NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

Imagine FX

THE ART OF
DUNGEONS &DRAGONS

DISCOVER THE ARTISTS WHO ARE BRINGING THE ICONIC **ROLE-PLAYING GAME** TO LIFE!

17
SPECTACULAR D&D SKETCHES
TO FIRE UP YOUR IMAGINATION

IN-DEPTH
INSECT ANATOMY
Quickly paint realistic creature art in Procreate

PRO INSIGHT
HOW TO WORK COLLABORATIVELY
Illustrators Raide and Leffie create charming animal designs

ALSO INSIDE
EXPLORE A JUNGLE STUDIO – WATCH OUT FOR SNAKES!
TAKE YOUR REFERENCES TO THE NEXT LEVEL
ABSTRACT ART ADVICE WITH KEN COLEMAN

FUTURE
ISSUE 214

RALPH HORSLEY REVEALS 25 ESSENTIAL TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR FANTASY ART

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Welcome to…

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

This issue is a big one for us, as we take a look at the art of one of the biggest fantasy brands out there. Dungeons and Dragons is one of those things that everybody has heard of and, although it isn't an art project, the world building and visual identity is simply iconic.

With that in mind, we spoke to some leading artists in the world of D&D to find out more about them and their swords and sorcery artwork.

Elsewhere in the issue we bring you even more top-level fantasy art with a wonderful traditional workshop by Ralph Horsley, himself one of D&D's artists of choice.

Charlie Pickard returns with the next instalment of his in-depth training course on human anatomy and we bring you a tutorial on drawing insects with Procreate, show you how to paint delightful children's illustrations and abstract portraits, as well as teach you how to make the best use of reference material in your projects.

Enjoy the issue!

Rob

Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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EDITOR'S CHOICE Three of my top picks this month…

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ImagineFX
NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

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Create a fantasy illustration

Drawing insects: the basics

Learn advanced reference skills

Paint abstract portraits

Dynamic fantasy scenes

Anatomy: Part 4

First impressions

ImagineFX Resources

Getting hold of this issue's resources is easy.
Just visit: **https://ifxm.ag/dragons**

WORKSHOP VIDEOS

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

Create a fantasy illustration
Discover how Raide and Leffie created this issue's delightful forest scene by checking out their video tutorial, demonstrating their process.

Abstract portraits
Ken Coleman takes us through his portrait painting process with his workshop video.

TUTORIAL FILES

3D elements & textures
Plus, download Ken Coleman's provided files to kitbash your own abstract portrait.

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ipso. For press freedom with responsibility

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Next month in...

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

Master Manga

Next issue, we take an in-depth look into the world of manga and anime

Also in the issue…

Discover the art of Belle
A look behind the scenes of the stunning animation of anime film Belle.

Pro step-by-step tutorials
Learn new skills with easy-to-follow workshops written by the experts.

Dario Jelusic sketchbook
We showcase the pro concept artist's incredible folklore-inspired sketches.

Monsters and surreal horror
Gain an insight from artists who create terrifying monster designs.

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Cover art
for issue 204
by Ayran
Oberto

ImagineFX 9

FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

ImagineFX
ARTIST
of the
MONTH

Iwo Widuliński

LOCATION: Poland **MEDIA:** Photoshop, ZBrush, traditional and colour pencils **WEB:** www.artstation.com/widulinski

Iwo is an illustrator and concept artist keen on dark fantasy worlds, dynamic poses and twisted monsters. "My tastes were moulded in the fires of 90s pop culture, including Labyrinth, Dark Crystal and The NeverEnding Story."

1 PATRON
"I wanted to show a strong bond between an apprentice and his mentor/protector. I liked the idea of showing the cost of becoming this powerful being. Done for the Evilbook2 project."

2 SSS'RA
"For the upcoming Master Of Magic, developed by MuHa Games. A piece I had great fun producing. It has it all: dragons, VFX, a rocky environment, jewellery. I can render wings for days!"

3 MERLIN
"Another piece from MoM. My take on a well-known wizard. My idea was to depict his strength even in his posture."

© MuHa Games, Slitherine Ltd.

FXPosé

Shaquielle Emptage

LOCATION: Guyana **MEDIA:** Photoshop, TVPaint 11 **WEB:** www.shaquielleemptage.com

Shaquielle is an animator and character designer who currently uses his illustration skills to create better shots for his animation work. "I really enjoy very bold colours, so I tend to lean on cel shading."

1 CLYDE
"This character, Clyde, is from a short story I wrote. Here's just a fun concept of him with a monster in his backpack."
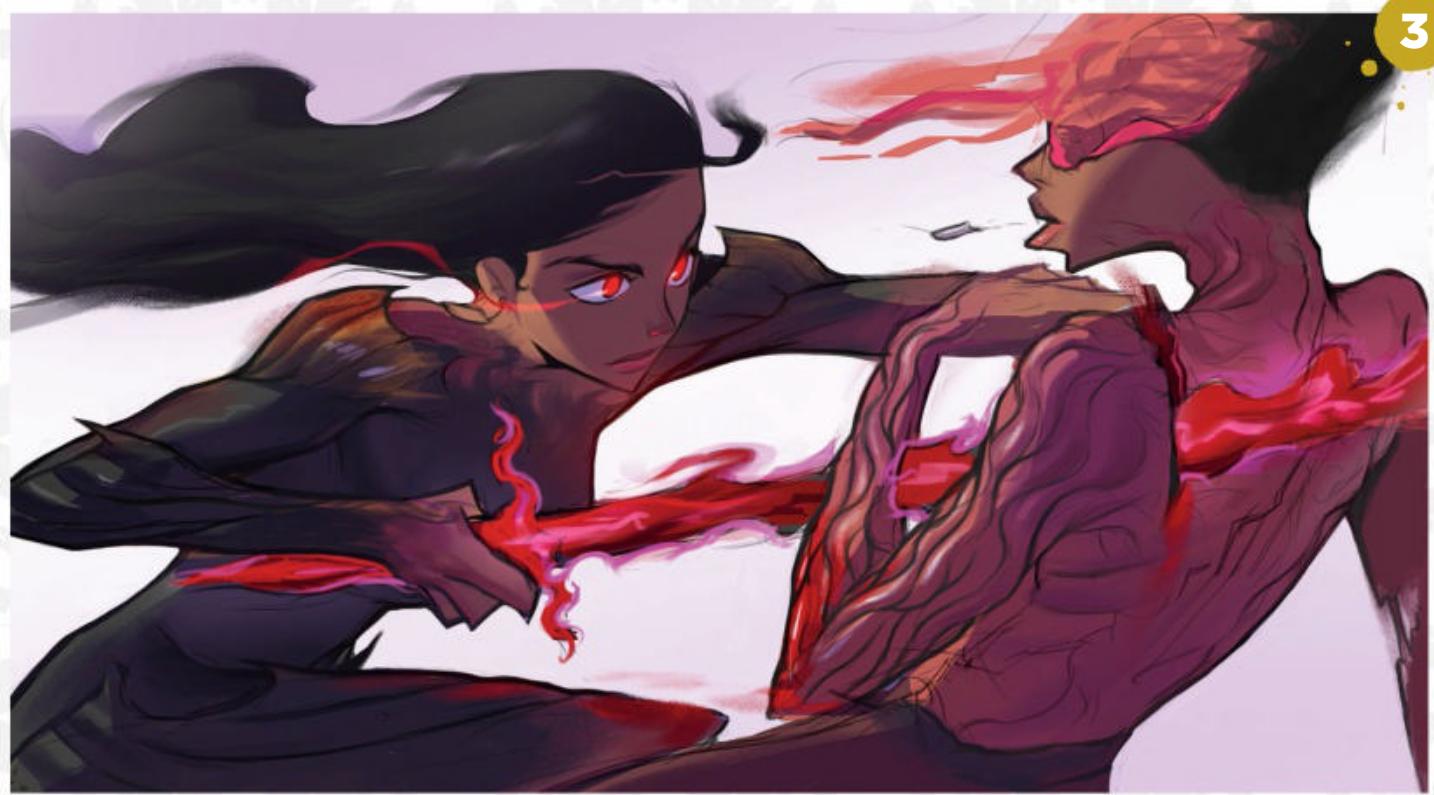
2 CHILLING ON THE FLOOR
"She's just 'chilling on the floor'. I'm a very laid-back person myself and I enjoy drawing people in a more relaxed posture."

