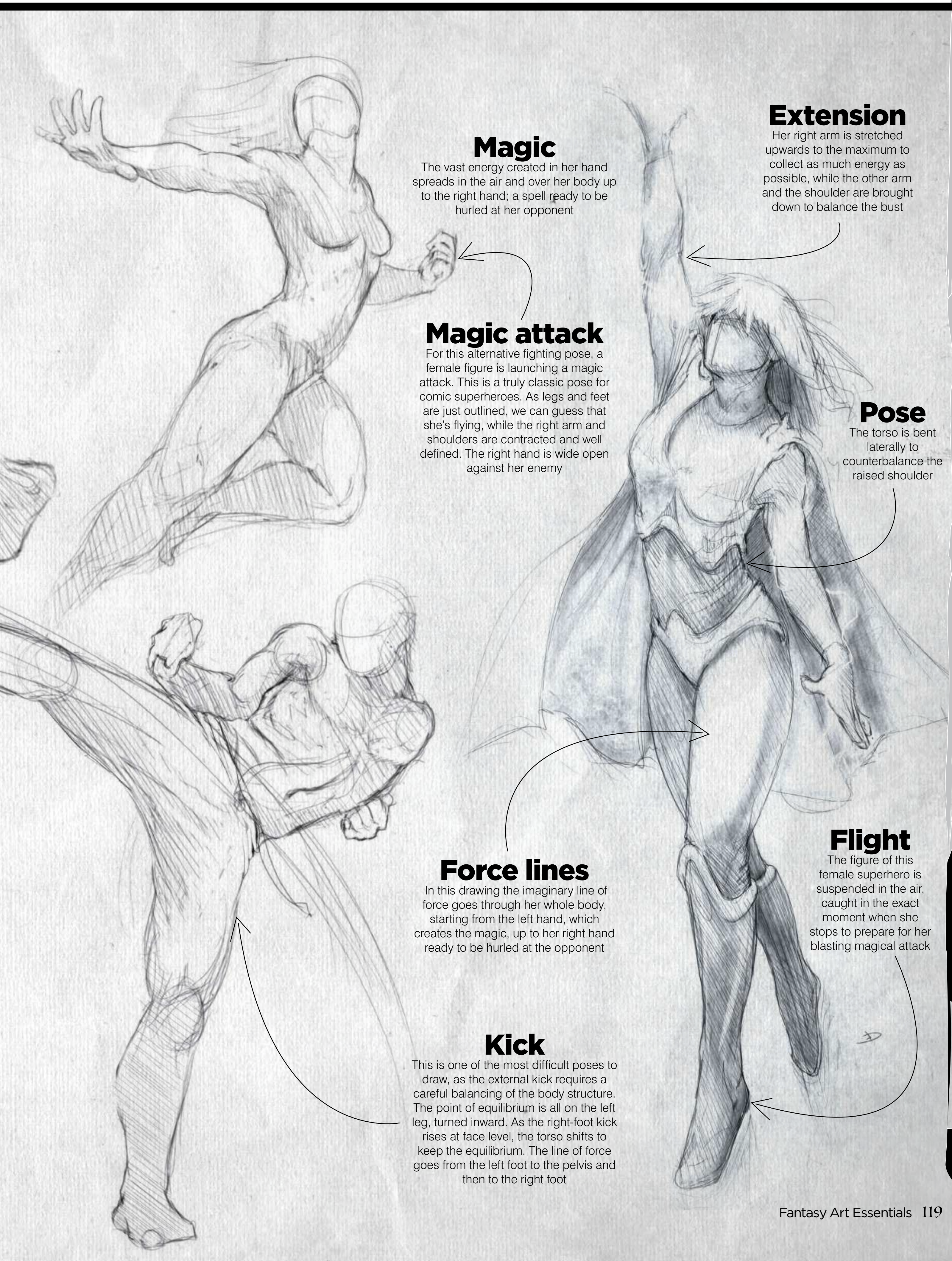
To represent a guard pose we drew a figure almost curled up on itself. We formed the punches firmly in front of the face, shoulders up, torso inclined with the knees bent. This will help him defend himself from frontal attacks and make him more agile in dodging the blows

> “All the sketches are drawn on lines of force – imaginary lines that follow the figure's shape and direction”



Sword attack from above

In this sketch the torsion of the arms and torso is exaggerated to make the sword blow look more violent. Arms, thorax and chest muscles are marked and defined to express the force this figure is using to attack. Legs and feet give the impression of a sudden burst of energy



Magic

The vast energy created in her hand spreads in the air and over her body up to the right hand; a spell ready to be hurled at her opponent

Extension

Her right arm is stretched upwards to the maximum to collect as much energy as possible, while the other arm and the shoulder are brought down to balance the bust

Magic attack

For this alternative fighting pose, a female figure is launching a magic attack. This is a truly classic pose for comic superheroes. As legs and feet are just outlined, we can guess that she's flying, while the right arm and shoulders are contracted and well defined. The right hand is wide open against her enemy

Pose

The torso is bent laterally to counterbalance the raised shoulder

Flight

The figure of this female superhero is suspended in the air, caught in the exact moment when she stops to prepare for her blasting magical attack

Force lines

In this drawing the imaginary line of force goes through her whole body, starting from the left hand, which creates the magic, up to her right hand ready to be hurled at the opponent

Kick

This is one of the most difficult poses to draw, as the external kick requires a careful balancing of the body structure. The point of equilibrium is all on the left leg, turned inward. As the right-foot kick rises at face level, the torso shifts to keep the equilibrium. The line of force goes from the left foot to the pelvis and then to the right foot

MAGICAL POSES

How to draw strong and dynamic characters in magical scenes

In this tutorial we will show you how to draw characters that use magic and how magic itself can be represented in various poses and actions. Whether it is launched, created or used for defence, the important thing is to make magic convincing and give the figure that uses it the correct strength and expression. These elements will give an injection of life to your scene.

The magic used by many comic-book, cartoon or movie characters is represented in various forms and elements. Some of these may be natural, such as air, earth, fire and water, or they may be energy elements such as lightning, waves of energy or shields.

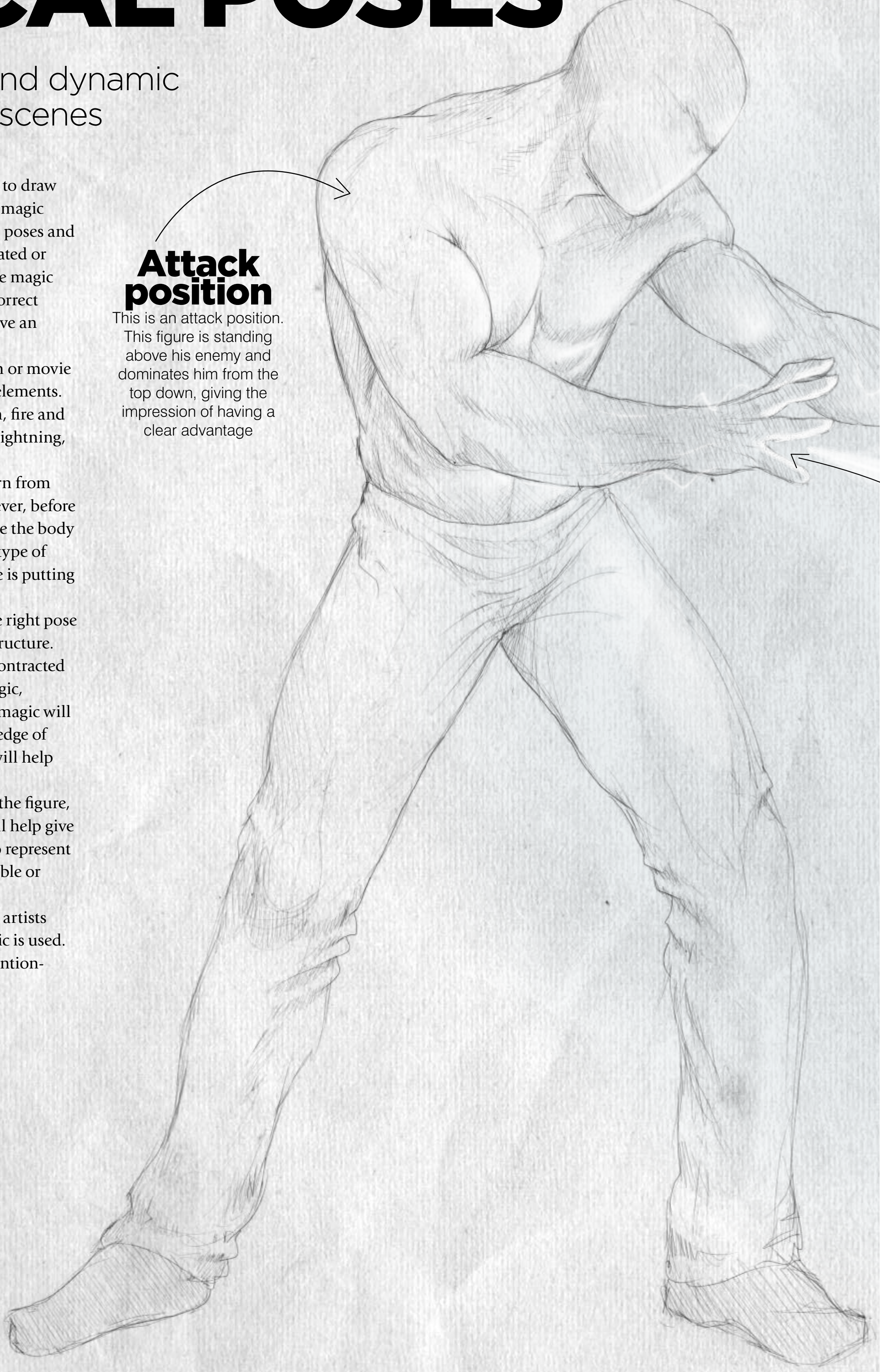
These items, along with many others, are born from the character's inner strength and power. However, before you let your character shoot fire you have to give the body an expressive pose that will make it clear what type of magic he is going to use and how much force he is putting into it, to make the image more dynamic.

To do so you must draw your character in the right pose and express the proper tension of the muscle structure. For example, the muscles will be swollen and contracted if there is a lot of effort needed to create the magic, otherwise they will be relaxed. More powerful magic will require stronger muscle tension. A good knowledge of human anatomy and of the action of muscles will help represent your character.

If you want to give impetus and character to the figure, we recommend you use lines of force. These will help give your figure elasticity and the boost necessary to represent a movement or the launch of a spell, be it invisible or shown by lighting, lines or smoke.

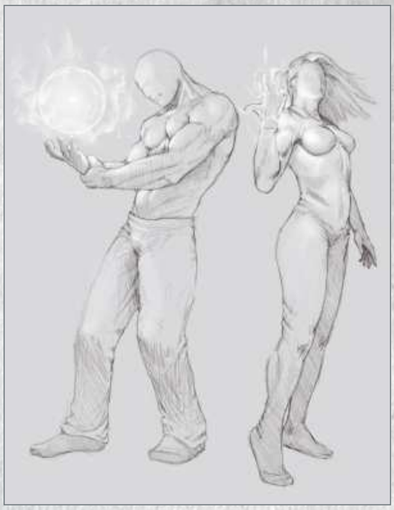
These small details are very important for all artists who want to draw and make scenes where magic is used. Your scene will become more dynamic and attention-grabbing, and it tells the story better.

> “To give impetus and character to the figure… use lines of force”



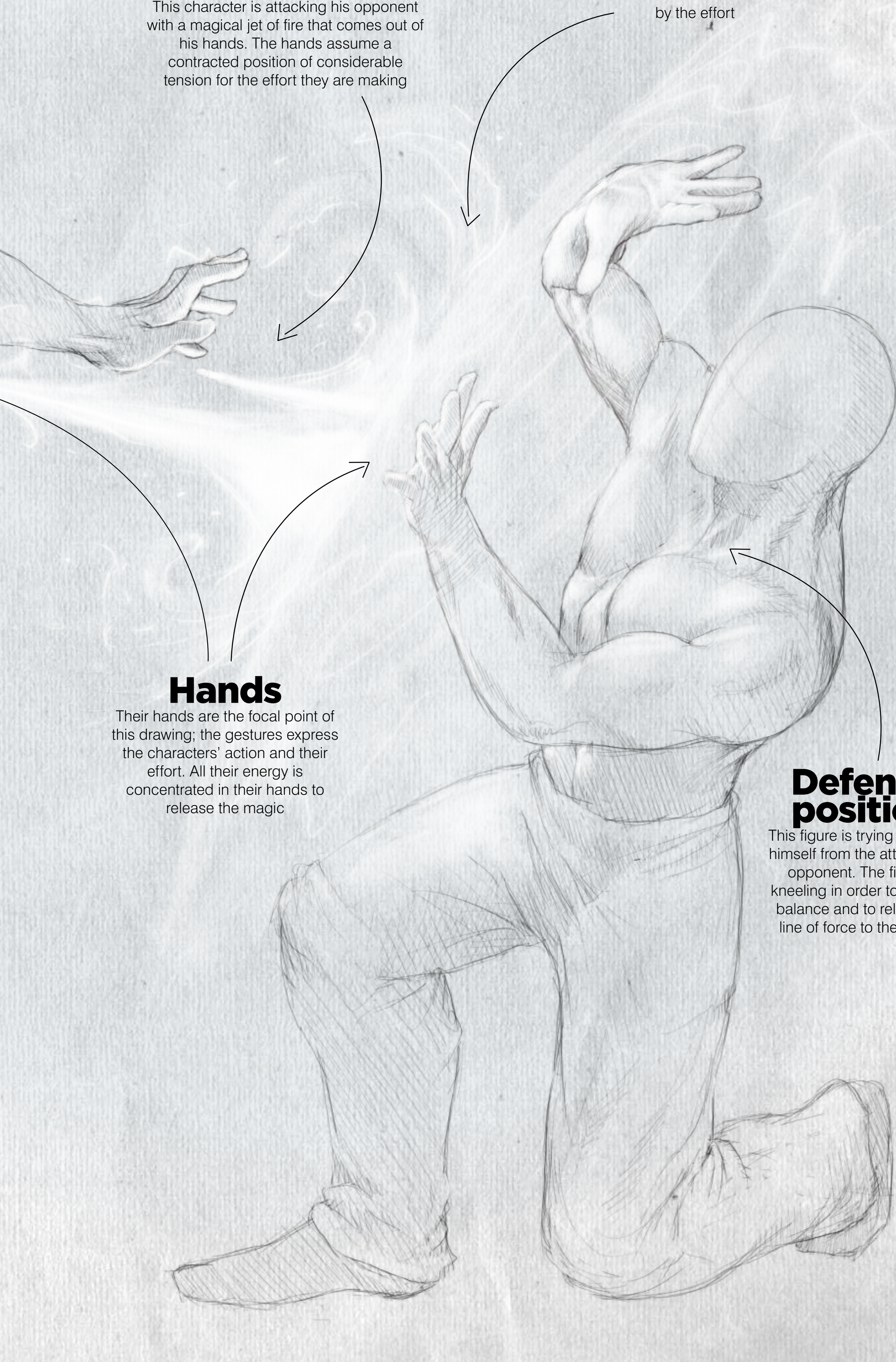
Attack position

This is an attack position. This figure is standing above his enemy and dominates him from the top down, giving the impression of having a clear advantage



HOW TO REPRESENT A FIGURE USING MAGIC

How can you express the weight of magic? In this image there are two figures creating a spell with their hands. The male character is creating a big ball of energy and the effort to create it is very large, as you can see from his posture. His weight is balanced all over the body, and the muscles of his arm and torso show tension and contraction. The woman's figure is firm and plastic, effortless and tensionless – she generates electricity in her hand with ease and this shows in her posture.