3 SWORD PLAY
"I love wide shots because they help to frame my narratives better. This one makes you ask, is she killing an innocent person, or protecting someone?"

4 GORY
"I really enjoy using red and yellow together in my work. I have a tendency to draw gore quite often."

FXPosé

Shahab Alizadeh

LOCATION: Austria **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Blender **WEB:** www.artstation.com/shahabalizadeh

Shahab is a self-taught concept artist and illustrator based in Austria. His work focuses on otherworldly landscapes that draw inspiration from science fiction and fantasy art from the 70s and 80s.

1 ANCIENT TOMB
"This started out as a practice piece, to see if I could improve rendering rocks. I liked where it was going, so I added a final polish for visual storytelling."

2 NEBULA
"This was a fun exercise between a few friends of mine. The idea was to create something based on a small brief within two days."

3 TIME SCAR
"A rift between time and space. This piece was an experiment where I used a simple 3D tool (Blender) to block out the painting."

Stephen Scott

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.blindcoyote.com

Stephen started his artistic career slightly later in life. Having grown up immersed in online furry communities, he believes this gave him a unique opportunity to explore what it means to be human.
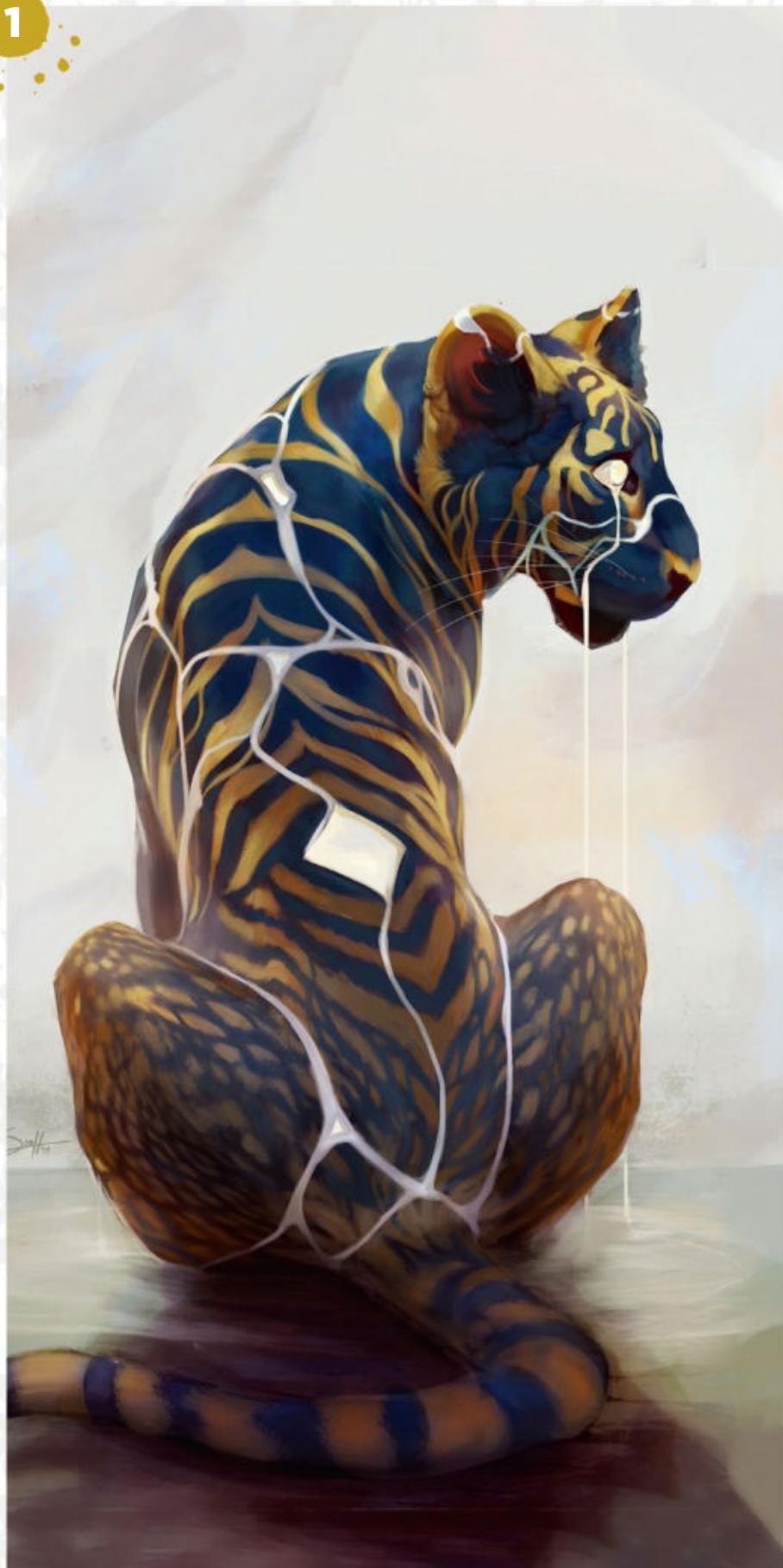
1 KINTSUGI
"Kintsugi is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with shiny lacquer. Scars are on display because we are stronger for it."

2 SMOULDER
"A mysterious, supernatural creature by a bushfire. Fire will come eventually to wipe the slate clean."
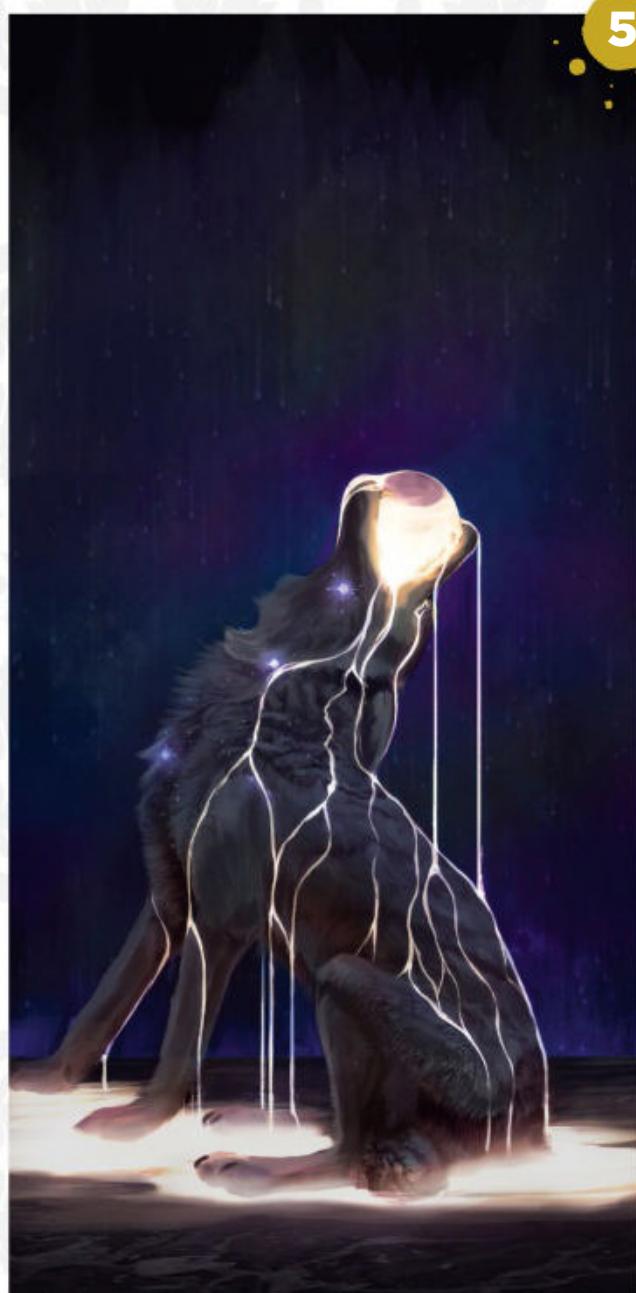
3 **AGAINST THE FLOW**
"Sometimes you need to find your own current in order to follow and write your own story."

4 **MOONGLOW**
"When caught in the spotlight, sometimes all you can do is offer to show your best cheek."

5 **STARFALL**
"This wolf has engulfed the moon and the land was swallowed by the darkness he created."

Kathryn Steele

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Procreate, Photoshop **WEB:** artofklsteele.com

Kathryn Steele is an American artist who combines lineart with semi-realistic rendering. She has worked in the tabletop gaming industry for over ten years on various titles for Fantasy Flight Games, Upper Deck and more.

1 MALESSA
"A commission of a World of Warcraft character with a list of very detailed requirements from armour to the location. It was very challenging getting all the details correct and cohesive."

2 KEIRNAN
"This is a commission of a werewolf character. I wanted to show subtle details in the early stages of transformation under the full moon."
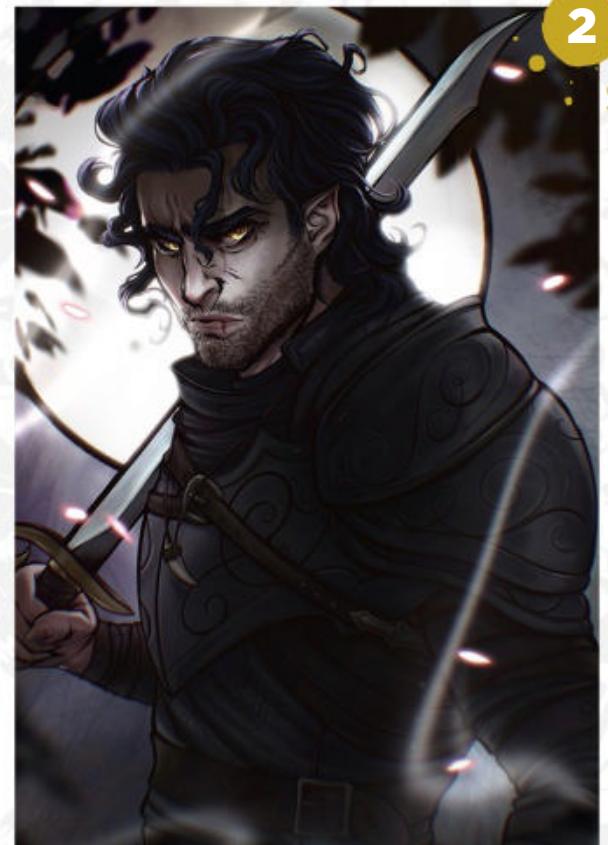
3 PRINCESS FLOWER
"As a Legend of Zelda fan, I took inspiration from Breath of the Wild. I wanted to show the bond between the two characters while highlighting the ethereal elements in the world."

5
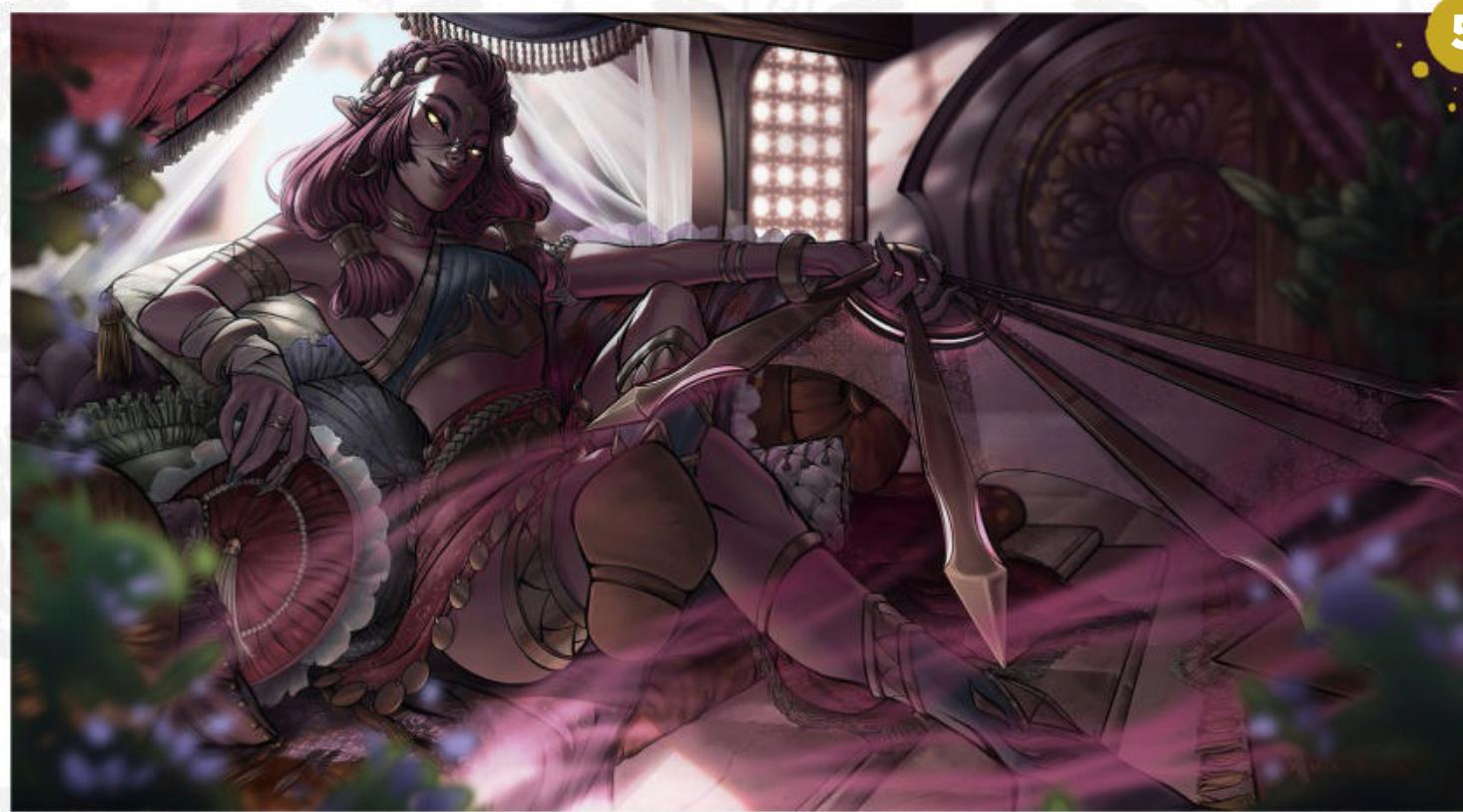
4 MAGNOLIA
"I have a love for dramatic lighting that evokes strong emotion and highlights key elements of a piece. Magnolia is my spearhead of exploring that concept."

5 PALMEDA
"I wanted to push my style in a new way by attempting a splash art themed piece, and creating an original character and environment."