Magic shield

To defend himself from the attack of his opponent, this character has created a barrier that protects him from fire. His hands are wide open to expand the shield and his muscles are contracted by the effort

Magic fire

This character is attacking his opponent with a magical jet of fire that comes out of his hands. The hands assume a contracted position of considerable tension for the effort they are making

Hands

Their hands are the focal point of this drawing; the gestures express the characters' action and their effort. All their energy is concentrated in their hands to release the magic

Defence position

This figure is trying to defend himself from the attack of his opponent. The figure is kneeling in order to keep his balance and to release the line of force to the ground

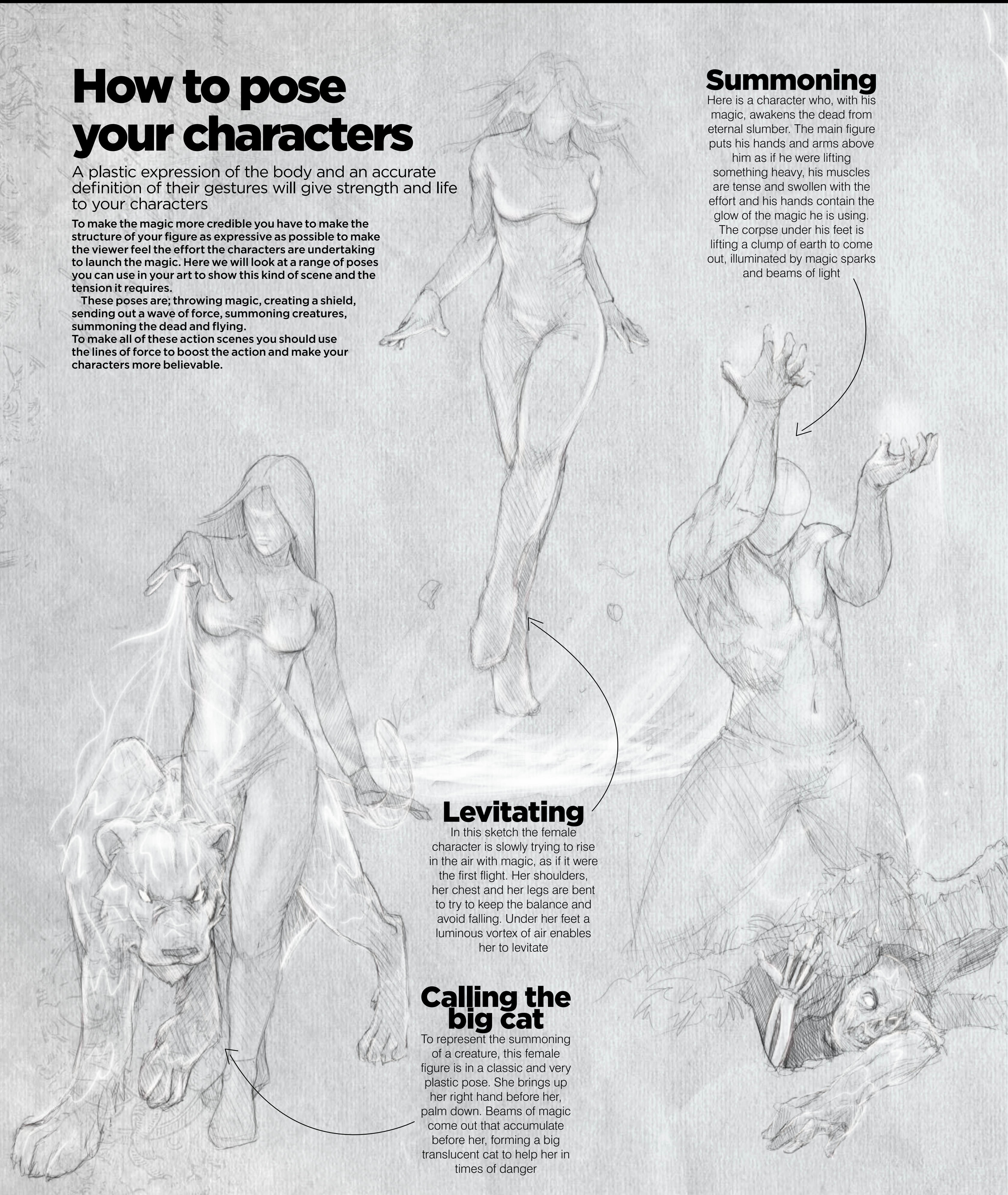
How to pose your characters

A plastic expression of the body and an accurate definition of their gestures will give strength and life to your characters

To make the magic more credible you have to make the structure of your figure as expressive as possible to make the viewer feel the effort the characters are undertaking to launch the magic. Here we will look at a range of poses you can use in your art to show this kind of scene and the tension it requires.

These poses are; throwing magic, creating a shield, sending out a wave of force, summoning creatures, summoning the dead and flying.

To make all of these action scenes you should use the lines of force to boost the action and make your characters more believable.



Summoning

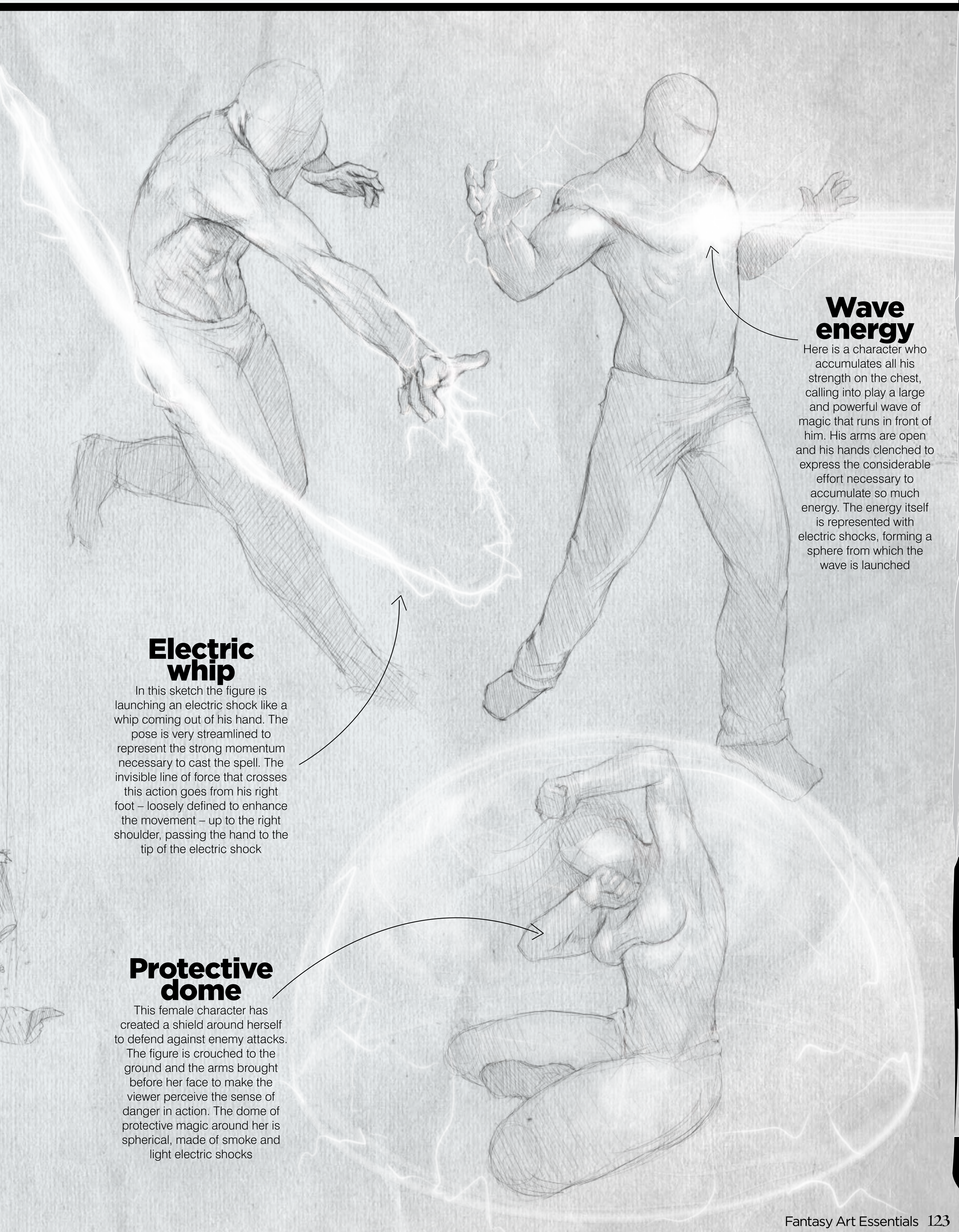
Here is a character who, with his magic, awakens the dead from eternal slumber. The main figure puts his hands and arms above him as if he were lifting something heavy, his muscles are tense and swollen with the effort and his hands contain the glow of the magic he is using. The corpse under his feet is lifting a clump of earth to come out, illuminated by magic sparks and beams of light

Levitating

In this sketch the female character is slowly trying to rise in the air with magic, as if it were the first flight. Her shoulders, her chest and her legs are bent to try to keep the balance and avoid falling. Under her feet a luminous vortex of air enables her to levitate

Calling the big cat

To represent the summoning of a creature, this female figure is in a classic and very plastic pose. She brings up her right hand before her, palm down. Beams of magic come out that accumulate before her, forming a big translucent cat to help her in times of danger



Wave energy

Here is a character who accumulates all his strength on the chest, calling into play a large and powerful wave of magic that runs in front of him. His arms are open and his hands clenched to express the considerable effort necessary to accumulate so much energy. The energy itself is represented with electric shocks, forming a sphere from which the wave is launched

Electric whip

In this sketch the figure is launching an electric shock like a whip coming out of his hand. The pose is very streamlined to represent the strong momentum necessary to cast the spell. The invisible line of force that crosses this action goes from his right foot – loosely defined to enhance the movement – up to the right shoulder, passing the hand to the tip of the electric shock

Protective dome

This female character has created a shield around herself to defend against enemy attacks. The figure is crouched to the ground and the arms brought before her face to make the viewer perceive the sense of danger in action. The dome of protective magic around her is spherical, made of smoke and light electric shocks

DRAW POSES FOR QUEST FANTASY

The essential skills you need for drawing fantasy characters on an unexpected journey

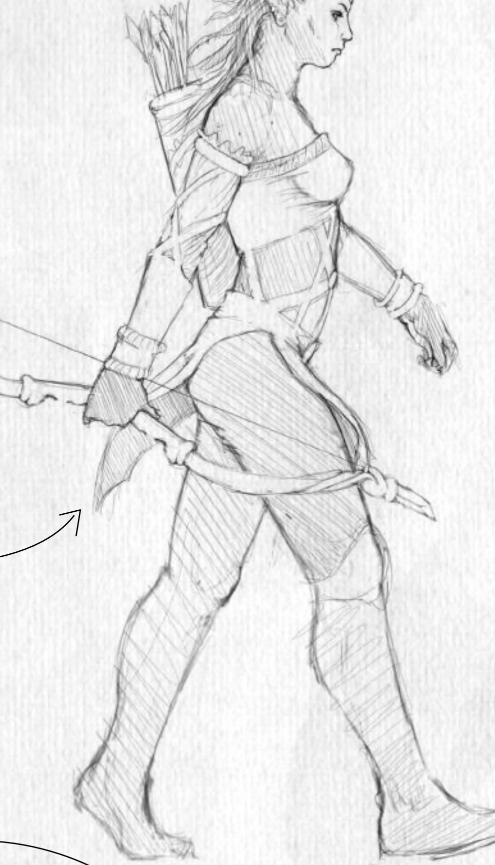
In this guide, you'll learn how to draw characters engaged in the activities and poses that relate to a mission or quest, such as walking, running, climbing, riding, exploring and resting. We'll show you how to express the tiredness of a long trip, how to portray tension and rest in your drawings and how to draw these poses to convey character and correct muscle structure.

You will learn to clearly show the activities that your characters are engaged in, but also to compare characters based on their behaviour and the small details that make each personality unique. This works in terms of their physical structure, personality and storytelling.

To illustrate these poses we'll use some classic fantasy characters like halflings, dwarves, elves, magicians and warriors. Every character has distinctive physical and expressive elements to draw from. For example, a rich warrior is differentiated from a poor one by his armour and clothing as well as by his pose and behaviour.

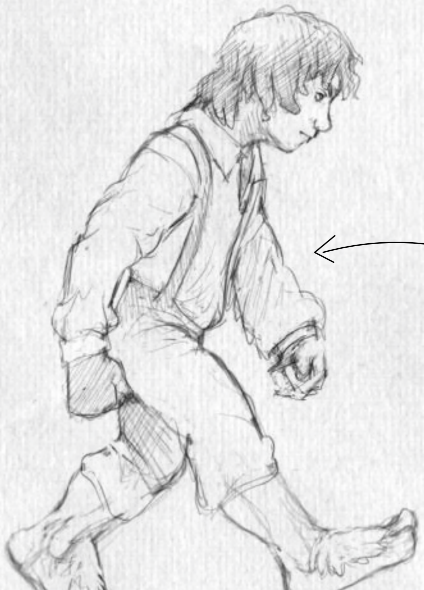
To portray these characters you need to have a good knowledge of both human bone and muscle structure. You need to know the characteristics of anatomy, therefore, because they must be changed depending on whether you are drawing a hobbit, elf or any other fantastic creature.

Study references on the web, in movies and, of course, take some photos of yourself or your friends and family in some of these poses to help you. Small children, for example, make great stand-ins for shorter character types!



Female elf ranger

A classic female elf with a tall and slender body and strong legs. Her step is sure and elegant, which helps her seek and hit targets with her bow. She is light-footed and leaves no trace behind



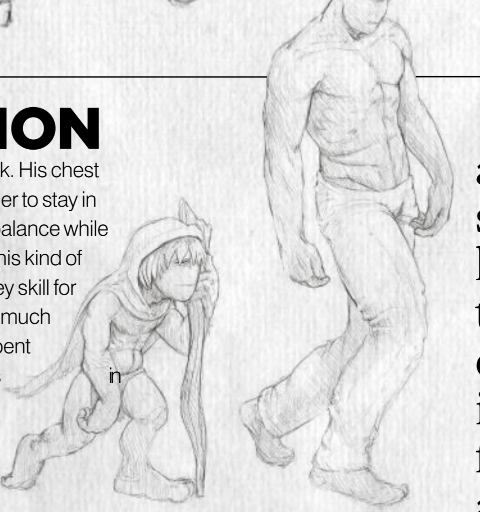
Hobbit

This figure is a hobbit. He walks fast in little steps because his legs are short – look at the way a toddler or small child walks for inspiration. His feet are very big but permit him to walk silently and hide himself inside the forest

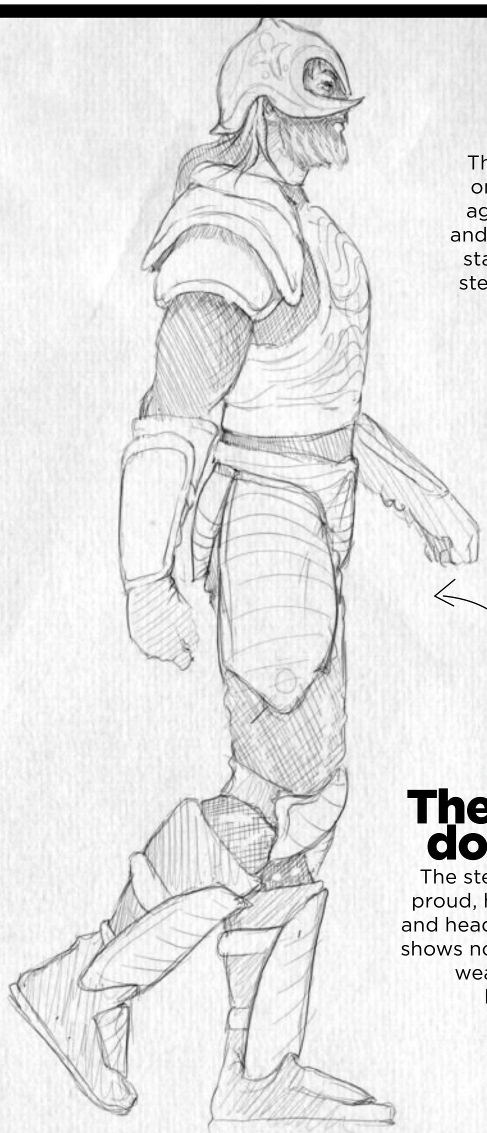
TIREDNESS AND TENSION

This drawing shows two characters who are very different in both race and physical dimensions, but are displaying the same physical state: tiredness.

The smallest figure, a hobbit-style halfling, leans on a stick that helps him on his hard and difficult walk. The bent back and sagging arm give him more of a feeling of heaviness and his foot seems to drag to enhance the look of effort. The strong human figure seems unbalanced and unstable, as though he is going to fall because of the effort of his trek. His chest and shoulders are tilted in order to stay in some semblance of upright balance while walking. Being able to show this kind of tension and exhaustion is a key skill for fantasy artists. Consider how much of a typical quest fantasy is spent wandering around the woods in the rain! Also, characters often need to snap from this pose into battle readiness when on a quest.

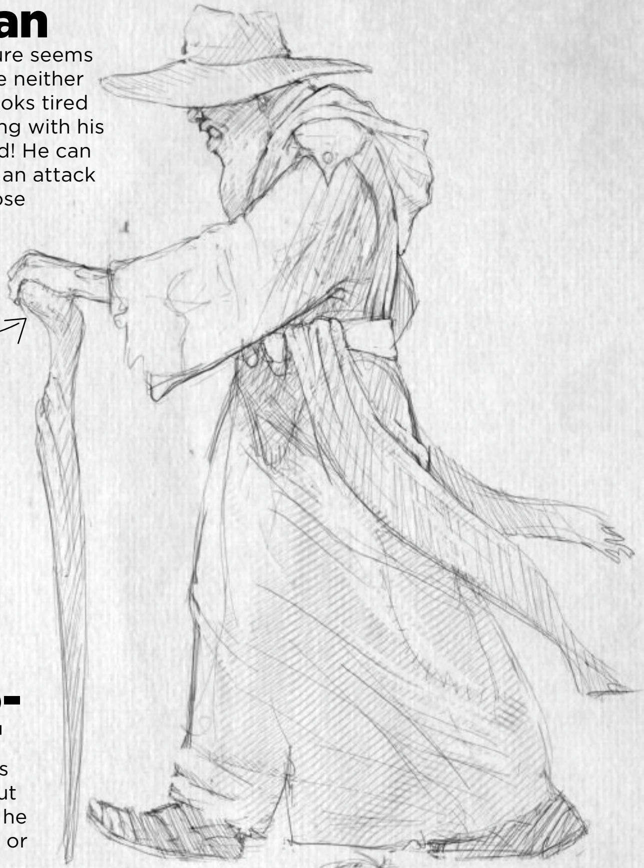


> “Being able to show this kind of tension and exhaustion is a key skill for fantasy artists”



Magician

The walk of this figure seems on the surface to be neither agile nor spry. He looks tired and helps himself along with his staff. Don't be fooled! He can step straight up into an attack or defence pose