Do you want to see your art on these pages? Then email five pieces of your work and a short explanation about each artwork, along with a photo and a few details about yourself, to **fxpose@imaginefx.com**
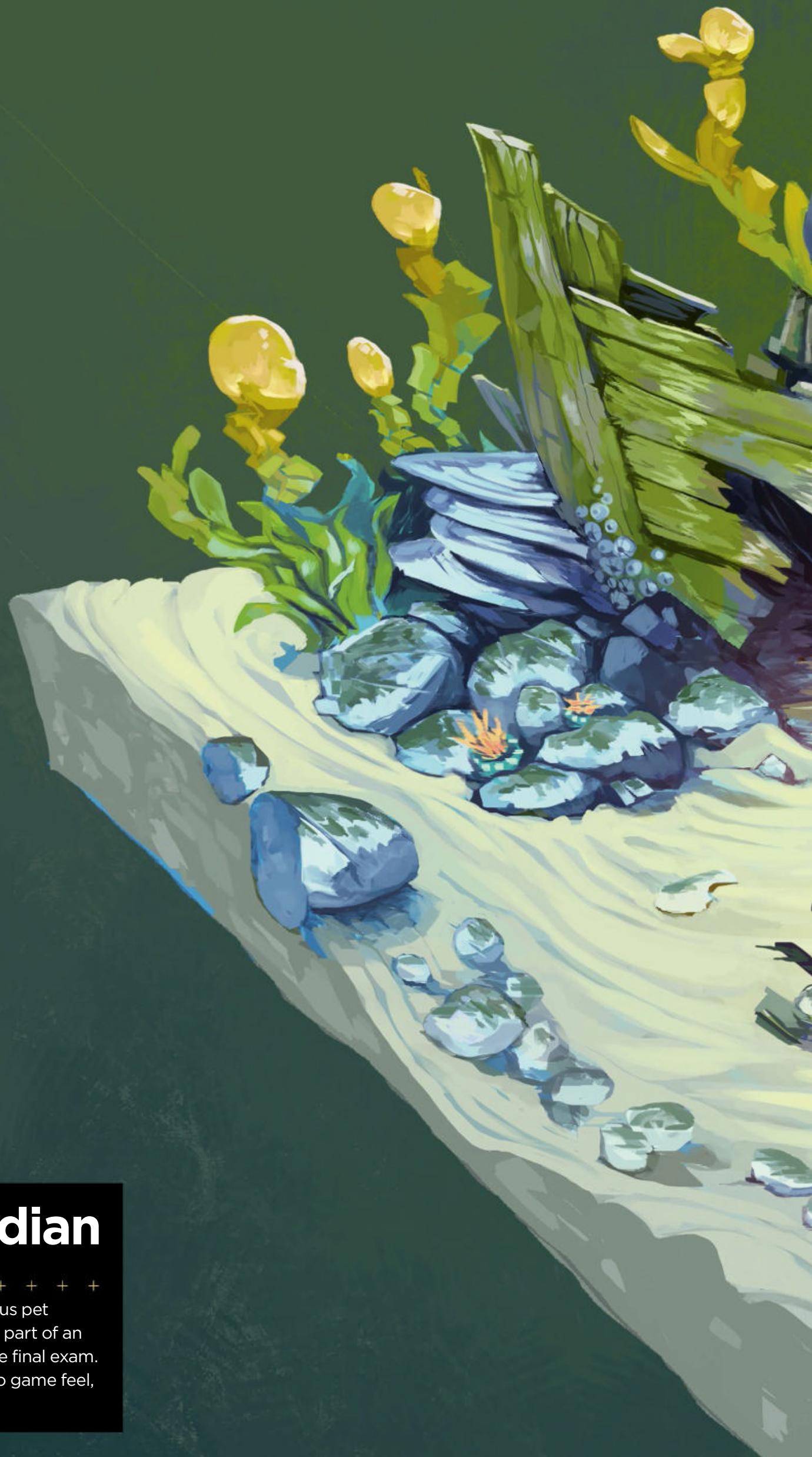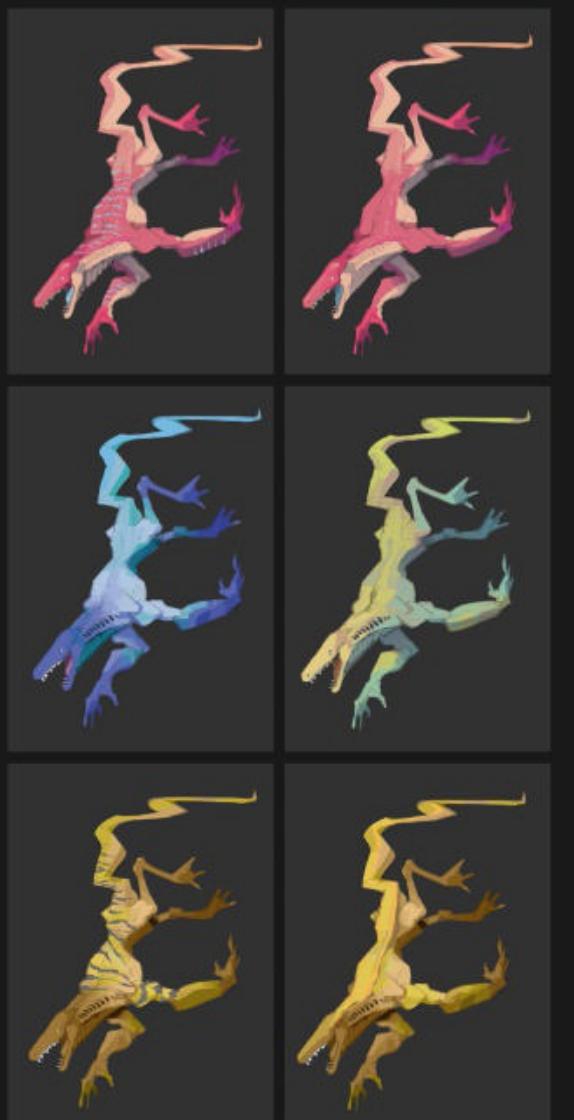
Kelp Forest Guardian

YEAR CREATED: 2021 **MEDIA:** Photoshop

+ +

"A forest creature guarding its treasure – his precious pet goldfish – in a fitting environment. This project was part of an assignment for a stylised design class, as part of the final exam. The goal was to create an environment with a video game feel, and a creature guarding some treasure."

Artist
PROFILE

Adriano Lorusso-Favia
LOCATION: Belgium

Italian-American concept artist and final-year student at DAE in Belgium. I love designing anything sea-related and my goal is to work in the industry on projects I can be passionate about. I focus on set and creature design but have experience with character design and VFX as well.
www.therookies.co/u/adrianolorusso

Leidora, a hunter who uses blood magic, by Astri Lohne. Here she has travelled to a wispy shadow realm, so Astri wanted to make her look cautious, but also fierce and ready.
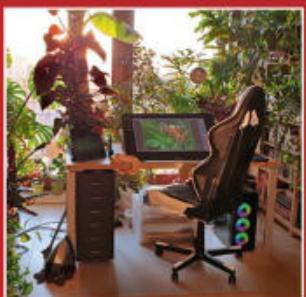
IN THE JUNGLE
Concept artist and illustrator Anna Podedworna reveals why she loves to be surrounded by lush greenery and slithering snakes as she works.
Page 28

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Take out a digital subscription to ImagineFX and you can read your favourite magazine while out and about, on your tablet or smartphone.
Page 32

YOUR VIEWS, YOUR ART
Readers write in with their art news and opinions on what we've covered in ImagineFX. Plus we feature art that's caught our eye on social media.
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Brienne of Tarth, by Bella Bergolts. "A young girl who has a complicated past, but is still inspired by life."

Luisa Preissler's cover for Secrets of the Sword III by Lindsay Buroker. Luisa shot her own reference photos for this image.

Warrior women

Powerful heroines Tanya Combrinck meets four artists who revel in creating strong female characters with depth and complexity

There is a strong focus in fantasy art on female beauty, but some artists thrive on the exploration of powerful, confrontational female characters whose attitude will be the first thing you notice.

Astri Lohne, lead 2D character artist at Vela Games, says she naturally gravitates towards painting female warriors. "While I don't think there's anything wrong with painting beautiful women for the sake of it, this is a genre of art that doesn't resonate strongly with me personally," she explains. "As a woman, I don't find women who are simply beautiful aspirational, and I struggle to relate to that type of

Aloy, by Inna Vjuzhanina. "Nothing is more exciting than the energy of an action pose and your hero being in the flow of it."
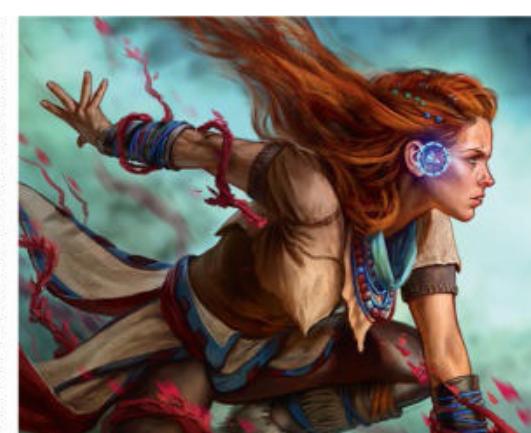
character – I love seeing determined, fierce women, who can of course also be beautiful!"

Astri's life experience is a big influence on her creative expression, and her work is a source of personal power. "So many of the women in my life are fighters, and I've had my fair share of struggles myself, so painting female characters who look determined feels right to me."

One of her biggest early sources of inspiration for female characters ➤➤

> 66 I love seeing determined, fierce women, who can of course also be beautiful! 99

INDUSTRY INSIGHT
KIND AND KICKING BUTT

Luisa Preissler reveals the thinking behind her illustrations of female fantasy warriors

What led you to create these images of confrontational female action heroes?
It all came from my passion for reading urban fantasy novels with strong female heroines. These women are independent, and they do what's necessary to take care of the bad guys. I appreciate female beauty, but what makes it really interesting for me is always a balance of strength and softness.

What kinds of female characters are most interesting to you?
Characters that are multi-layered and have a compelling backstory, not just a pretty face – even though I like that, too. I think it's very important that they are still vulnerable despite their strength, and take care of others while overcoming their challenges. In essence: women with a kind heart who kick butt.