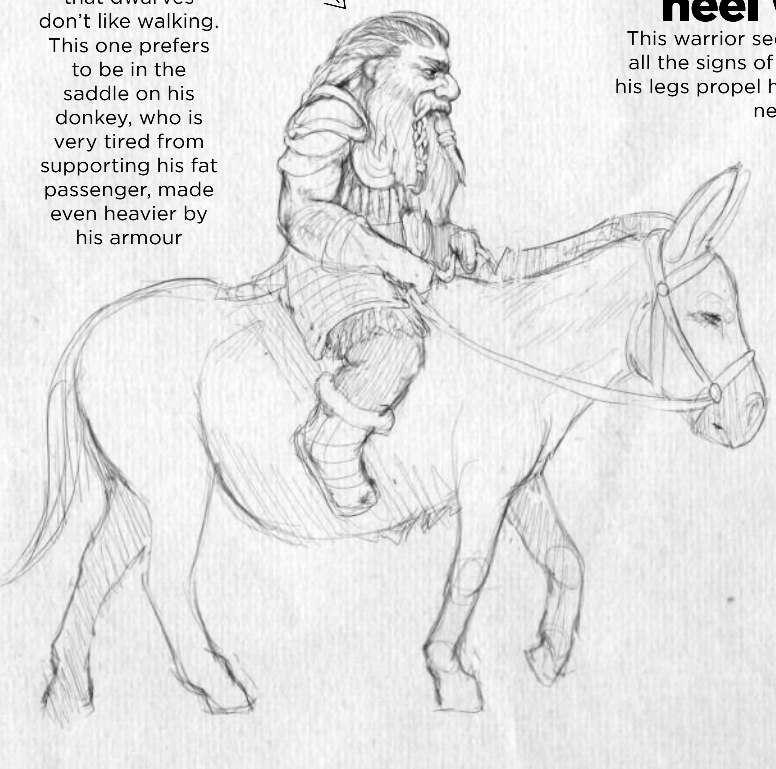


The well-to-do warrior

The step of this warrior is proud, he has his chest out and head up to make sure he shows no sign of tiredness or weakness from his long journey

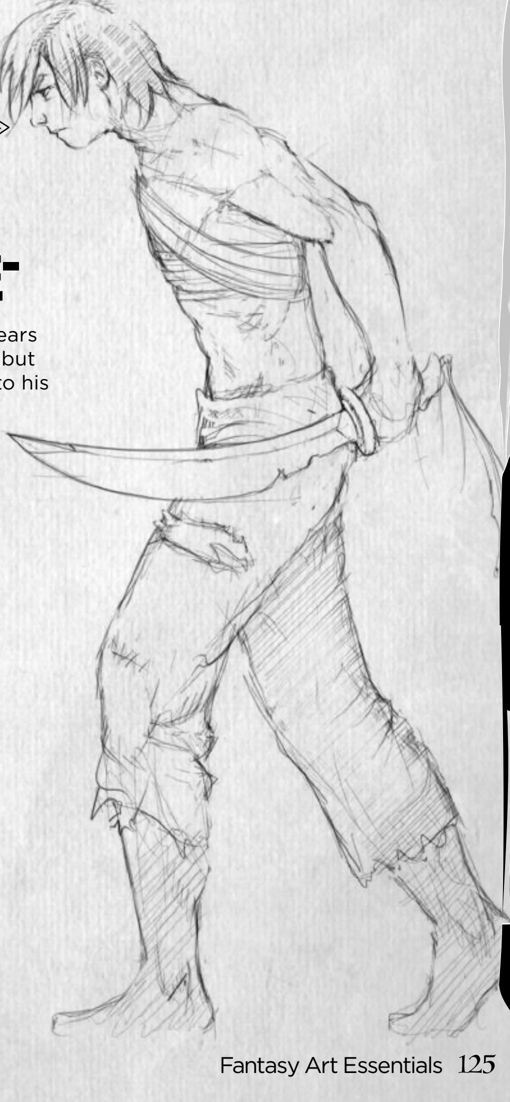
Dwarf

Everyone knows that dwarves don't like walking. This one prefers to be in the saddle on his donkey, who is very tired from supporting his fat passenger, made even heavier by his armour



The down-at-heel warrior

This warrior seems tired and bears all the signs of a recent battle, but his legs propel him stoically on to his next goal



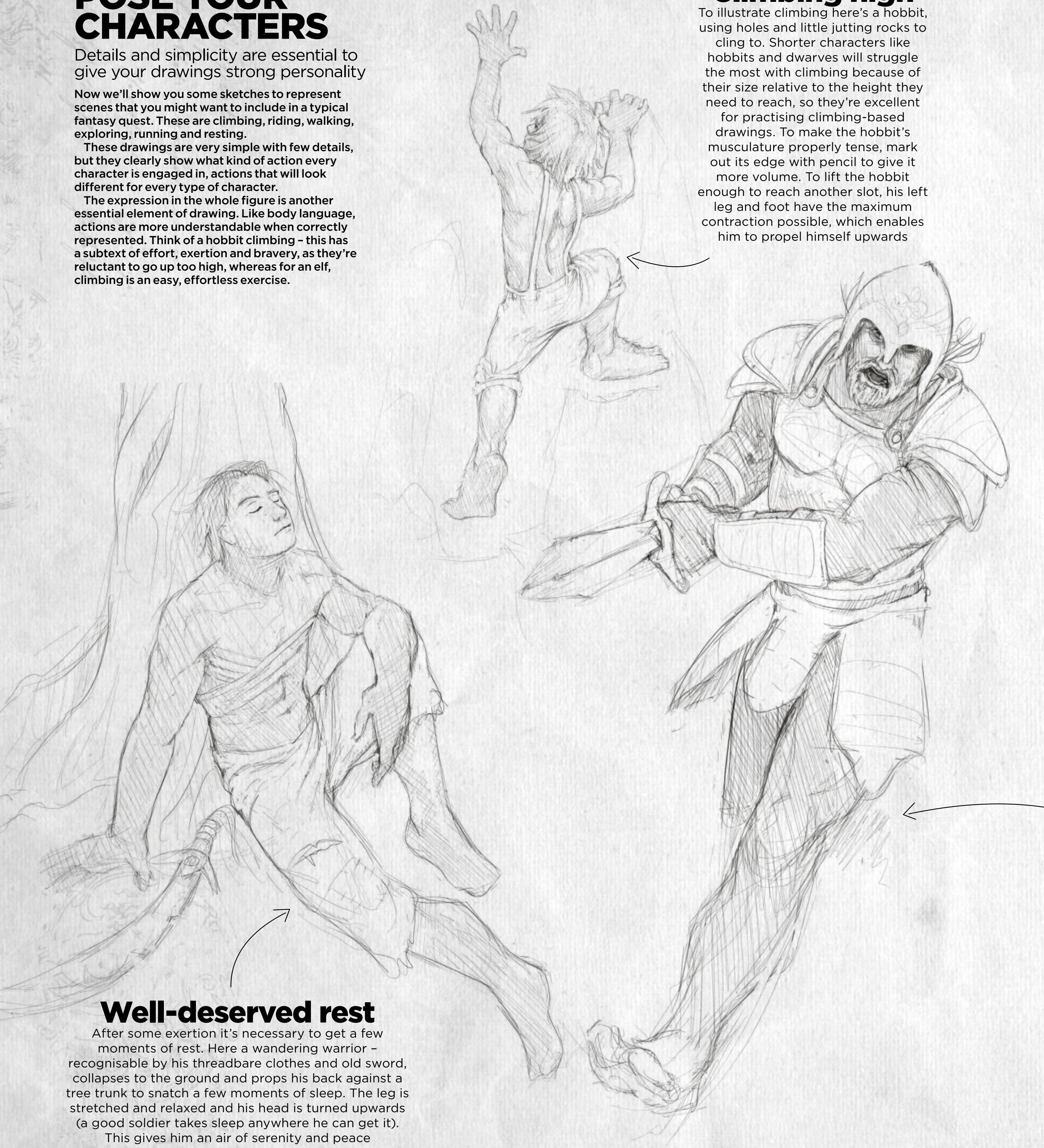
POSE YOUR CHARACTERS

Details and simplicity are essential to give your drawings strong personality

Now we'll show you some sketches to represent scenes that you might want to include in a typical fantasy quest. These are climbing, riding, walking, exploring, running and resting.

These drawings are very simple with few details, but they clearly show what kind of action every character is engaged in, actions that will look different for every type of character.

The expression in the whole figure is another essential element of drawing. Like body language, actions are more understandable when correctly represented. Think of a hobbit climbing – this has a subtext of effort, exertion and bravery, as they're reluctant to go up too high, whereas for an elf, climbing is an easy, effortless exercise.



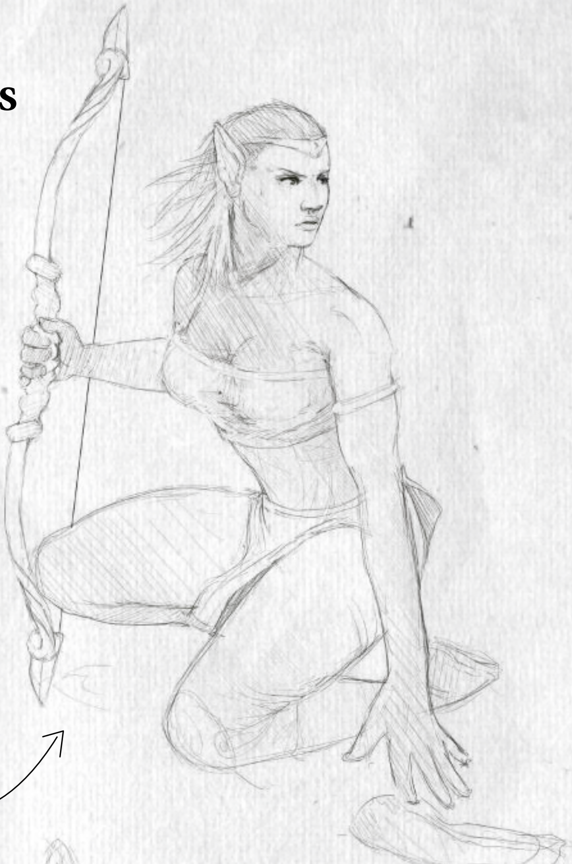
Climbing high

To illustrate climbing here's a hobbit, using holes and little jutting rocks to cling to. Shorter characters like hobbits and dwarves will struggle the most with climbing because of their size relative to the height they need to reach, so they're excellent for practising climbing-based drawings. To make the hobbit's musculature properly tense, mark out its edge with pencil to give it more volume. To lift the hobbit enough to reach another slot, his left leg and foot have the maximum contraction possible, which enables him to propel himself upwards

Well-deserved rest

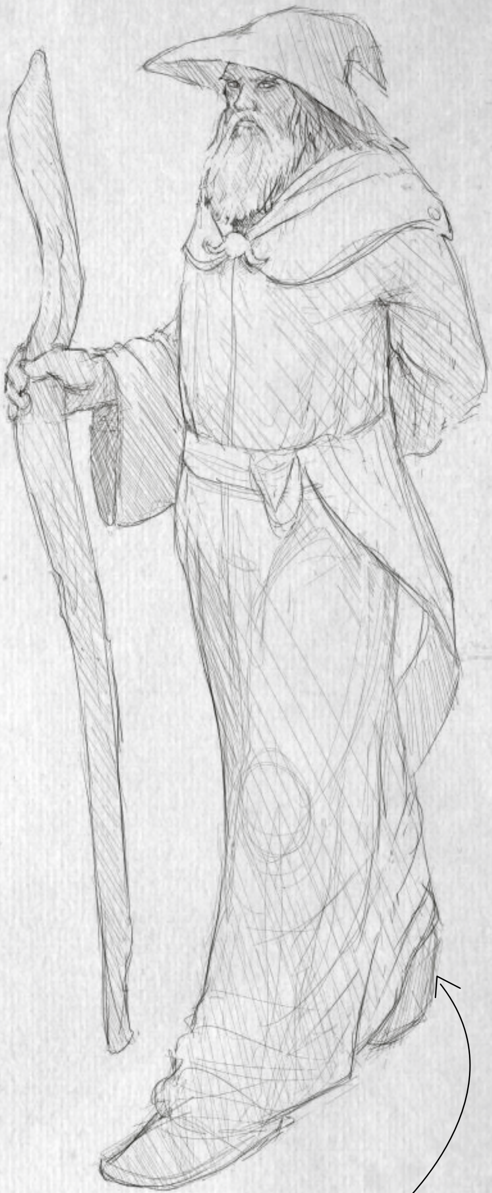
After some exertion it's necessary to get a few moments of rest. Here a wandering warrior – recognisable by his threadbare clothes and old sword, collapses to the ground and props his back against a tree trunk to snatch a few moments of sleep. The leg is stretched and relaxed and his head is turned upwards (a good soldier takes sleep anywhere he can get it). This gives him an air of serenity and peace

> “Like body language, actions are far more understandable when correctly represented”



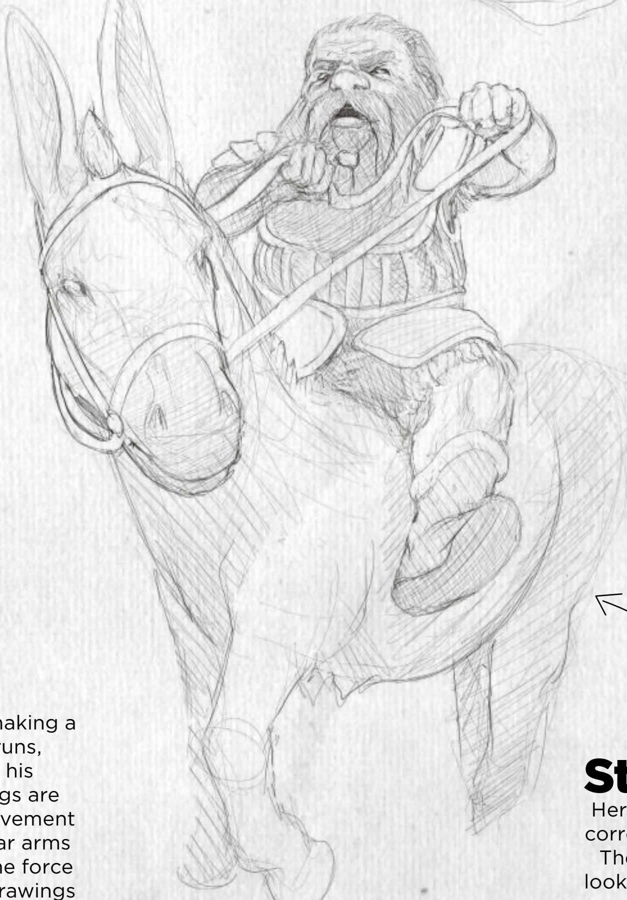
Tracking and searching

Exploring, tracking and hunting are all key parts of a quest fantasy. Here our elven ranger is bent to the ground to search for traces of an enemy or her quarry. Look at the relaxed and supple pose – elves are traditionally lithe and not as prone to tiredness as other fantasy races, so she can move gracefully even in awkward poses. Her look is turned laterally to perceive the direction that the group must take



Walking

The character in this drawing has a long robe, big hat and a staff, instantly marking him out as a sorcerer. He is walking in a calm and composed fashion, carefully watching what is happening around him. One foot moves forwards while his robe hides the other one. He holds an arm behind his back, suggesting age and the need for a bit of support, while the other hand grips his magical staff. He gives the impression of age, but he also has a strong physical presence – he can plant his feet firmly and use a magical attack if needed

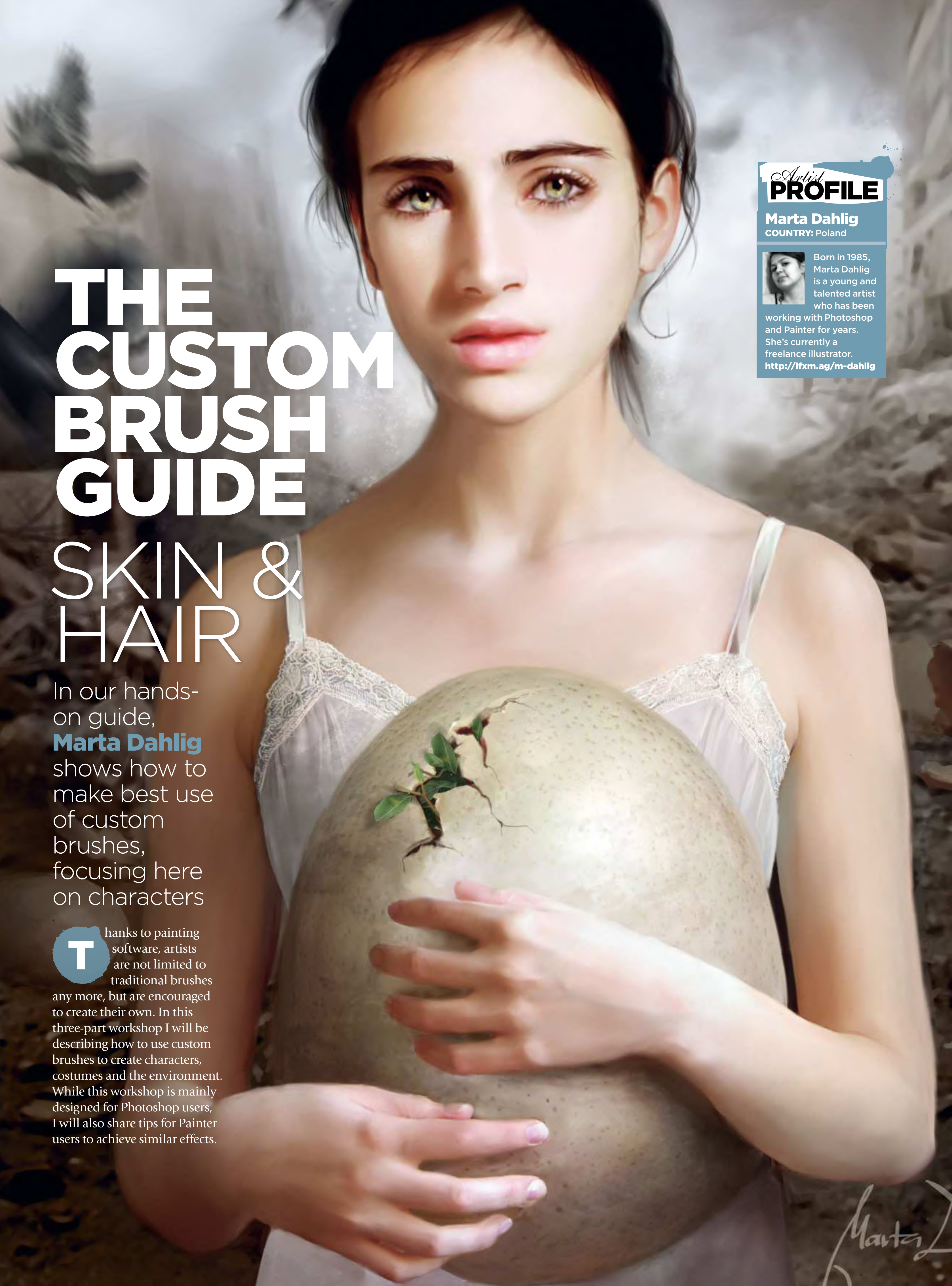


Running attack

This well-to-do warrior is making a frontal attack while he runs, screaming a war cry at his opponent. His feet and legs are less defined to suggest movement and speed, but his muscular arms are well defined to show the force he uses. Practise gesture drawings of the pose – this warrior will need to sweep up and out of his walk and straight into the attack

Stubborn as a mule

Here our battle-hardened dwarf is trying to correct the direction of his stubborn donkey. The hands of the dwarf grasp with force – look at the tension running through the arms and down into the sides and legs, which clench tightly and cling on. His toes are up and heels down so, if the donkey decides on an unexpected trot, he will stay on its back



THE CUSTOM BRUSH GUIDE

SKIN & HAIR

In our hands-on guide, **Marta Dahlig** shows how to make best use of custom brushes, focusing here on characters

Thanks to painting software, artists are not limited to traditional brushes any more, but are encouraged to create their own. In this three-part workshop I will be describing how to use custom brushes to create characters, costumes and the environment. While this workshop is mainly designed for Photoshop users, I will also share tips for Painter users to achieve similar effects.