Tell us about your process for creating your images.
The clothing and weapons are described in the books I illustrate; I love it when a cover shows the character and surroundings exactly as described in the books. I often like to work with dramatic lighting, using a one-point light source from above to obscure the eyes and have defined shadows that make the character look more mysterious. I also love to use powerful stances and centred compositions.

Luisa Preissler is a freelance illustrator specialising in creating fantasy book covers for a range of clients.
www.luisapreissler.de

Before the Fight, by Bella Bergolts. An art gift to one of her followers.

Inna Vjuzhanina's entry for a Tomb Raider movie contest. "It didn't take the prize, but Alicia Vikander did snap a picture next to it, and that's the best kind of win for me!" she says.

came from The Longest Journey saga, a trilogy of adventure games by Funcom and Red Thread Games. Two of the main protagonists, April Ryan and Zoe Castillo, are both flawed people who face great odds and rise to the occasion.

"In a sea of other games where women were either eye candy or one-dimensional side characters, this had a really big impact on me in my early days," says Astri. "I also always loved watching The Lord of the Rings when I was a kid, and I think it laid the groundwork for a lot of my aesthetic tastes. I remember being obsessed with Galadriel, Arwen, and especially Eowyn. They were all so strong and self-possessed, while also being

beautiful, multi-faceted and nuanced. I think a lot of the time women are portrayed as either shallow side characters, or they're strong and moral to the point where they just feel like caricatures."

In designing a character's outfit, Astri likes to think about what they will be doing while wearing it, and what their motivations are. "I'll usually try to imagine myself wearing their outfit to judge how practical it would be, and

> ❝ I think it's very important that they are still vulnerable despite their strength ❞

Katja, a secret agent character, by Astri Lohne. "I enjoyed getting to depict a female character with a bit of a masculine edge," she says.

I'll also attempt to do the pose I'm painting them in, both to get reference pictures and to judge if it's even possible or not. I don't fully adhere to realism though; to me it's more important to create an impactful piece of art than to paint something that's completely plausible, so I like playing with form over function as long as it looks like it could be plausible."

She also tries to capture certain elements of the character's

personality in the design of the outfit, so a warrior with an impulsive and rash personality might have asymmetrical armour that's not entirely optimised for protection.

COURAGEOUS AND INSPIRING

Luisa Preissler is a fantasy novel illustrator who has a knack for conveying a defiant, confrontational and determined expression in her heroines. Her early inspirations came from the likes of Katniss from the Hunger Games, Ripley from Alien and Sydney from Alias, but her biggest influence has always been novels featuring daredevil women.

"I read my first urban fantasy novel with a strong and witty heroine in 2008," she says. "The book was called 'Magic Bites' by Ilona Andrews. I instantly fell in love with the character Kate Daniels, a down-on-her-luck mercenary who cleans up magical problems and has a hard time controlling her mouth.

"Little did I know that ten years later I would get the amazing opportunity to actually illustrate a compilation ➤➤

Luisa Preissler's cover for Blood Heir by Ilona Andrews. The character, Julie aka Aurelia Ryder, made an amazing transition from a malnourished girl living on the streets to a dangerous fighter.

A portrait of Resident Evil heroine Jill Valentine, by Inna Vjuzhanina. "Jill is always beauty and grace, even when the horde of zombies is behind her."

➤ of short stories in the Kate Daniels universe. Needless to say, that was a once-in-a-lifetime chance to officially illustrate for the book series that I love the most."

Another of Luisa's favourite characters to illustrate is Val Thorvald from the series 'Death Before Dragons' by author Lindsay Buroker, a freelance assassin in her forties who looks much younger due to her half-elven blood and has a white telepathic tiger as a sidekick. "I also love to draw Rachel Aaron's female characters who are also very brave, quick-witted and funny," she says.

Warrior, by Bella Bergolts. "This is kind of a self-portrait, full of light and meaning," she explains.

Leanne, a roleplayer's paladin character, by Astri Lohne. "I was really happy to get a chance to paint a scarred, slightly older lady, which is something I don't get to do professionally often." she says.

For **Inna Vjuzhanina**, a fascination with a fearsome fantasy woman was the driving force that inspired her to become an artist. "My love for Lara Croft and her adventures led to me picking up the graphic tablet and starting my own path in the exciting world of magic that is art," she says.

After Tomb Raider, Inna's next big phase of inspiration came from Game of Thrones and its women. "Up to that point in my creative journey I've been painting Lara almost exclusively until Daenerys Targaryen pushed me to expand my horizons. I could probably fill an entire art book with paintings I did of her, and I grew a lot artistically during our time together."

These days Inna is immersing herself in the world of the Netflix series Arcane, which is set in the League of Legends universe. "It is my current artistic love story and the biggest inspiration I've ever experienced," she says. "It pretty

much turned my world upside down in the best way possible." As a Ukrainian currently based in an active conflict zone, Inna draws strength from the fantasy characters that are close to her heart. "My bond to Arcane and my personal 'holy trinity' – Vi, Caitlyn and Jinx – is saving my soul as I'm pushing through the darkest period of my life. They are the ones who keep me from falling apart and still inspired to create despite all the chaos around." Inna's Patreon can be found at **patreon. com/innavjuzhanina**.

POWERFUL ROLE MODELS

Bella Bergolts is another artist who finds power in drawing fierce women, and in fact it was this that started her career. "In challenging situations that made me anxious I would draw a mighty, glorious woman on a battlefield to appeal to my inner strength and recharge myself," she says.

Bella likes heroines who are relentless, principled and fully committed to their mission or duty. "My first favourite character was Lady Aribeth from Neverwinter Nights," she says. "I also love Cassandra from Dragon Age Inquisition, Kusanagi

> ❝ In challenging situations I'd draw a mighty, glorious woman on a battlefield ❞

Portrait of Visenya from A Song of Ice and Fire, by Bella Bergolts. "She is my favourite from house Targaryen," she says.

Astri Lohne's study of a photo by Douglas Herring; the model is Rhiya Prater.

Motoko from Ghost in the Shell, and Brienne of Tarth from A Song of Ice and Fire. Adamant characters who are examples of courage and resilience help me overcome doubts in my life."

Female characters that are guided by a higher purpose are particularly enthralling to Bella. "Ultimately, my heart is in epic stories about worlds rising and falling, and I hope to reflect the personalities of brave and noble heroines in my work."

While characters from popular culture are great catalysts for creativity, Bella is just as interested in her clients' stories. Sometimes they give her sketches of armour or weapons they would like her to draw, and she relishes the challenge of transforming it into her personal style while keeping it recognisable.

The art of FromSoftware, a Japanese video game company, is a source of visual inspiration. "I love how they mix styles and epochs, add daring fantastic details, and finish with visuals that are both elegant and recognisable," explains Bella. "I'm just as interested in a common chain mail as I am in an armour made, for example, of porcelain or crystal glass, decorated with gems and completely impossible and impractical in terms of our world. The latter is something that exists only in my imagination at this point as it requires great mastery, but that's the kind of thing I aspire to create one day." ●

An image of Lara Croft by Inna Vjuzhanina. It's a personal re-imagining of one of her favourite classic Tomb Raider promotional renders.

Luisa Preissler's cover for Secrets of the Sword II by Lindsay Buroker. Luisa used a toy tiger as a reference for the light and shadows, finishing off with some fur brushes.

ImagineFX

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Neue · Bibliothek.

I quite enjoy looking out of my studio's window. I have a view that goes over the roofs of the neighbouring buildings. The skyline of this part of Warsaw is nothing spectacular, but the sky itself is often something to behold. I often take photos of the unabstracted sky to later use it in my works.

I had to make a call – a second monitor, or more plants. I chose more plants, so I use an iPad if I need to expand my working space.

Anna Podedworna

Welcome to the jungle! Explore this Polish artist's lush, green studio full of plants and snakes

I've always dreamed of being able to live the outdoors life. Due to the nature of being a digital artist working in a big city, that's just not really possible or practical. That's why I've decided to settle for the next best thing, to bring a piece of nature into my studio.

There are over 200 potted plants in my apartment. They make the space look beautiful and inviting. They help to keep the perfect humidity in my studio, which is not only great for the air quality and terrific for keeping my artbooks in a pristine condition, but it also helps to keep dust at bay. I live pretty high up and my place gets lots of natural light – so thankfully everything grows beautifully.

Since I work alone I enjoy the non-distracting companionship of my four snakes. I love to have them slither ➤➤

During the warm months I also enjoy the added space of the balcony. Of course I also populate it with as many plants as I can. Strawberries, petunias and lavender galore!

My PC is nothing special – decent, off-the-shelf rig.

This is my leucistic boa imperator. He likes to hang out on the back of my chair and critique my work.

I use the Wacom Cintiq 27QHD with an Ergo Stand. This allows me to work in multiple positions – anything from half-lying to standing. I try to change the way I sit/stand often. So far it seems to be working since I haven't experienced any issues with back pain or carpal tunnel as of yet.

Helmet with an aventail plus a mace. Great for reference and storage!

One of my ball pythons, just looking for a good spot.

Marketing illustration of a Beholder done for Magic: The Gathering - Adventures in the Forgotten Realms. This one was a bit tricky because of very strict cropping requirements.

I really try not to bring too much clutter into my studio, but sometimes I just can't help it. Do I need a hamster collection? No. Am I happy that I have it? Yes.

Books, comics and artbooks – all behind a solid cover of plants for harder access.

➦ around my desk. They seem to appreciate our little jungle ecosystem as well. Untangling them from plants that are higher up or shooing them away from the warm PC can be an issue though. On the plus side, they don't bark or jump on my lap during the Zoom calls with my clients. So that's always something.

AT MY OWN PACE

I look at all the artists who are early birds with admiration and a tinge of jealousy. I had to come to terms with a simple fact – I'm just not an early riser.

One of the great things about having a ton of plants is you can hide stuff in the pots. Look at this little ceramic guy, his dopey face makes my day every time I glimpse at him.

It's hard to trick your circadian rhythm no matter how alluring the idea of getting up with the sun might sound on paper. I'll roll out of bed around 9AM. I like to have the morning to myself. Take a shower, be extremely slow about preparing breakfast, go for a walk or a bike ride and of course tend to my plants. Keeping them alive is not super time consuming, but it does take a few minutes out of every day. I start my work once I've completed all these things, which is

rarely before 2PM. Thankfully, this is not an issue since most of my clients are located in the Western Hemisphere. I tell myself that I start my day with them, not the locals.

I tend to work late into the evening. When I feel that I'm running out of energy, I change gears and start replying to emails or taking care of paperwork. It's the type of work that can be done while half asleep. The 'good' hours are reserved for painting, and only painting.

Anna is an illustrator and concept artist living in Warsaw, Poland. She has worked for high-profile clients such as Riot Games, CD Projekt RED, Wizards of the Coast and Valve. You can find her works at www.artstation.com/akreon

❝ **My 200 potted plants help to keep the perfect humidity in my studio** ❞

I love to keep at least a few physical anatomy figures. Having something tactile to use as a reference makes a huge difference for me.

Dueling Rapier card illustration for Magic: The Gathering's D&D set Adventures in the Forgotten Realms.

I always keep a ready-to-go kit with a sketchbook and pencils for when I feel like sketching something outside.

I like to hide little trinkets like this set of Totoro figurines out of sight. Rediscovering them once in a while is always a delight.

On the shelf to the left of my desk I keep terrariums of my two ball pythons. They guard all the important paper that's underneath – a metric ton of sketches, unfinished works, Magic: The Gathering cards and documents.

Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS

Contact the editor, Rob Redman, on **mail@imaginefx.com** or write to ImagineFX, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, England

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Through the keyhole

I'd just like to say thank you for the looks around different artists' studios. As well as seeing their talent, I really enjoy getting a look at where they work. I get as much inspiration from that as I do from the art. Please don't stop this part of your magazine.
Kitty Birch via email

Rob replies *Hi Kitty. I'm so glad you enjoy this feature. We love it and there's definitely a guilty pleasure involved when having a nose round somebody's workspace. It can be a real insight into seeing what keeps people productive and enthused about their work. Seeing what references, toy collections, or simply whether they sit or stand can really help open up opportunities to adapt our own spaces, and don't worry, we won't be stopping that feature any time soon.*

Best inspiration

Hello ImagineFX team. I have been reading ImagineFX for many years and I love the sketchbook pages. It's funny because I usually get to these last, most likely because of the black and white

DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?
Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 213 at **ifxm.ag/ single-ifx**.

Seeing the studio space of another artist can be a source of inspiration.

The artwork showcased in our Sketchbook feature can be helpful for understanding form and silhouette.

nature, but I find that it is these pages that I return to most often and they help me with my art most too.
Jaques via email

Rob replies *I couldn't agree more Jaques. I love these pages too and often go through back issues to check them out. I think the value here is partly pure inspiration but also as a source of learning. Studying the sketches of other artists can really help with understanding lines, form and silhouette, without the distraction of colour. We have more of these to come, so be sure to keep your eyes peeled.*

Bone structure

Good afternoon. I've been following Charlie Pickard's anatomy course over the last few issues and it has proved to be immensely valuable to me. The last part (in issue 213) was the best yet. It gave me lots of information that I have been unable to find in other tutorials. Understanding some of the fundamentals to build upon has been of great help and I would like to thank you and Charlie for this.
Eric, via email

Rob replies *I couldn't agree more. Charlie is at the top of his game and really understands how to help artists, at any level, get the most out of their time, with some really good tutorials. Charlie knows his stuff and really understands what newer artists need as well as what they want. He somehow manages to strike the exact right balance and offers insights into how to produce some wonderful art.*

Charlie's course isn't finished yet, so look out for more from him over the next few issues, including this one, over on page 96.

I love hearing your thoughts on all the content in ImagineFX, so please do write in to let us know what is on your mind.

FRESH PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention

Lisa McIntyre @lisa_mcintyre_art
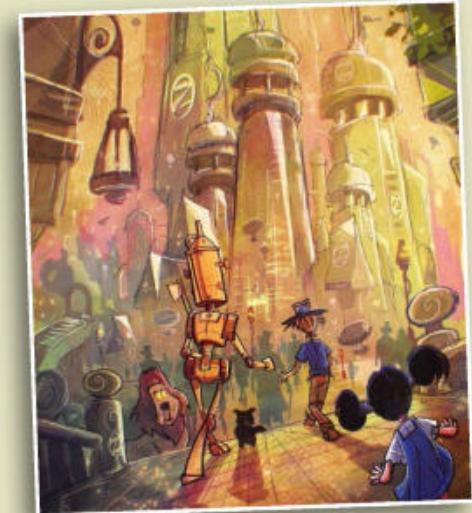
Luis Peres @icreateworlds_ illustration

Malx Tattoo Artist @lemalxtattoo

If you've created art that you want us to shout about simply tag us on Twitter or Instagram, and use the hashtag #imaginefx

Meet the artists behind...
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Roll initiative! We interview incredible D&D artists about illustrating this immense, fantastical universe

For decades, ardent adventurers across the globe have been travelling across far-reaching worlds full of magic and mystery on many a quest, building their own stories and characters as they pray for high dice rolls. Across these pages, we gain a behind-the-scenes perspective on the world-building and character design from the artists that help make these incredible adventures possible.

Julian Kok Joon Wen

Ralph Horsley

TYLER JACOBSON

Tyler has illustrated many covers and story artwork for the game

Tell us a bit about yourself and your background as an artist. Where did you start, and what got you into it?
I've always been making art in some capacity. When I was a child, I was very inspired by fantasy and sci-fi films from the 80s. It wasn't too long before I got into D&D with my brother and our friends. Most of the time I'd draw my character rather than pay attention to the adventure, but nonetheless, those 2nd edition D&D books really fired up my imagination. All through high school I would draw characters from all kinds of films, games and comics, completely filling the margins in my school notebooks (my teachers weren't thrilled).

I went to art school at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, which is where my real art education began. Thanks to Irene Gallo at Tor Books, Jon Schindehette (D&D's senior art director at the time) reached out to me for my first commission with Dungeons and Dragons. The rest is history.

Do you play D&D yourself, and if so what's the appeal to you?
I occasionally play with some of my friends, and we always have a blast. The thing that really appeals to me is the freedom of imagination and the opportunity to become a character of my own creation. Roleplaying and exploring new adventures and friendships makes the game very special to me.