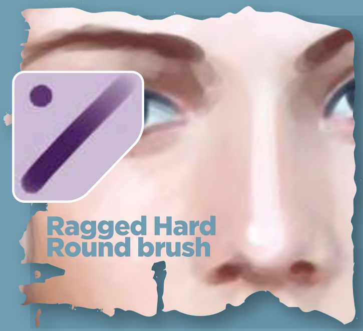
Artist PROFILE

Marta Dahlig

COUNTRY: Poland

Born in 1985, Marta Dahlig is a young and talented artist who has been working with Photoshop and Painter for years. She's currently a freelance illustrator.

http://ifxm.ag/m-dahlig



Ragged Hard Round brush

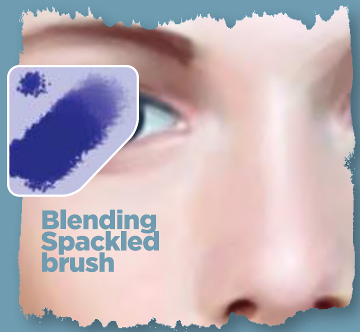
PHOTOSHOP

Opacity: 100%
Flow: 100%
Spacing: 10%
Other Dynamics: Opacity and Flow, 0%
Smoothing: checked

PAINTER

TINTING
Basic Round
Opacity: 5-15%
Grain: 0%
Resat: 20%
Bleed:100%
Jitter: 0%

This is the first brush I use for any painting. An altered Hard Round brush with ragged edges is perfect for the first stages of colour blocking, because aside from applying colours, its edges will prevent the transitions from being too rough. The pressure sensitive opacity will enable you to create a bigger variety of skin tones.



Blending Spackled brush

PHOTOSHOP

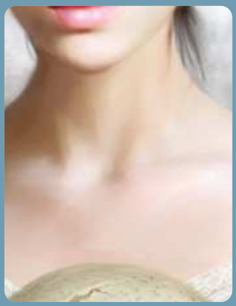
Opacity: 20-100%
Flow: 100%
Spacing: 6
Other Dynamics: Opacity and Flow, 0%
Scattering: Both Axes, 109%

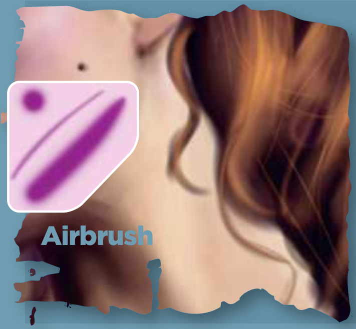
PAINTER

TINTING
Blender
Opacity: 15%
Grain: 0%
Resat: 0%
Bleed:100%
Jitter: 0%

BLENDERS
Just Add Water
Opacity: 15%
Grain: 0%
Bleed: 50%
Jitter: 0

A Spackled brush is the best thing to choose when you want to blend facial skin tones. Thanks to its shape and pressure-related opacity, it can blend really well and hint at skin pore texture. Smooth the transitions with this brush, while picking the colours with an Eye Dropper tool. Painter users can use the Blender brush; while it doesn't render a natural skin texture, it creates satisfying effects.





Airbrush

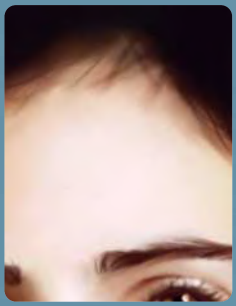
PHOTOSHOP

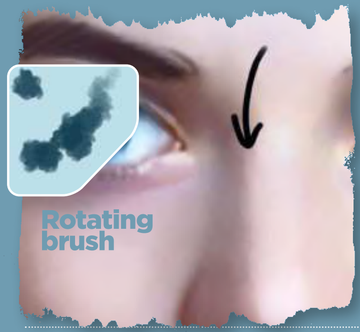
Opacity: 80-100%
Flow: 100%
Other Dynamics: Opacity and Flow, 0%
Shape dynamics: (just switched on)

PAINTER

AIRBRUSH
Soft Airbrush
Opacity: 5-15%
Resat: 100%
Bleed:100%
Jitter: 0%

The Airbrush is an extremely flexible tool. It's perfect for adding in anything to your work, from painting strands of hair to adding little details, such as blushes, moles and many others. An Airbrush is also a good way to soften the edges of painted objects and those rougher transitions between certain shades, creating an illusion of beautiful fleshy softness.





Rotating brush

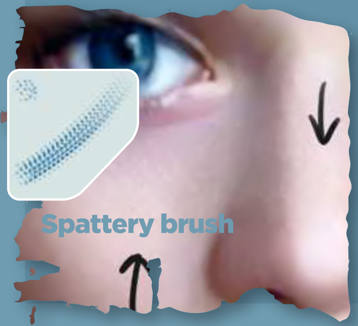
PHOTOSHOP

Opacity: 50%
Flow: 100%
Other Dynamics: Opacity and Flow, 0%
Scattering: 100%
Shape dynamics: (just switched on)

PAINTER

AIRBRUSH
Detail Airbrush
Opacity: 2-20%
Resat: 20-70%
Bleed:100%
Jitter: 2-3

This brush is perfect for enriching the colour palette of an already painted body part, I always use it for this task. Thanks to its distinctive shape and angle variations, applying new shades naturally is extremely easy: just choose a colour and run with it over the painted skin. If you apply the colours carefully on a low opacity, you won't really require any extra smoothing. This brush also works great as a skin tone blender.



Spattery brush

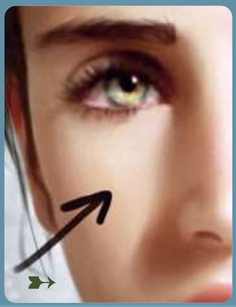
PHOTOSHOP

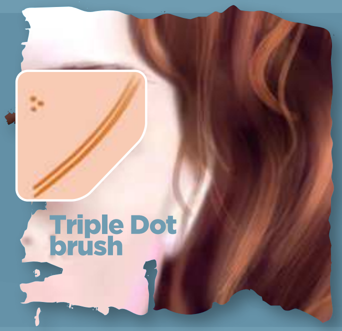
Opacity: 100%
Flow: 100%
Spacing: 75%
Other Dynamics: Opacity and Flow, 0%
Smoothing: checked

PAINTER

AIRBRUSH
Tiny Spattery Airbrush
Spread: 50%
Flow: 1
Feature: 20
Opacity: 70%

The small Spackled brush is great to render skin pores with. Use it on a low opacity setting on a separate layer, so you can play with layer modes later (Soft Light usually gives the most natural effects). To enrich the 'automatic' pore effect, create another layer on top of the existing one and, with an Airbrush, randomly place some small lighter dots on top of the previous ones.





PHOTOSHOP

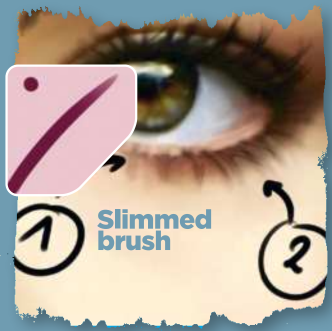
Opacity: 100%
Flow: 100%
Other Dynamics:
Opacity and Flow, 0%
Smoothing: checked

PAINTER

ACRYLICS
Wet Soft Acrylic
Opacity: 100%
Resat: 30%
Bleed:100%
Jitter: 0

After having the hair basis marked with an Airbrush, it's good to start adding some texture. This simple Spackled brush is perfect for this job. Start applying the hair strands, gradually moving from bigger and darker to smaller and lighter.

In Painter, I highly recommend the Acrylic brushes – aside from a 'strandy' feel, they will automatically create a very interesting texture.



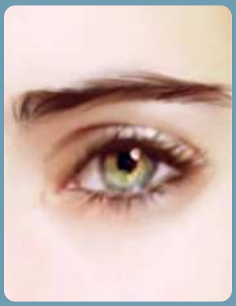
PHOTOSHOP

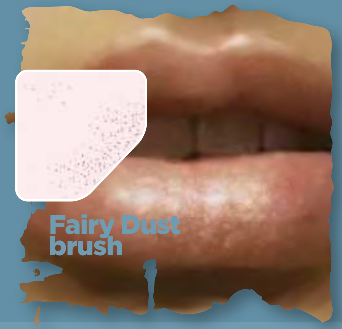
Opacity: 100%
Flow: 100%
Other Dynamics:
Opacity and Flow, 0%
Shape dynamics: (just switched on)
Smoothing: checked

PAINTER

PENS
Fine Point
Opacity: 10-30%
Resat: 100%
Bleed: 0%

This simple brush, thanks to its pressure adjusted size and opacity, is a natural choice for painting eyelashes. Use it on a low opacity to mark the shades under the eyelashes (1). Afterwards, size it down a bit and increase the opacity, marking the actual eyelashes (2). This brush is also a wonderful tool for hair detailing.





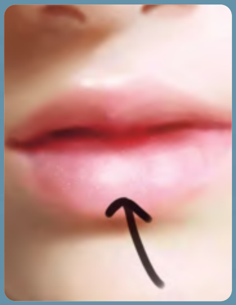
PHOTOSHOP

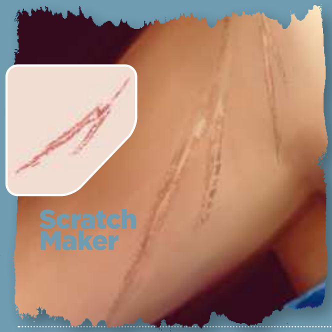
Opacity: 100%
Flow: 100%
Other Dynamics:
Opacity and Flow, 0%
Smoothing: checked
Scattering: Both Axes; 85%

PAINTER

AIRBRUSH
Variable Spatter
Spread: 90°
Flow: 5
Feature: 9
Opacity: 60-80%

This Spackled brush is a great special effects tool. When painting characters, you can use it to texture mouths: choose a light colour and run with the brush over the highlighted part of the lips. To achieve natural effects, switch the sizes and opacity constantly. You can also use this brush to enhance a magic spell rendition, by creating a fairy dust effect. Furthermore, you can also paint stars with it!





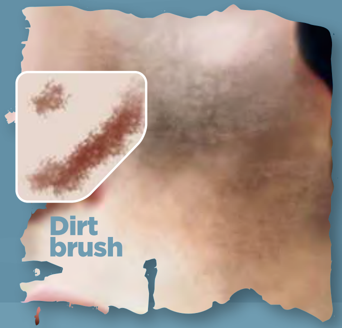
PHOTOSHOP

Opacity: 30-40%
Flow: 100%

PAINTER

Unavailable

This custom brush was made from a leaf photograph I took. It's perfect for creating scratched surfaces, but most of all for scars. Choose a neutral brown colour and use the brush over the skin (by clicking, not dragging). Then experiment with the layer modes (I recommend Overlay). Later, you might want to shrink the brush and add some lighter textures to some parts of the scar to make it look more natural.



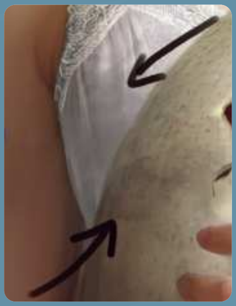
PHOTOSHOP

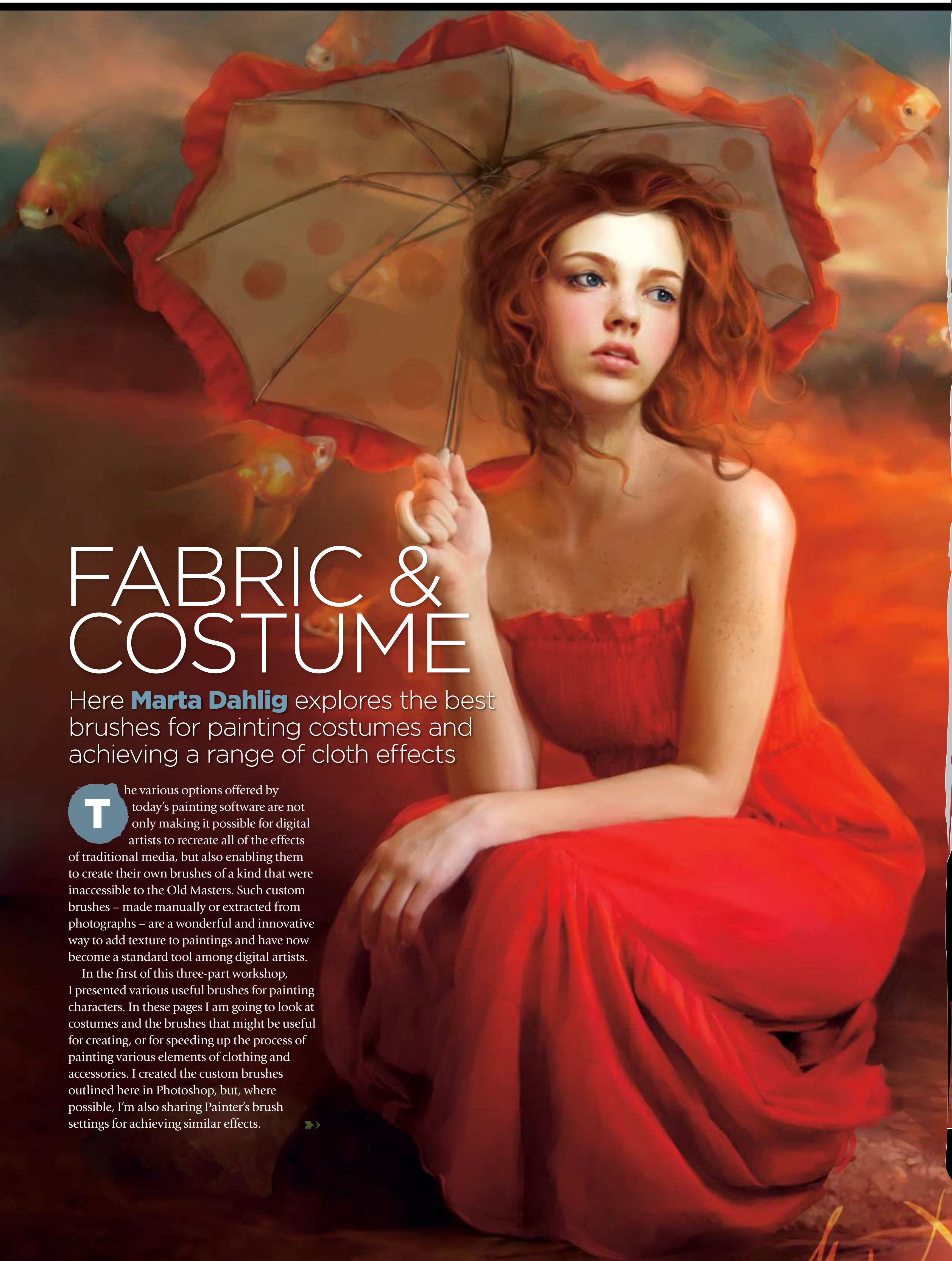
Opacity: 10-50%
Flow: 100%
Other Dynamics:
Opacity and Flow, 0%
Smoothing: checked
Scattering: 33%

PAINTER

Unavailable

This ragged brush is fabulous for adding dirt effects to the skin and clothing. Simply pick a darker colour and click around the surface, remembering to switch the sizes and opacity constantly. Afterwards, change the Layer mode to Multiply and add some Gaussian Blur to make your brushstrokes look natural.





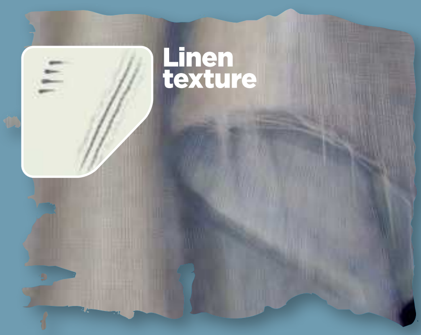
FABRIC & COSTUME

Here **Marta Dahlig** explores the best brushes for painting costumes and achieving a range of cloth effects

The various options offered by today's painting software are not only making it possible for digital artists to recreate all of the effects of traditional media, but also enabling them to create their own brushes of a kind that were inaccessible to the Old Masters. Such custom brushes – made manually or extracted from photographs – are a wonderful and innovative way to add texture to paintings and have now become a standard tool among digital artists.

In the first of this three-part workshop, I presented various useful brushes for painting characters. In these pages I am going to look at costumes and the brushes that might be useful for creating, or for speeding up the process of painting various elements of clothing and accessories. I created the custom brushes outlined here in Photoshop, but, where possible, I'm also sharing Painter's brush settings for achieving similar effects.

Linen texture



This simple Spackled brush makes texturing linen easier than ever. Just paint the desired folds and later, on a new layer, paint some vertical and horizontal brushstrokes. Remember to keep the brush size small and change the hue from time to time. To touch up, play with the Opacity and Layer modes to see if you can enhance the created effect. You might also want to use the Burn/Highlight tool in the most/least convex areas of the fabric.

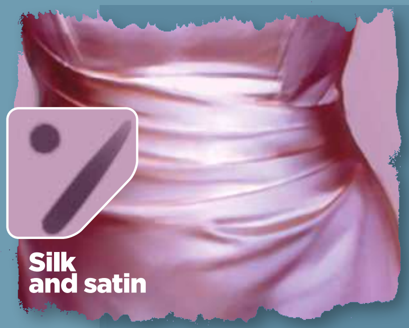
PHOTOSHOP

Opacity: 100%
Flow: 50%
Shape Dynamics:
Size Jitter: Off
Angle Jitter: 0%
Roundness Jitter: 73%
Minimum Roundness: 62%
Texture:
Wrinkles
Scale: 45%
Texture Each Tip: On
Mode: Multiply
Depth/Minimum Depth: 100%
Depth Jitter: Off
Dual Brush:
Diameter: 110px
Spacing: 15%
Scattering: Both axes, 0%
Count: 1
Other Dynamics:
Opacity Jitter: 0%
Flow Jitter: 0%

PAINTER

PENCILS
Sketching Pencil
Opacity: 50-100%
Grain: 18%
Bleed: 10%
Jitter: 0%

Silk and satin



This brush is a hybrid between a Ragged Edge Hard Round (described in the first part of this workshop) and an Airbrush, which makes it a fabulous blender and a texturing tool at the same time. It is especially effective when painting textiles with smooth colour transitions, such as satin or silk.

PHOTOSHOP

Opacity: 20-80%
Flow: 50%
Shape Dynamics:
Size Jitter: 0%
Minimum Diameter: 10%
Other Dynamics:
Opacity Jitter: 0%

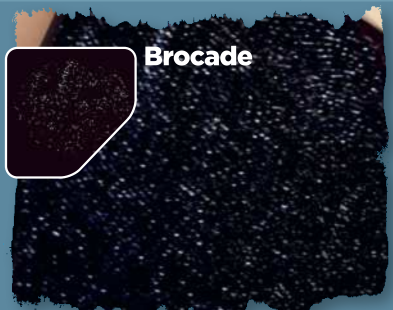
PAINTER

TINTING
Basic Round
Opacity: 10-30%
Resat: 20%
Bleed: 100%
Jitter: 0%

TINTING
Blender
Opacity: 5-10%
Grain: 0%
Resat: 70%
Bleed: 100%
Jitter: 0%

BLENDERS
Just Add Water
Opacity: 10-40%
Resat: 0%
Bleed: 50%
Jitter: 0%

Brocade



PHOTOSHOP

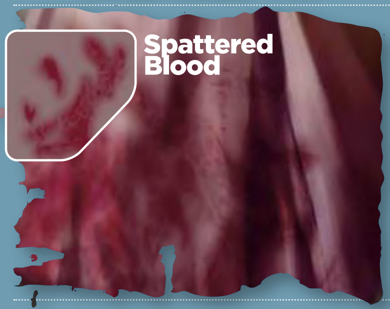
Opacity: 90-100%
Flow: 50%

PAINTER

AIRBRUSHES
Tiny Spattery Airbrush
Opacity: 75%
Spread: 45%
Flow: 1
Feature: 9

I use this Spackled brush for texturing brocade fabrics. It looks plain, but used correctly it can be extremely powerful. To get the best from this brush always use it at full opacity, constantly adjusting the lightness between the applications. To push the realism of the texture, blur the specks from time to time and use the Dodge and Burn tools to accentuate singular dots to a higher extent.

Spattered Blood



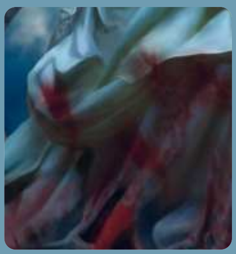
PHOTOSHOP

Opacity: 20-50%
Flow: 50%

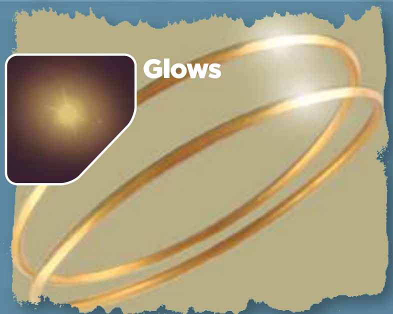
PAINTER

Unavailable

Now here is something for your more morbid paintings! This brush was made by accident, but it proved great for creating stains on textiles, especially for a spattered blood effect. Use this as a stamp on a separate layer with Overlay mode switched on. Blur (and occasionally rotate) the colour blocks for a natural effect.



Glows



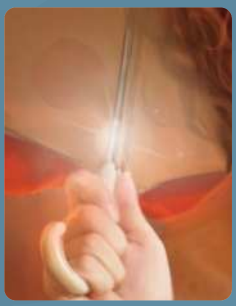
PHOTOSHOP

Opacity: 60-100%
Flow: 50%

PAINTER

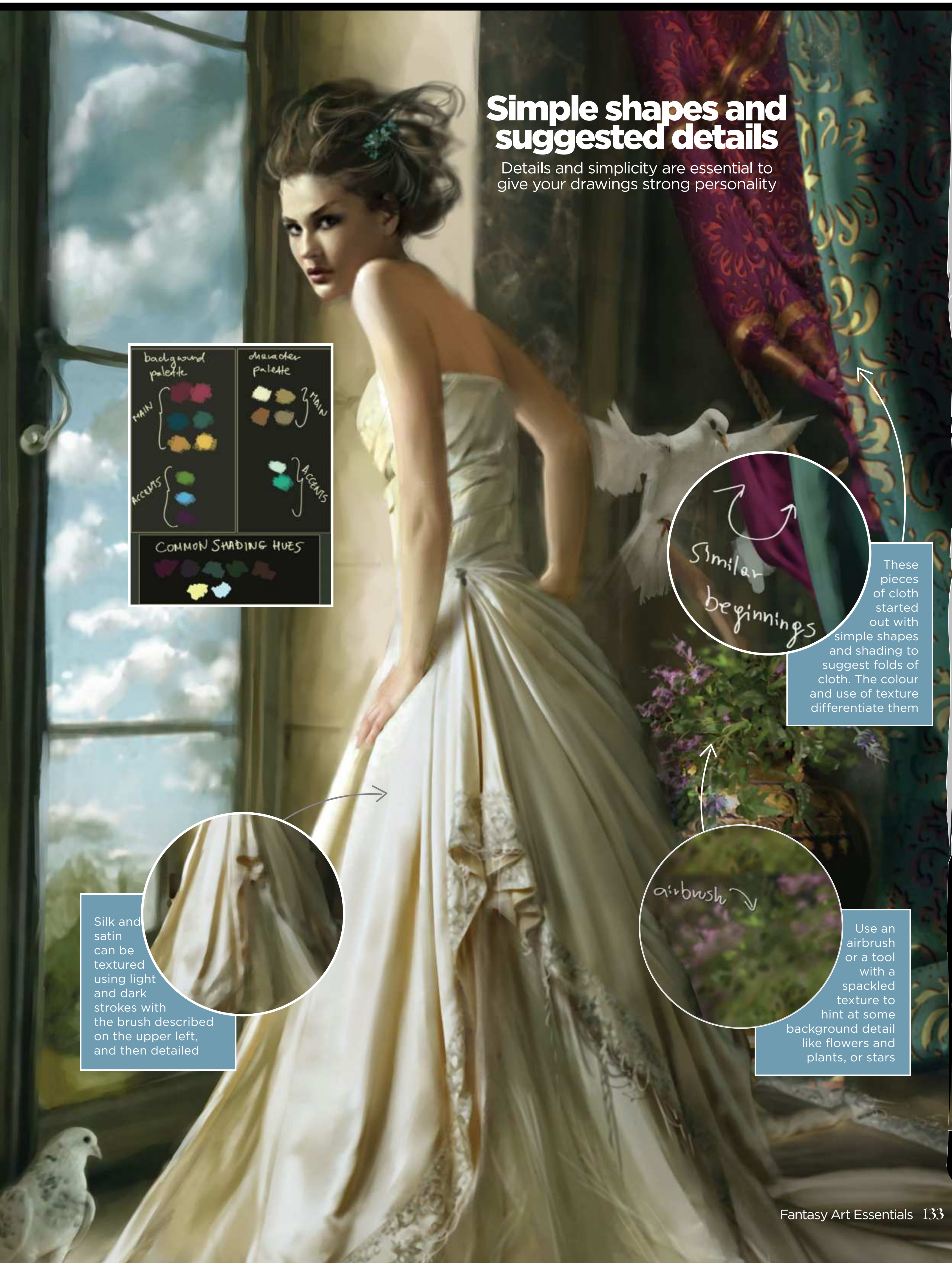
TINTING
Airbrushes: Fine Tip Soft Air
Opacity: 5-10%
Resat: 100%
Bleed: 0%
Jitter: 0

This little stamp brush is extremely useful for all kinds of jobs. It can simulate all sorts of reflections and glow on metal objects, brocade and sequins, as well as act as a star or sun stamp. In addition it can be used to create the fairy dust effect.



Simple shapes and suggested details

Details and simplicity are essential to give your drawings strong personality

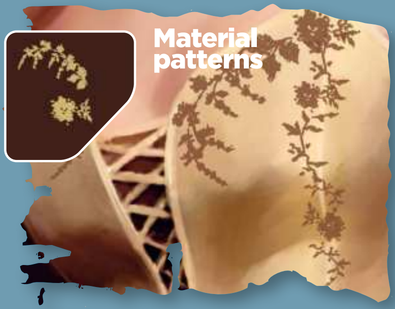

background palette
MAIN
ACCENTS
character palette
MAIN
ACCENTS
COMMON SHADING HUES
Similar beginnings
airbrush

These pieces of cloth started out with simple shapes and shading to suggest folds of cloth. The colour and use of texture differentiate them

Silk and satin can be textured using light and dark strokes with the brush described on the upper left, and then detailed

Use an airbrush or a tool with a spackled texture to hint at some background detail like flowers and plants, or stars

Material patterns

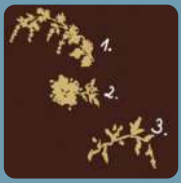


PHOTOSHOP

Opacity: 100%
Flow: 50%

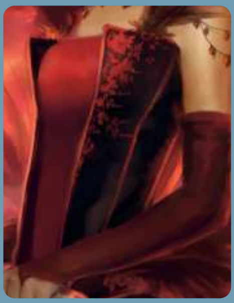
PAINTER

Unavailable

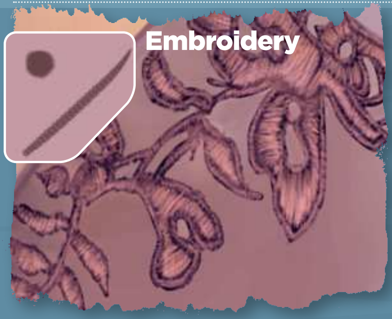


This is a set of three stamp brushes that I frequently use to create floral patterns for my characters' dresses. There are dozens of possibilities for interesting patterns, as long as you keep resizing and rotating the brushes.

By experimenting with layer modes you can create semi-transparent patterns for lace (I use Soft Light or Multiply, depending on the colour) or a nice basis to paint embroidery upon.



Embroidery



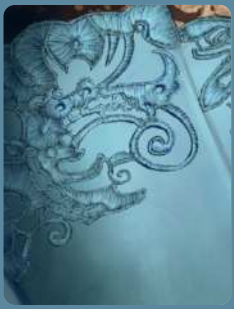
PHOTOSHOP

Opacity: 70-100%
Flow: 50%
Spacing: 50%
Shape Dynamics:
Size Jitter: 0%
Min diameter: 0%

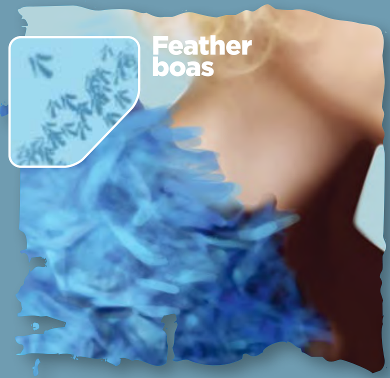
PAINTER

PENS
Thick And Thin Pen
Opacity: 100%
Resat: 100%
Bleed: 0%

With its sparse spacing this brush looks a bit pixellated, which is a great means of achieving a realistic thread effect. Start off with a dark zigzag pattern and move to lighter colours. The more layers of thread you lay down, the thicker the embroidery will look. To underline the thickness, form your zigzags into arches instead of straight lines. Remember to keep your brush size very small at all times!



Feather boas



PHOTOSHOP

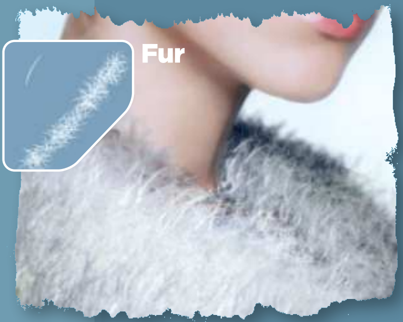
Opacity: 10-70%
Flow: 50%
Shape Dynamics:
Size Jitter: 0%
Minimum Diameter: 10%
Angle Jitter: 11%
Scattering:
Both axes, 294%
Count: 1
Count Jitter: 98%
Other Dynamics:
Opacity Jitter: 0%
Flow Jitter: 0%

PAINTER

Unavailable

This is a great texturing brush, which will enable you to mark out the details of a feather boa, without having to paint each individual feather separately. First, block the general shape of the object and roughly shade it, marking the highlights and shadows with an Airbrush. Afterwards, use the Feather brush on a low opacity on top of the existing shape. Switch the sizes and colour depth constantly, marking some darker and lighter areas. After you have the basic texture in place, try to underline singular feathers by giving them some extra highlights and shadows underneath. This is an easy way to create a realistic looking boa.

Fur



PHOTOSHOP

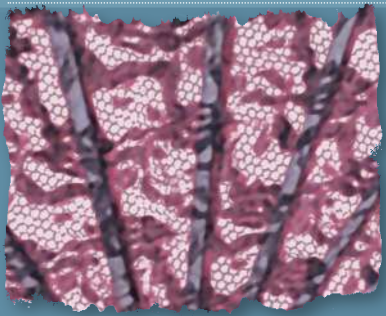
Opacity: 10-70%
Flow: 50%
Shape Dynamics:
Size Jitter: 0%
Minimum Diameter: 1%
Angle Jitter: 45%
Scattering:
Both axes, 109%
Count: 1
Count Jitter: 98%
Other Dynamics:
Opacity Jitter: 0%

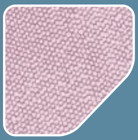
PAINTER

F-X
Furry Brush
Opacity: 10-20%
Resat: 25%
Bleed: 0%

This is a simplified version of Painter's Furry brush. At first it is difficult to achieve satisfying results, but once mastered, it speeds up the process of painting fur. After you have the general shape marked with an airbrush tool, add fur strands on a new layer. When the first strokes are done, use the Gaussian Blur tool on it. Change the brush's hue, make another layer of strands and blur it again.