D&D has a long history for artists, as well as gamers. How has it shaped your creative process and aesthetics?
The art of D&D, back to the beginning, has always been inspiring for me when it comes to inspiration and the overall look of my art. Since I've worked on the game's art for so long, I get opportunities to insert my own aesthetic too. It's important to me to keep my D&D illustrations fresh and modern; it keeps the game exciting and appealing for both long-time fans and new players. Movies and television have set a pretty high bar in aesthetics over the past 25 years, so it's crucial to keep Dungeons and Dragons updated with the tastes of modern audiences.

Do you have any heroes that have worked on D&D projects? Who are they and any key pieces that you particularly love?
From the day I first saw it, the cover art by Jeff Easley was burned into my mind. I always loved the energy and power he

RED DRAGON
A magnificent illustration for D&D's Tyranny of Dragons campaign.

STORM KING'S THUNDER
A terrifying encounter emerges from the deep in this artwork for Storm King's Thunder, a giants-focused storyline for Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition.

"Exploring new adventures and friendships makes the game very special to me"

brought to the subject matter, particularly with his Red Dragon illustration. My all-time favourite D&D artist, though, has to be Tony DiTerlizzi. I have a very well-loved copy of Advanced Dungeons and Dragons 2nd Edition Monstrous Compendium from 1994, in which Tony did every interior illustration. I spent hours studying and drawing many of those monsters in grade school. It served as a major inspiration point for my life as an artist.

When creating art for Dungeons and Dragons, what inspires you? What's your relationship to D&D from an artist's perspective?
It's important for me to help create characters and environments that will not only inspire players to visualise their adventures, but will also excite people into creating their own worlds and stories to enjoy with their friends. The game is about allowing your own imagination to blossom. If I can help that with my art, then my job here is done.

What is it about fantasy art, and D&D in particular, that you enjoy the most? As either an artist or as a consumer?
Fantasy art for me is the opportunity to create exciting, complex, textured and cultured worlds. In doing so, I get to study and understand the complexities and

PLAYER'S HANDBOOK
Cover illustration for D&D's 5th Edition Player's Handbook – an essential reference for roleplayers with guides on character building, combat and more.

history of our own world. My goals have always been to create authentic and compelling imagery in my fantasy illustrations, and that means really examining how things work: the buckle holding up a hero's sword; the complex functionality of armour; the tangled web of dragon anatomy, and how living creatures inspire it; or the functional architecture of a medieval castle. These things come together to make something more believable for players to get lost in.

What changes have you seen in fantasy art over the years?
I think fantasy art is an ever-escalating genre, always getting better and better. New technologies have allowed it to explode into almost every corner of entertainment. New standards are always being set. The genre of fantasy illustration

and art has so many new places to live these days. My favourite change over the past 30 to 40 years is how much fantasy art has truly come to life, especially on screens. The characters and creatures that once only lived on book covers or in the pages of gaming manuals now walk, fly and talk within incredibly vibrant worlds of their own. It's super exciting.

Is there anything from D&D that you would love to illustrate?
In all my years on D&D, I think I've only had the opportunity to illustrate one or two beholders. I would love to tackle more of them; they're so strange and unique. To me, they are one of the most iconic creatures of Dungeons and Dragons and they present a chance for artists to get really creative and, most importantly, have a lot of fun.

NIKKI DAWES

Nikki talks her creative thought process and artistic inspirations

Tell us a bit about yourself and your background as an artist. Where did you start, and what got you into it?
I've definitely always been into art. My elementary school didn't offer any art instruction and I had to beg my family to let me take art classes after school. They were dubious about it at first because they didn't consider it something to pursue, like sports, for example, but I was persistent and they eventually relented.

I planned to pursue an art degree after high school, but life happened, as it so often does, and I stopped all creative endeavours for a while. I ended up eventually getting a degree in graphic design and working in that field for years, but fantasy illustration was always my real interest, so I practised that on my own on the side. Through a series of fortunate events, it all worked out, albeit much later than I had planned as a teenager!

Do you play D&D yourself, and if so what's the appeal to you?
I do play D&D! I play in two different groups right now. One of my favourite things about playing is creative problem solving as a team. Sometimes my groups come up with absolutely bonkers plans that involve good roleplay, interesting spell use and some lucky dice rolls, and it's so satisfying to hear the cheers around the table when we can pull it off.

D&D has a long history for artists, as well as gamers. How has it shaped your creative process and aesthetics?
I'm so inspired by the other artists who have worked on D&D and have been since I was a teenager. I'm constantly amazed at the quality of work my peers create and it pushes me to want to continue to improve. I look through the art every release to admire the work of the other artists on the project, and I always find new things I

AYO JABE
From Call of the Netherdeep, a Critical Role campaign. Character design by Shawn G. Wood. Armour and weapon design by Nikki Dawes.

admire in their work that I'd love to see in my own. I try to take those things and improve on them in the next assignments.

Do you have any heroes that have worked on D&D projects? Who are they and any key pieces that you particularly love?
Keith Parkinson and Cynthia Sheppard! My earliest exposure to fantasy art that made me realise what I wanted to do with my life was Keith Parkinson's art. The flying citadel for the cover of Dragons of Desolation blew my mind.

I still absolutely adore how much attitude Cynthia Sheppard's dwarf lady has in the 5e Player's Handbook and I think about that piece often when I'm painting my assignments.

> **"You can open up a D&D book and on one page see an epic battle scene and on the next a quiet character moment"**

WILL OF THE FEYWILD
A character, based on concept art by Shawn G. Wood, for The Wild Beyond the Witchlight.

When creating art for D&D, what inspires you? What's your relationship to D&D from an artist's perspective?
I can remember sitting in my room as a teenager and just staring at pieces of fantasy art for hours and being absolutely transported to other worlds. I hope my art helps players feel more involved in their games and maybe helps to transport them into their games a little bit, too. Since I mostly paint characters, I try to make them feel like someone players are excited to meet in game. Maybe it's to befriend them, or, if the character is a villain, perhaps it's to punch that smug look off their face.

What is it about fantasy art, and D&D in particular, that you enjoy the most? As either an artist or as a consumer?
I love that there's so much variety in it. You can open up a D&D book and on one page see an epic battle scene and on the next there's a quiet little character moment.
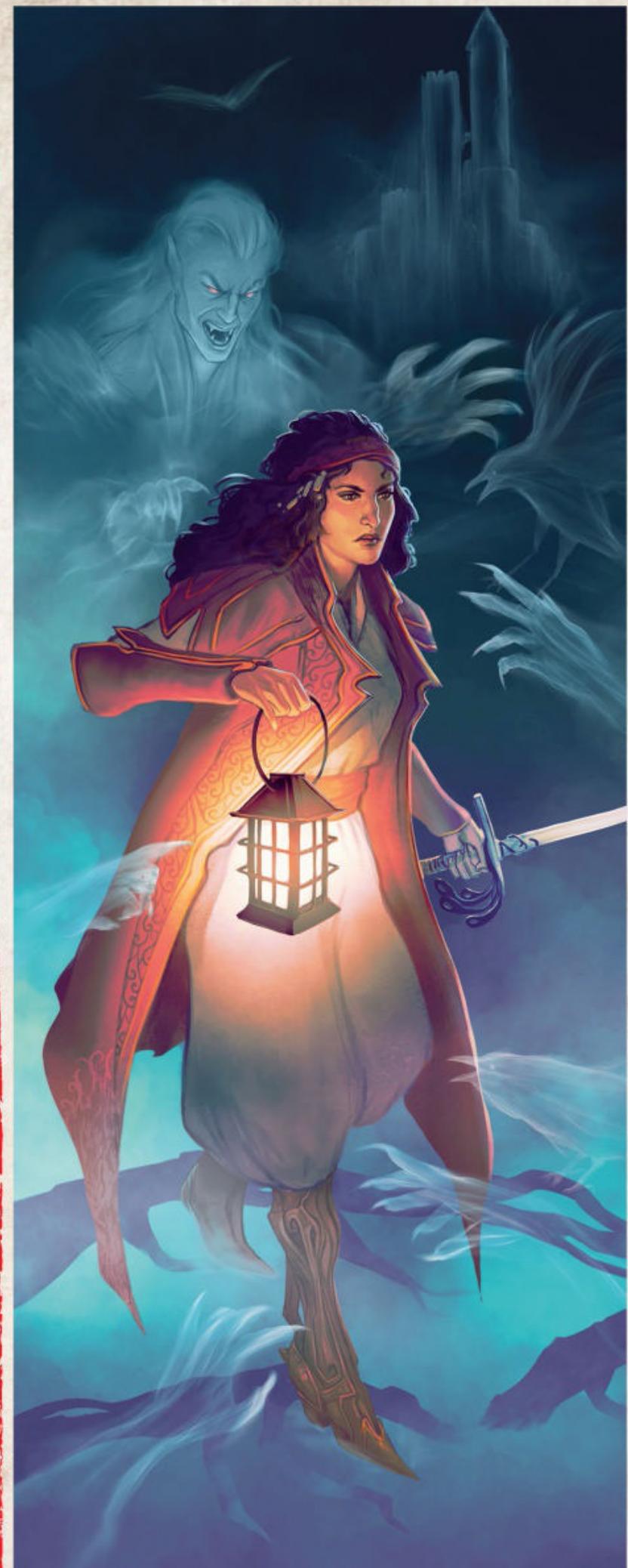
EZMERELDA D'AVENIR IN THE MISTS
Character artwork for Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft, a campaign book with a Gothic horror setting.