Lace





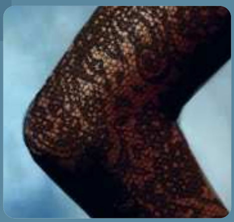
PHOTOSHOP

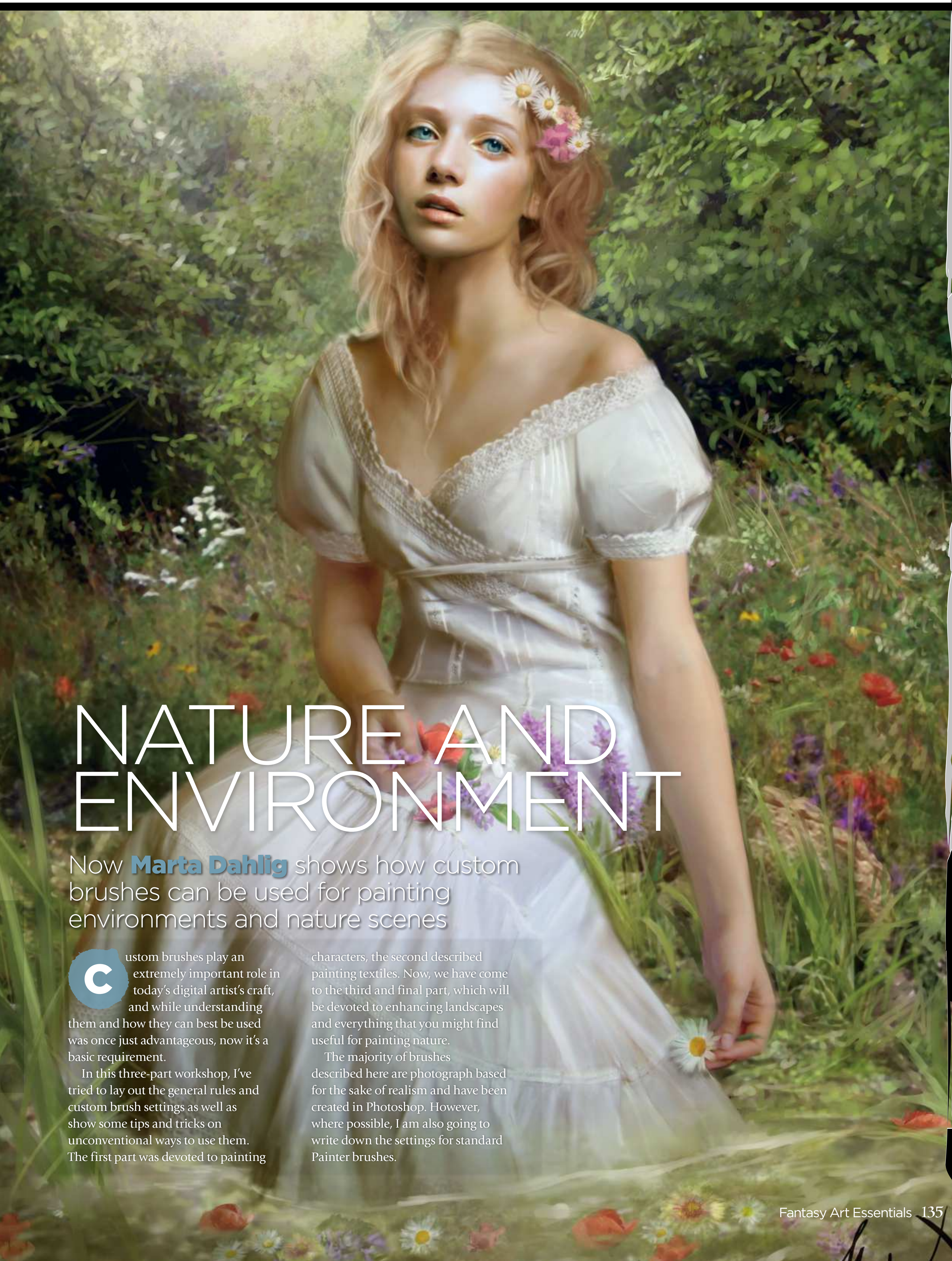
Opacity: 50-100%
Flow: 50%

PAINTER

Unavailable

This stamp brush is extracted from a veil photograph I took and is perfect for texturing lace in garments or objects. It's easy to use – place it on a new layer (with the Multiply mode on) over the object to texture and you're done! You might want to blur it slightly for a more realistic effect.





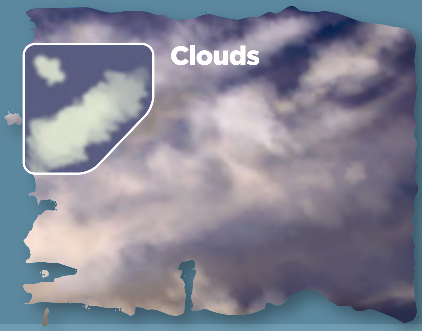
NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Now **Marta Dahlig** shows how custom brushes can be used for painting environments and nature scenes

Custom brushes play an extremely important role in today's digital artist's craft, and while understanding them and how they can best be used was once just advantageous, now it's a basic requirement.

In this three-part workshop, I've tried to lay out the general rules and custom brush settings as well as show some tips and tricks on unconventional ways to use them. The first part was devoted to painting characters, the second described painting textiles. Now, we have come to the third and final part, which will be devoted to enhancing landscapes and everything that you might find useful for painting nature.

The majority of brushes described here are photograph based for the sake of realism and have been created in Photoshop. However, where possible, I am also going to write down the settings for standard Painter brushes.



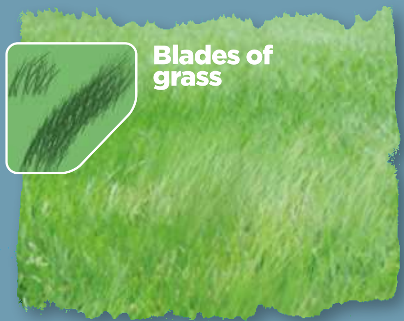
PHOTOSHOP

Opacity: 25-50%
Flow: 100%
Spacing: 3%
Shape Dynamics: Size Jitter: 20%
Minimum Diameter: 9%
Scattering: Both axes, 137%
Other Dynamics: Opacity and Flow Jitter: 0%

PAINTER

Chalk: Large Chalk
Opacity: 10-50%
Grain: 20%
Resat: 20-50%
Bleed: 0 %
Jitter: 0-1

This brush is quite a simple shape and consists of a few merged airbrush tips. It is very easy to use and highly efficient for realistic renders, so long as you remember to switch the opacity and colours constantly throughout the painting process. To use it most effectively, first off sketch out the general cloud shape with an airbrush and try the brush out on top of it on a separate layer.



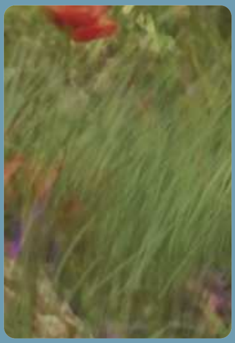
PHOTOSHOP

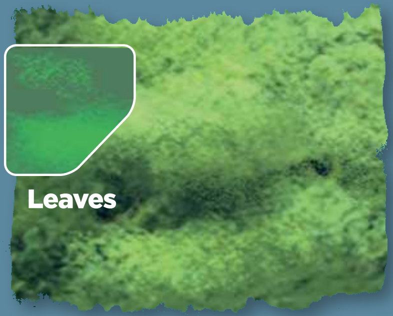
Opacity: 5-50%
Flow: 100%
Spacing: 25%
Other Dynamics: Opacity and flow Jitter: 0%

PAINTER

Unavailable

This brush is great for basic texturing of a grassy field. However, do not rely on it solely, as nothing can replace the hand-made touches. Once you have the basis done, pick an airbrush or hard round of a lighter colour and add some additional blades. For extra realism you can also add some loose leaves, sticks and so on. When the texture is done, duplicate that layer, flipping it horizontally and setting its layer mode to Soft Light.





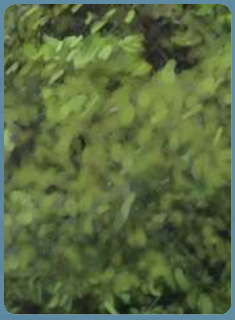
PHOTOSHOP

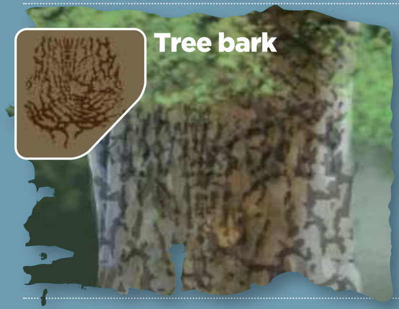
Opacity: 5-30%
Flow: 100%
Spacing: 25%

PAINTER

Chalk: Large Chalk
Opacity: 50%
Grain: 25%
Resat: 18%
Bleed: 0%
Jitter: 4

This photo brush is extremely useful for painting leaves in distant backgrounds. Its edges are sharp, due to the photo extraction, so be sure to blur the painted leaf blobs from time to time to avoid artificial looking results. When shading with these brushes, try to gradually move on from darkest to lightest shades. Once done, paint some individual leaves with an airbrush on top of the area.





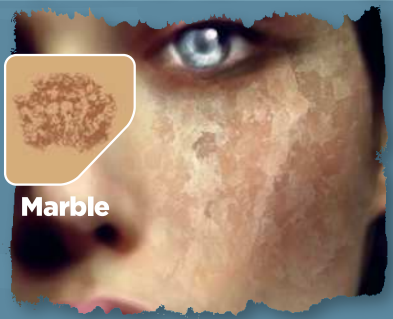
PHOTOSHOP

Opacity: 20-40%
Flow: 100%

PAINTER

Unavailable

This is another brush that I extracted from an old photo I took a while back. Using it requires a bit of patience as the stamp has to be rotated continuously, but once you're used to it, it enables you to create truly realistic effects. After you place it over an area, enhance the effect by underlining the cracked edges with a lighter stroke. This brush has a lot of functions and, aside from texturing bark, can be used for painting cracks, facial marks and scars.



PHOTOSHOP

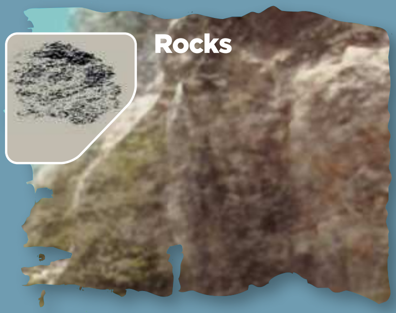
Opacity: 30-70%
Flow: 100%

PAINTER

Unavailable

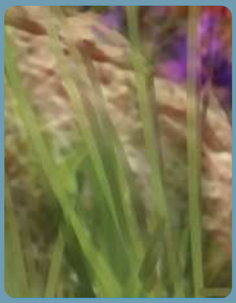
This is a wonderful brush extracted from a marble photo, which I use excessively for a multitude of things. It can be employed for general painting and texturing, texturing of flat stone surfaces and even skin deformities. It is most efficient when used over the desired area on a separate layer with its mode switched to Overlay, Multiply or Soft Light.

Rocks

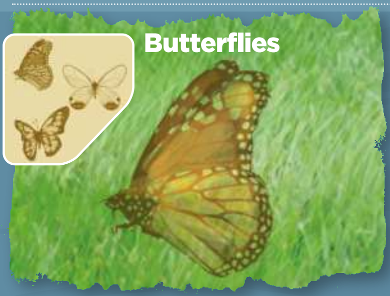


PHOTOSHOP	PAINTER
Opacity: 5-50%	**Unavailable**
Flow: 100%	

Painting rocks is extremely hard and time-consuming. This brush can't be used to create a realistic rock from beginning to end, but it is extremely useful for creating a basic texture or for hinting at the detail during speed painting. Use it as a stamp, from time to time rotating the blobs. It's definitely most effective when you blur the outcome and regularly change the hues and brightness.



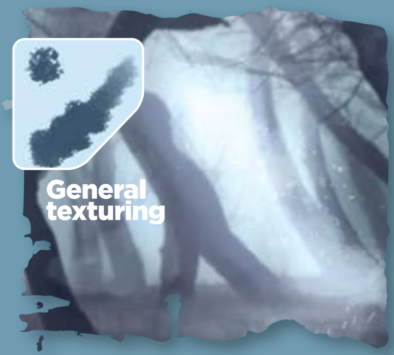
Butterflies



PHOTOSHOP	PAINTER
Opacity: 50-100%	**Unavailable**
Flow: 100%	

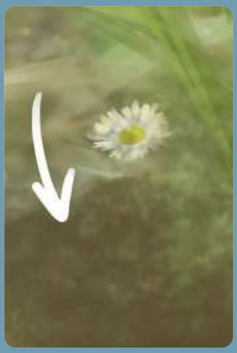
Butterflies are very common painting elements, yet quite time consuming. So, why not make your life a little bit easier? The brushes shown here were created from photos I found on the internet. They're extremely handy if you need to add detail to your painting but are feeling a bit lazy – I always use them when painting glades, forests and such.

General texturing

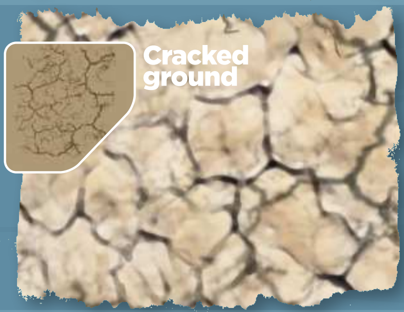


PHOTOSHOP	PAINTER
Opacity: 10-90%	**Unavailable**
Flow: 100%	
Spacing: 5%	
Shape Dynamics:	
Size Jitter: 55%	
Minimum Diameter: 9%	
Scattering:	
Both axes, 104%	
Count: 5	
Other Dynamics:	
Opacity and Flow Jitter: 0%	

I use this brush for speed painting landscapes, when I rarely switch between the brush types. This custom one is made out of some loose colour blobs – its ragged edges encourage smooth transitions between colours and so make this brush perfect for all fast jobs, as you don't need to constantly worry about colours not blending correctly. Use this brush as a typical Hard Round, constantly playing with the opacity and colour.



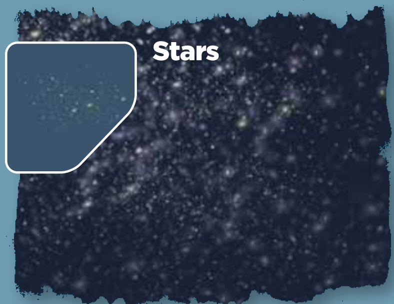
Cracked ground



PHOTOSHOP	PAINTER
Opacity: 10-80%	**Unavailable**
Flow: 100%	

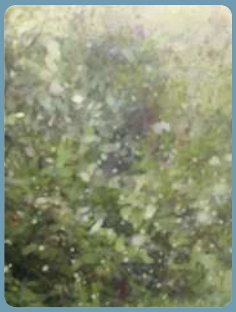
This brush is a fast and efficient means to texture dried ground. Use it as a stamp, preferably on a Multiply layer mode. It usually requires some editing and rotating, but generally greatly speeds up the painting process. Aside from its main use, it can also be handy for painting lightning.

Stars



PHOTOSHOP	PAINTER
Opacity: 10-100%	**AIRBRUSH**
Flow: 100%	Tiny Spattery Airbrush
	Opacity: 75%
	Spread: 15 degrees
	Flow: 2-4
	Feature: 5-10

Now that is a fast way to paint a sky! Just run over the night sky with this brush, first with a larger size and higher transparency (for distant stars) gradually blurring and changing to smaller and more opaque. This brush is one of the most functional, as aside from its main purpose, it can be used to create such textures as: skin pores, brocade, smaller leaves, dust, enhanced grass and so on.



Photoshop

PAINT A FANTASY MANGA PORTRAIT

Asia Ladowska puts aside her ink pens and markers, and embraces the digital painting process of a soft and colourful manga character

Artist
PROFILE
Asia Ladowska
LOCATION: England

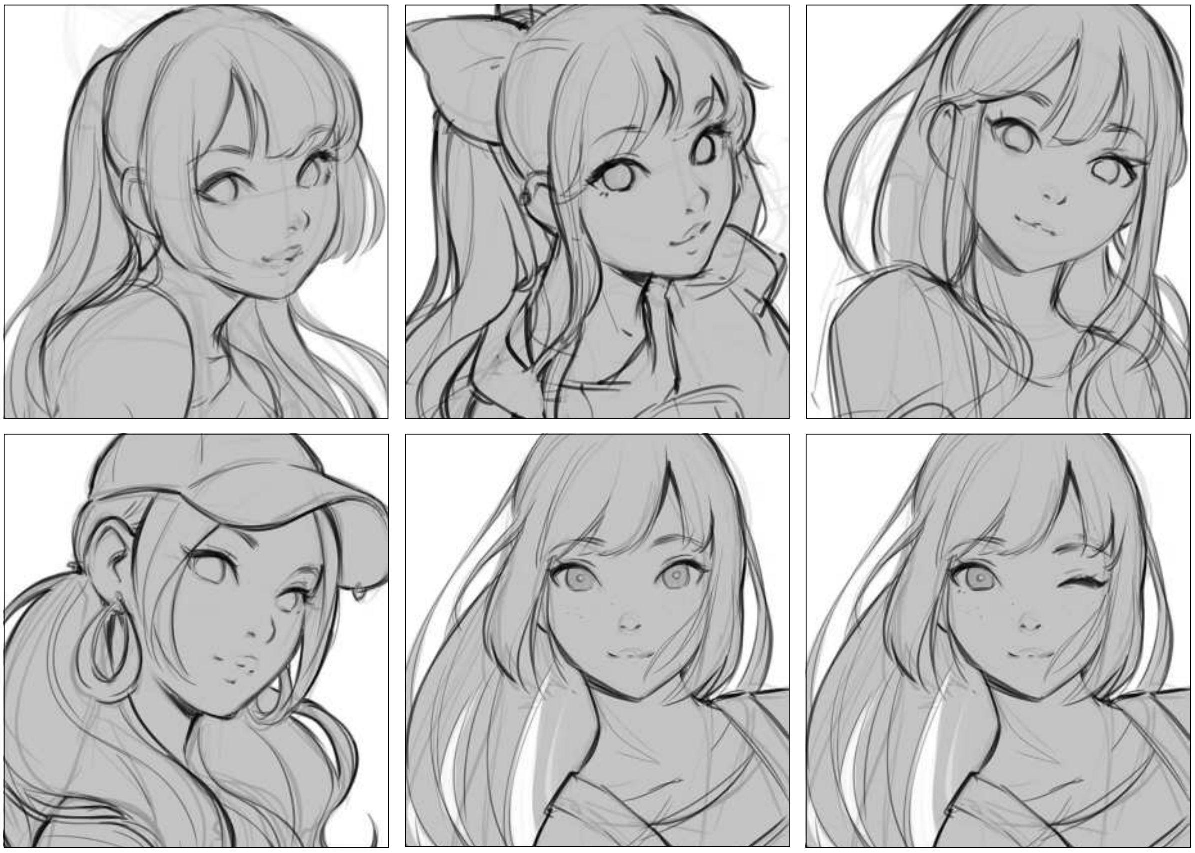
The Polish artist and Instagram art ambassador is also the author of the book Sketch with Asia.
www.ladowska.com

For this workshop I'm painting a beautiful manga character. My go-to tools are usually traditional media. I'm most comfortable working with ink pens, pencils and markers, and so I'm learning a lot when I'm painting with digital tools.

I have no idea what the end result will look like, so I'll make sure to share in this workshop every important step and my thinking process, as well as why I make certain decisions that affect the final appearance of the character.

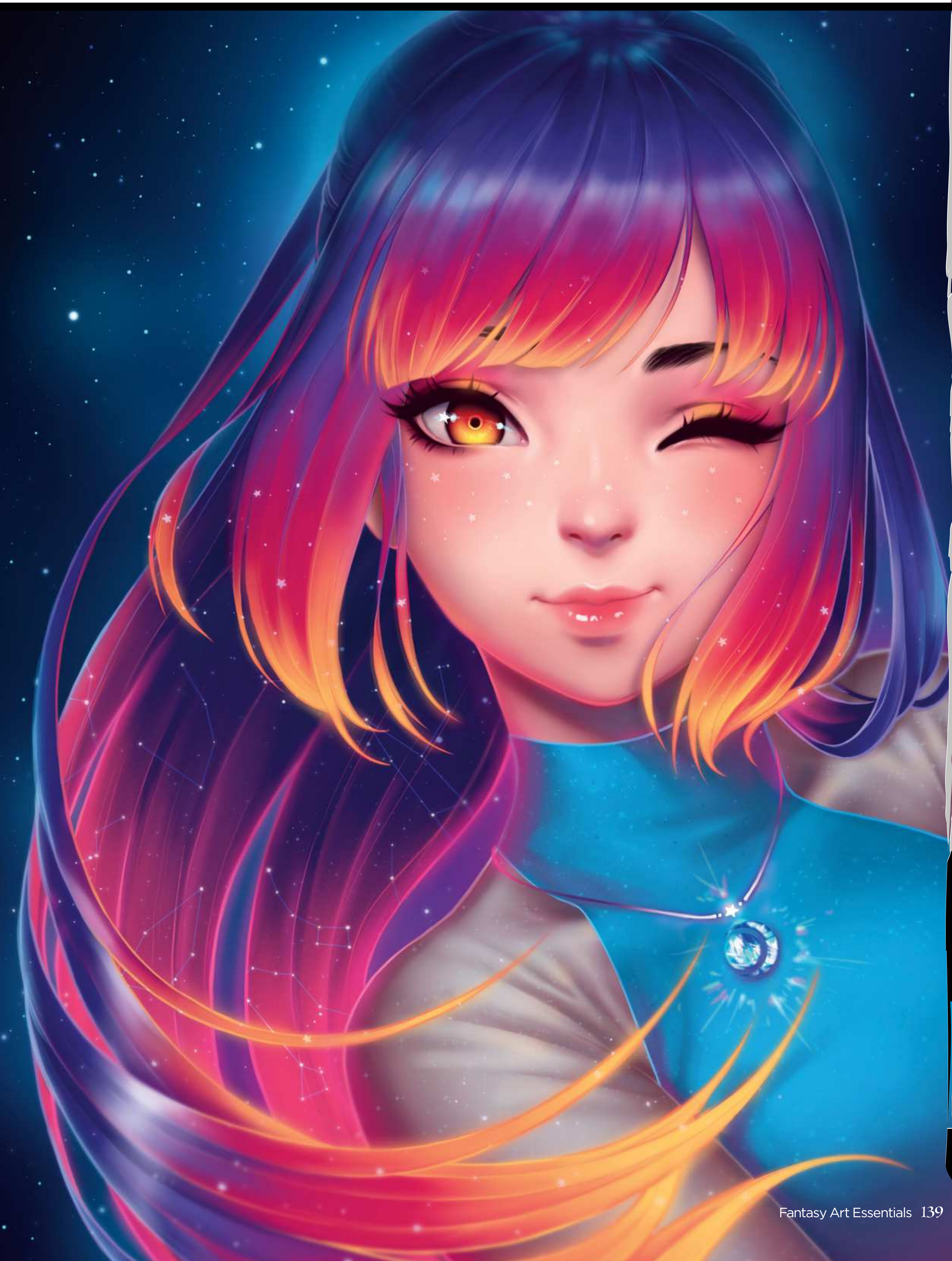
While painting colour concepts and experimenting with different palettes in the sketching phase, I was listening to music and believe it or not, the final colours of this illustration were inspired by a song. I heard the line, "Day gives way to night" and that's when the deep red and blue sparkled in my mind. If not for the song and the feedback from ImagineFX I'm sure the girl's hair would have ended up being pastel pink and blue (like the hair of most of my characters that I've painted digitally). It's exciting to experiment with colours that I've never used together before.

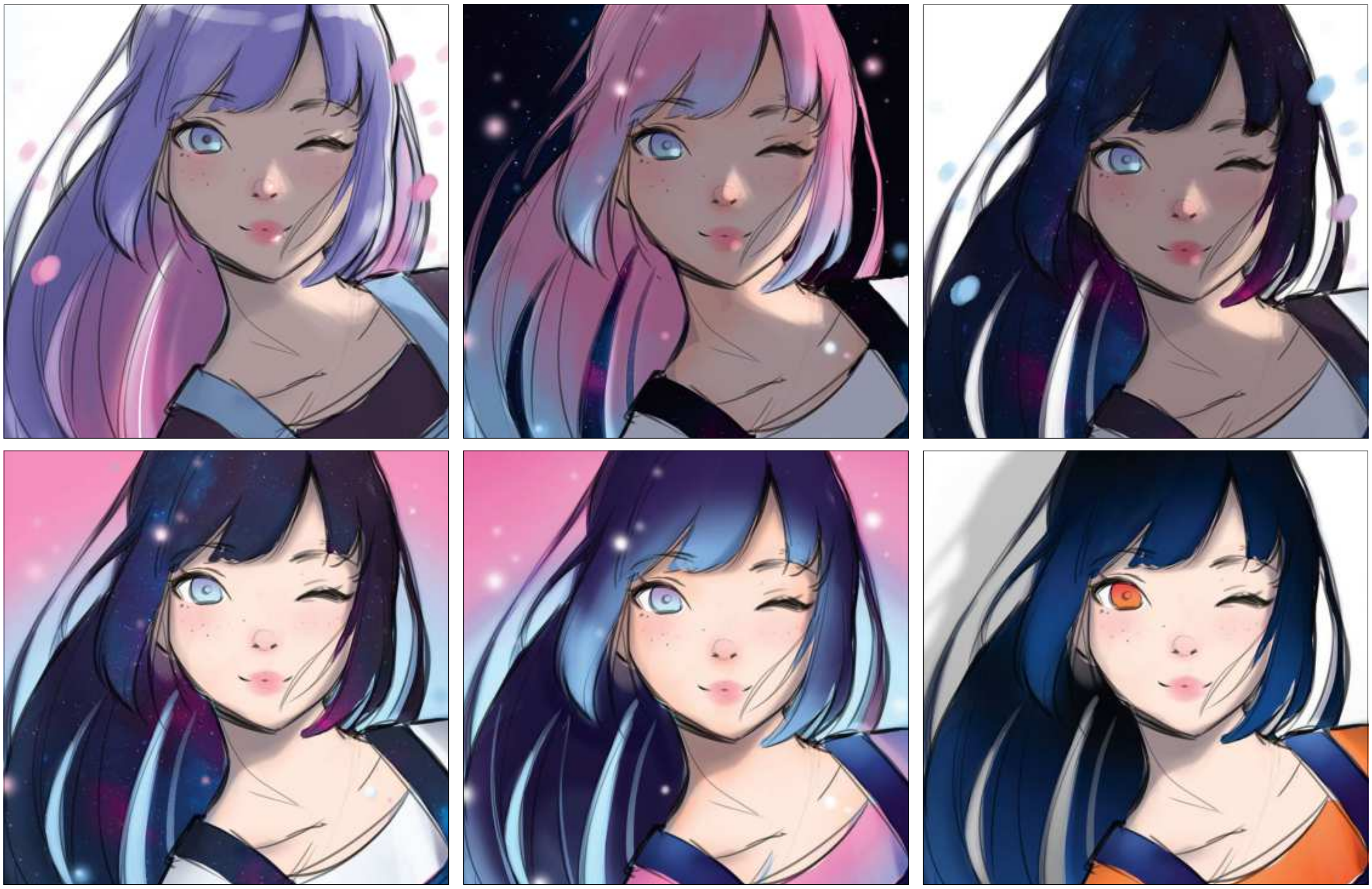
So, prepare to meet Sunset, a happy and colourful character who is ready for adventure!



1 Generating concept sketches

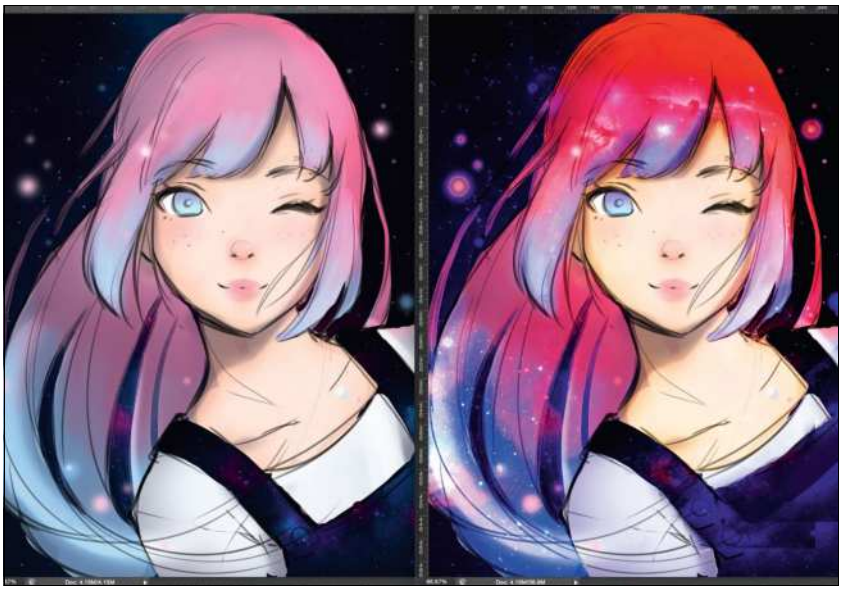
The brief I receive is pretty straightforward, with a lot of freedom for experimenting. I start by sketching some close-up shots of a woman in her 20s, making sure she's looking at the viewer and that she's smiling. I always make the expression of the character I draw myself, so the sketching process has left me in a really good mood!





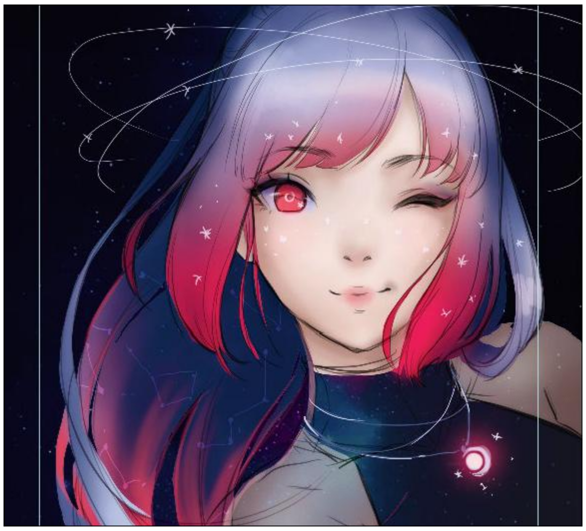
2 Apply colour tests to the chosen sketch concept

I introduce colour to one of the concepts that's been chosen for the cover. Although I'm trying to be creative with the palette, and despite the brief saying "No pink", I'm sneakily trying to introduce pink combined with blue, two different light sources and some space textures.



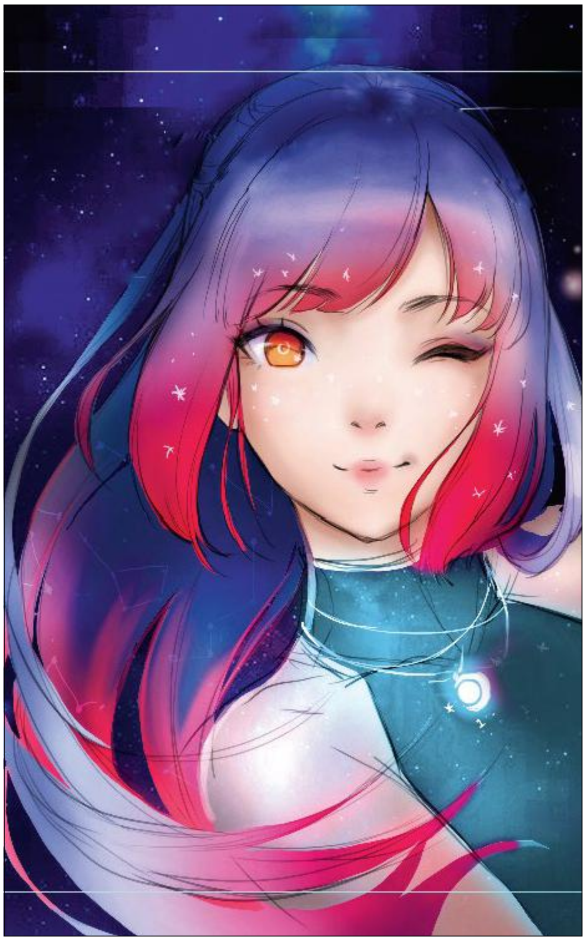
3 Acting on the first round of feedback

The scary moment is here! I receive my first feedback on the colour sketches that I've sent in. It's also my first experience of having someone edit my colour sketches and say what needs adjusting. The ImagineFX team ask me to change the pink to a more red-looking hue, add stars in the hair and give the girl a necklace. I'm panicking just a little right now. Does this mean no more pink…?



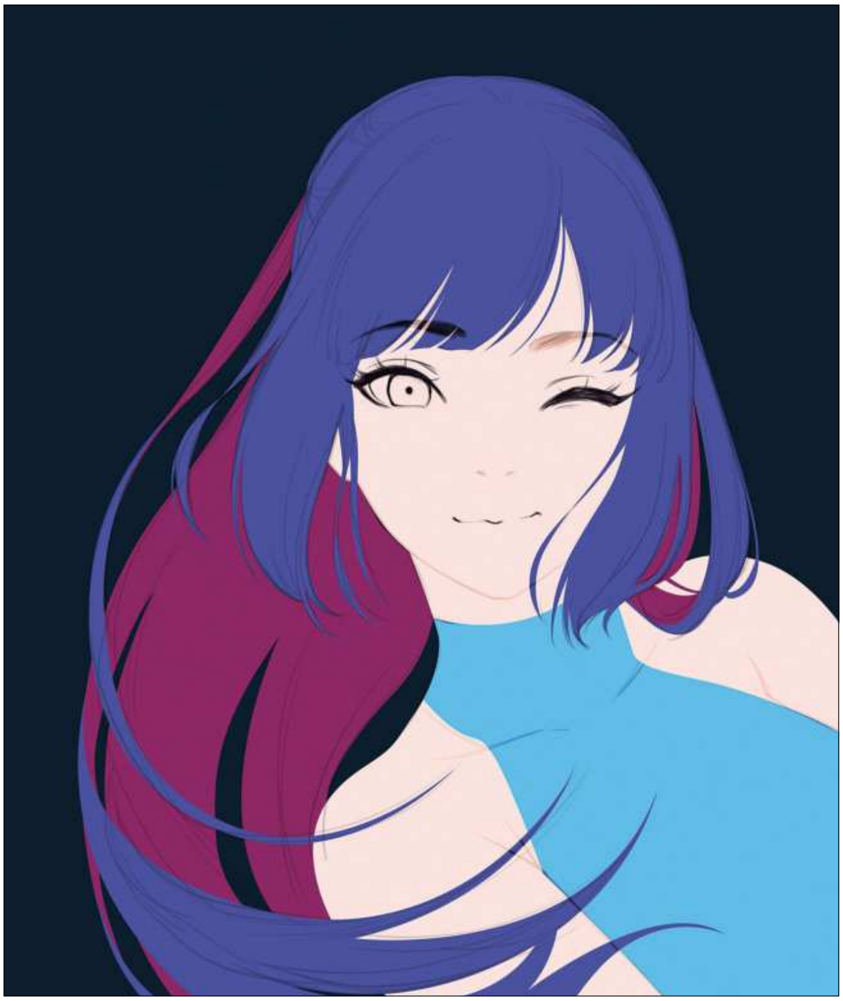
4 Forgetting about the pink

I start over with new colours and a new concept for the clothes. I wasn't really happy about the request to remove the pink, but I know that I can still make this work. I paint on a larger canvas now, with extra space around the character and guides that indicate the actual crop of the cover image. I'm listening to music that keeps me relaxed and, surprisingly, also brings new colour ideas!



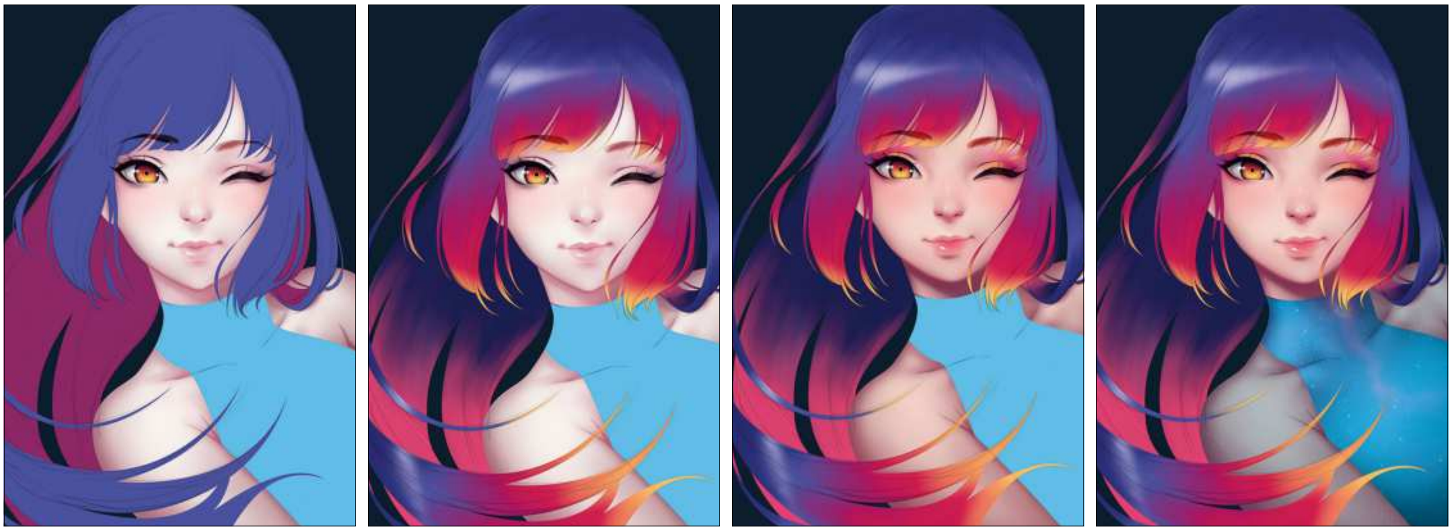
5 Second round of feedback

The new concept worked for ImagineFX; however, I'm asked to make some more changes. Because the painting was looking a little too dark, the team suggests brightening the dress and background, and introducing some yellow highlights in the eye. Sure! I'm much more confident on how to take the painting further now.



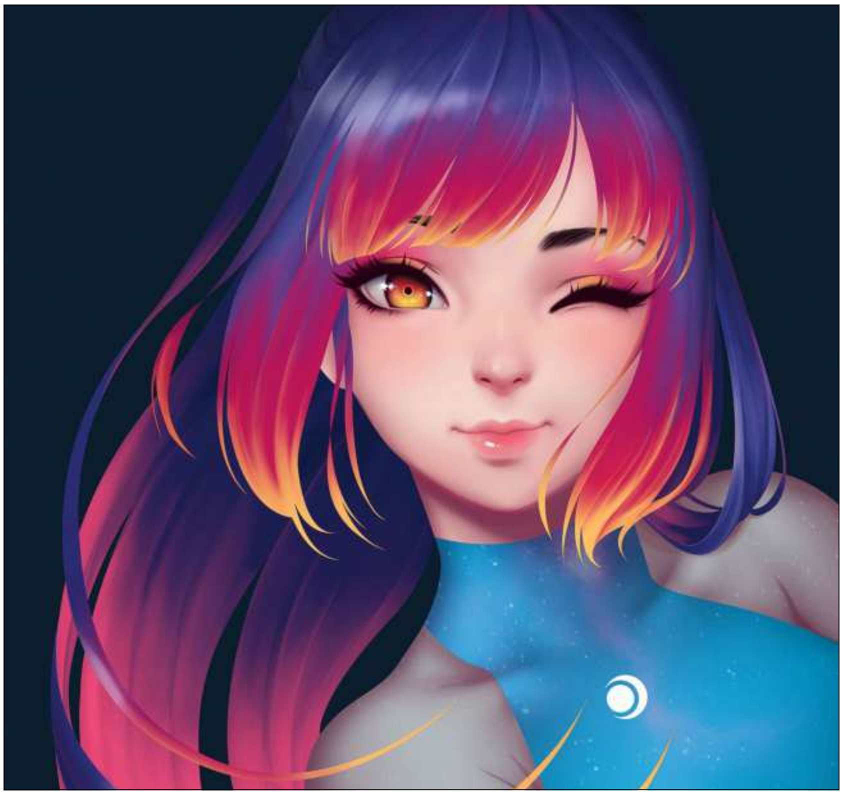
6 Making selections to separate out elements

Making selections is a long and tedious process, but it's worth the effort. Some artists just paint on one or more layers, but I like to keep everything editable and easy to select. So for each element, like the skin, the hair at the front, hair at the back and the dress I make flat selections with the Pen tool, all on separate layers.



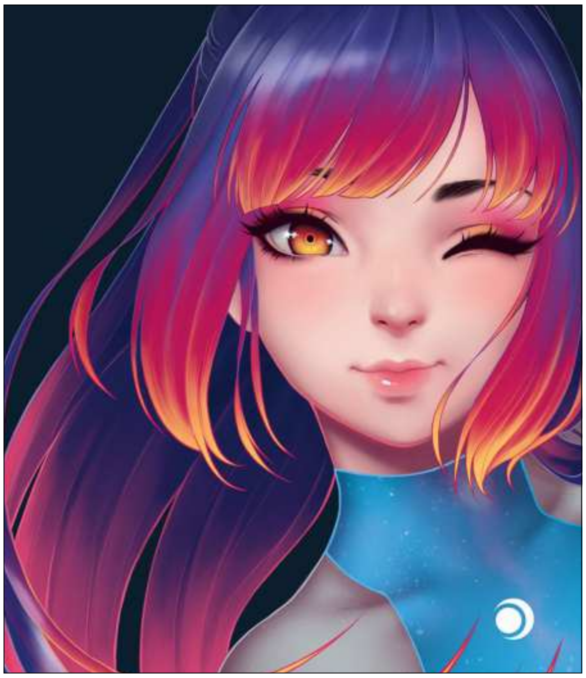
7 Painting basic colours and shading

Once I've made a selection I usually just lock the Transparency or create a clipping mask to the exact shape layer and then start painting. I'm adding basic colours that I want to use as a reference and then some simple shading to all of the character's elements, such as her skin or dress. This stage is more about finding the right colours than trying to make everything look perfect. ➤



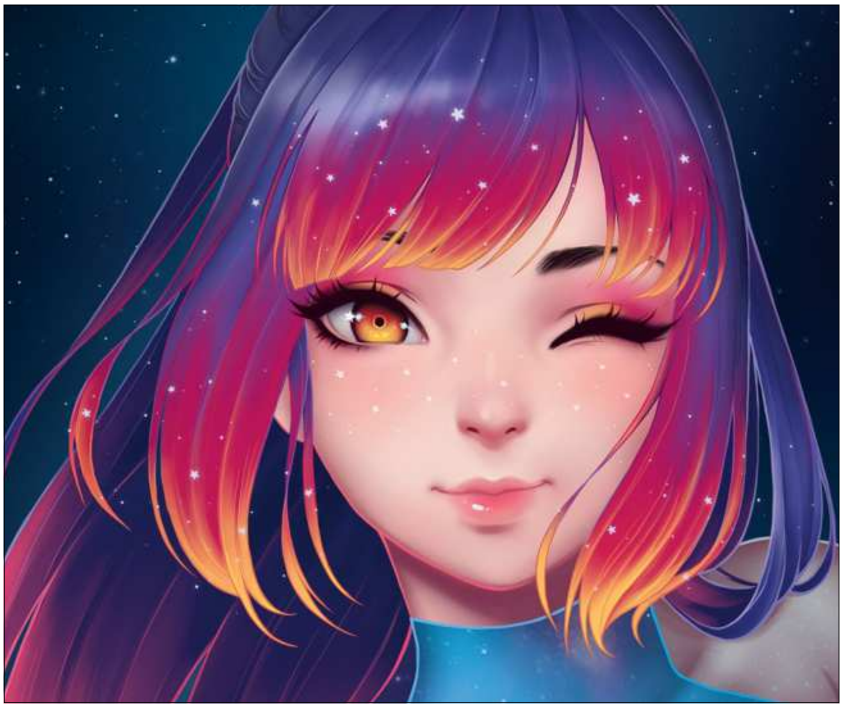
8 Painting hair texture

Using the basic colours of the hair in the previous step, I paint up and down with my custom Hair Brush to make the strands look more like hair. As simple as it sounds, however, it takes me a few hours to paint in all those strands!



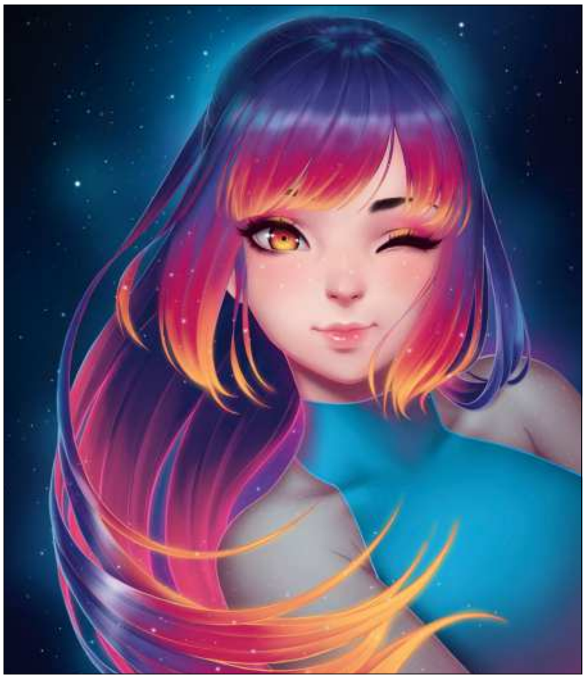
9 Creating line art

I think that a key characteristic for manga-style art is line art, so I always add it into my work at some point. Black lines would make the painting look too harsh, so I use colours that I've swatched from various places in the painting. To change the colour I initially picked I can always lock the pixels of the layer and try different ones, so there's no need to spend more time making selections.



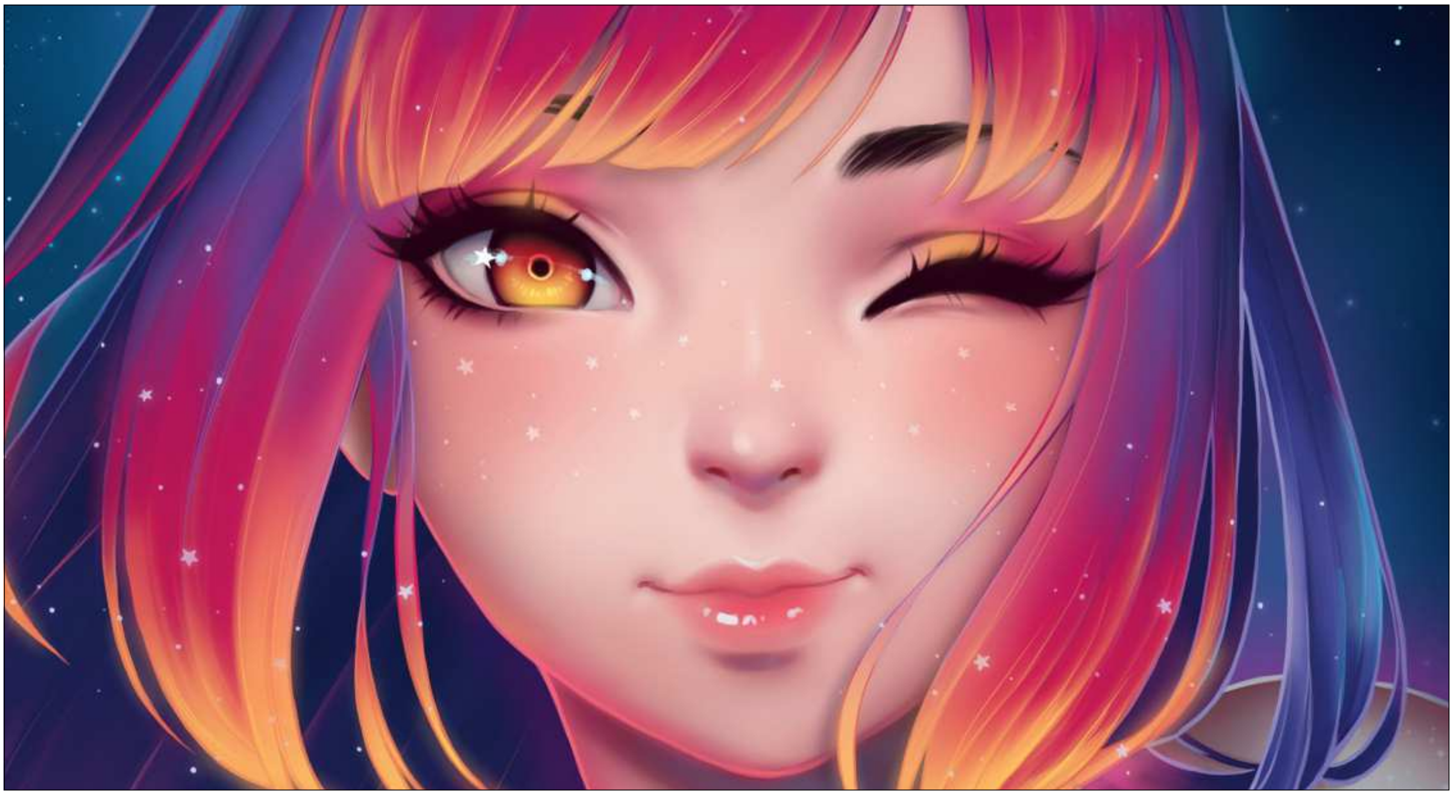
10 Painting in the stars

For stars in the background I use the brush that can be downloaded from Adobe's Creative Cloud. From the Brushes menu click Get More Brushes. It's one of Kyle's Spatter brushes pack, called Dots 1. I adjust the Spacing and Size Jitter, add in the stars, then apply the Blur and Overlay filters, Now the stars look perfect. I paint the stars on the character's face and hair on a separate layer by hand.



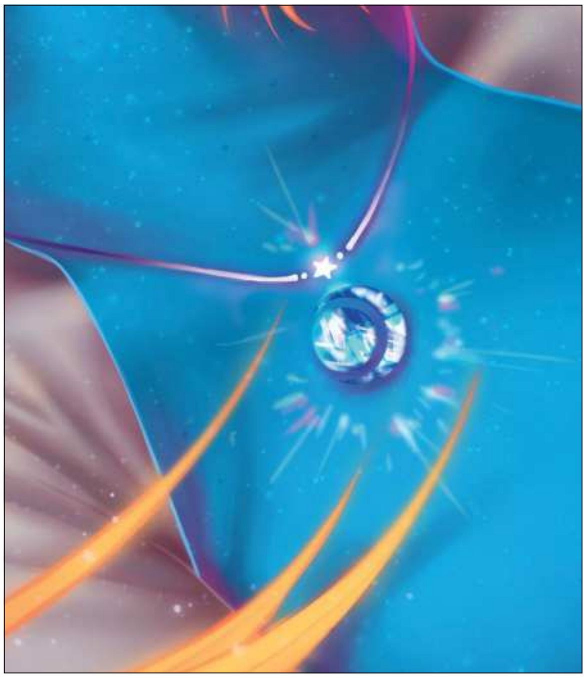
11 Softening the image

In my opinion this phase drastically changes the illustration. I no longer stick to selections, but create a new group above everything and then paint. I use a soft Round brush to soften selected edges, such as the yellow ends of the woman's fringe with a colour picked from exactly the same place. This makes them look like they're glowing.



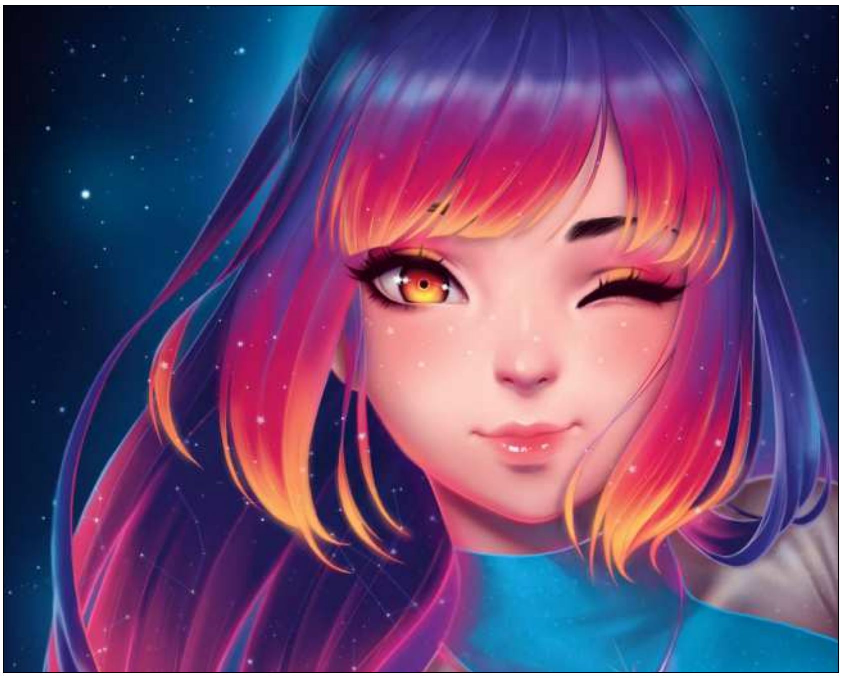
12 Introduce reflective light on the face

With such a colourful and strong environment, glowing hair and lots of stars, Sunset's face was looking a little flat and not part of the environment. I need to remedy this. On a Multiply layer I add some shadows to make her look more three-dimensional, and on another one set to Normal I apply some pink and yellow on the jaw line and blue on the neck, because those colours would have an effect on the shadows.



13 Design a crystal necklace

It's time for detailing. The sleeves of Sunset's dress are missing crease lines, the dress itself receives a few brushstrokes, and then I add a diamond necklace in the shape of the Sun and the Moon to complement her look. I also add a few constellations to her hair to make her look even more magical.



14 Applying the finishing touches

To finish off, my process is almost always the same. I add a Color Balance filter layer with Midtones at +3, -3 and +3, respectively, to push the reds, pinks and blues a little further. I also flatten all layers as a copy above everything and apply a Gaussian Blur filter to it. I erase the parts that I don't want blurred, and now Sunset looks much softer and finished. Even though her hair isn't pink, I'm pleased how this painting took me on a space journey beyond my usual art frontiers!

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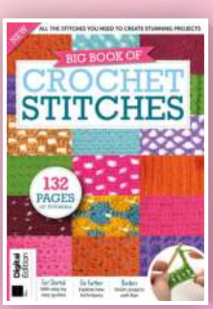

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