Also, because a whole group of artists work on each book, I always find it exciting to see the settings, adventures and characters through the lenses of the various artists involved.

What changes have you seen in fantasy art over the years?
I feel like fantasy art hasn't really changed, it's expanded. It's all still there, there are just more voices joining in the chorus.

Is there anything from D&D that you would love to illustrate?
A beholder! I mostly paint humanoids, but I'd love a crack at a beholder with a ton of personality, like Xanathar.

DEMON LORD
Baddies are always great personalities to try and capture, plus there are often skulls and bat wings!

STEADFAST
The odds might look long for this adventurer, but I like to think that their indomitable spirit will see them triumph, or maybe just goblins' ineptitude.

IMPERFECT SHOT
This Dragonborn should stick to spell casting. It's refreshing when you can inject some humour.

RALPH HORSLEY

How a childhood of playing D&D led to a successful art career

Tell us a bit about yourself and your background as an artist. Where did you start, and what got you into it?
I have been drawing for as long as I can remember. I found the world and stories I created on the page an easy place to inhabit. Initially those worlds were inspired by films, or military history. The big influences were reading Lord of the Rings when I was 11, followed by my friend's Basic Dungeons and Dragons (the blue book) he got for his 13th birthday. We were hooked and then my drawings revolved around the actions and adventures of our characters.

I studied art at school, started contributing pictures to roleplaying fanzines, and then created my own, but for the young man growing up in the small town of Kendal in England's Lake District, the prospect of a career illustrating roleplaying games was as fantastical as the games themselves. So I left home at 18 to study English Literature and Librarianship at university in Aberystwyth.

Three years later I was still producing my 'zine, and had received my first professional illustration job contributing work to one of the short-lived RPG magazines that popped up in the late 1980s. That commission, combined with a rapidly declining interest in becoming a

librarian, made me decide to try a career in art after all. Maybe if I'd had the objectivity to realise how poor my skill set was I wouldn't have embarked down that route, but stubbornness and determination provided the fuel to teach myself, and develop those skills.

Do you play D&D yourself and if so what's the appeal to you?
I have played D&D enthusiastically from my early teens. I was also inspired to play other role playing games, leading to creating my own systems and campaigns. Now I am far more likely to be found playing the Lords of Waterdeep board game rather than D&D itself.

D&D has a long history for artists, as well as gamers. How has it shaped your creative process and aesthetics?
Where to begin! It has shaped it massively. Firstly as a teen when it influenced the content of my art by focusing it within the fantasy genre, and introduced me to the inked linework of AD&D, causing me to ditch my pencil in favour of a dip pen.

As a developing commercial artist it was the quality benchmark to aim for, and Wizards Of The Coast the aspirational company to be hired by.

Once hired I have been fortunate to receive a broad range of commissions that have developed my abilities and honed my process: character and monster design concepts, mass battle scenes, weird magical effects, maps and charts, miniature designs, and book covers. I feel very fortunate for the opportunities and assignments D&D has given me.

When creating art for D&D, what inspires you? What's your relationship to D&D from an artist's perspective?
I am inspired by my peers, and those who preceded us, but the main inspiration is a simple love of the game itself, and an ability to tap back into my teenage enthusiasm. Thinking about the characters and monsters I illustrate as part of the games I've played. What kit would my fighter have? Okay, so this picture better include that fall-back dagger, special pouch for potions, oh, and a robust scroll case that can help resist against fireballs... D&D deserves huge credit for directing and shaping my career.

What is it about fantasy art, and D&D in particular, that you enjoy the most? As either an artist or as a consumer?
The clue is in the title – it is fantasy! It depicts the world of our imagination. A world unbounded from the mundane that can take you in any direction, allowing you to create and paint anything.

Engrained within it is a heroic quality. The combat is toe-to-toe, the monsters appear overwhelming, the quests near impossible, the villains writ large.

Aesthetically I also find the costuming, armour and weaponry far more appealing than anything contemporary. Give me a sword over a gun any day.

What changes have you seen in fantasy art over the years?
The content has matured greatly and better reflects the real world and its values. There is a far stronger awareness of the importance of representation as well as the power of the imagery.

Fantasy art also has a far broader appeal and greater presence. D&D is now a household name, similarly the fantasy worlds like those of Harry Potter, Game of Thrones and World of Warcraft are global phenomenon. Consequently there is far more fantasy art out there. They say a rising tide raises all boats and I believe that to be very true of fantasy art. More artists are producing work in the genre, and that has had the effect of levelling up the quality across the board.

E.W. Hekaton

Cynthia Sheppard

Jon Hodgson

Eric Belisle

KATE IRWIN

Advice from D&D's principal art director on what she looks for in aspiring artists

What do you look for in new artists?
The art of Dungeons & Dragons has deep roots in traditional painting. Although we use a variety of illustration styles, including both digital and traditional media, our house style might be described as cinematic realism or fantasy realism. We don't often have projects where we use stylised illustrations like anime or caricatures. Occasionally we will have a project where we need something different, like our Dungeon Mayhem game or Alt Covers we make for game stores, but most of our art falls into fantasy realism.

A perhaps unexpected thing I also look for is consistency. Not in subject matter, but in quality. When we were able to do in-person portfolio reviews, I would ask myself, if I got the 'worst' piece in this portfolio, would I still be happy? Art directors are risk-averse. We are on a schedule with a budget and pretty much have one chance to get it right. I want to know that the artist I hire can evaluate their own work and will be able to deliver high-quality art consistently.

Once I've worked with someone their professionalism pushes them up or down the ladder. Did they meet their deadlines? Did they communicate well? Were they responsive to feedback? It's one thing to get your foot in the door and another to become a member of my go-to group of artists and someone I would recommend to other art directors.

What three things should a portfolio include to impress you?
⬤ Show me you've done your homework by customising your portfolio for my brand. If you have various styles or interests, a section at the end that shows that is fine, but the main presentation should show why we are a match.

⬤ Lean into your strengths. If you are great at characters, show me that. You don't have to be a jack-of-all-trades to have a career. I have categories for characters, monsters, action scenes, environments, items and so on. Some artists can do it all but you don't have to.

⬤ Don't work dark and check your colours in CMYK. We are printing on paper. There isn't a screen to illuminate the art. Book printers may also run black heavier than other colours to make sure the words print well. If you use a lot of black and don't have contrast in your images, they might end up muddy and all the beautiful details you spent time on become invisible.

How can an artist show their personality in a portfolio?
Paint things you enjoy! If you make a portfolio of work that you think will appeal to an art director or brand, you'll be stuck doing that. I met Wylie Beckert at a convention where she showed me her portfolio. I loved it and knew I wanted to work with her but her style was so unique, I didn't know how that would happen. A few years later the stars aligned and she painted the Alt Cover for Tasha's Cauldron of Everything.

GHOSTS OF SALTMARSH
Cover artwork by Greg Rutkowski for D&D's nautical Ghosts of Saltmarsh adventure.

Lars Grant-West

THE RISE OF TIAMAT

Michael Komarck's cover artwork for The Rise of Tiamat campaign, starring the titular ferocious five-headed dragon.

Kate Irwin breaks down her career journey

1 How did you get started?

I went to the Art Institute of Seattle and I wanted to pursue illustration, but I didn't see a way to make a living at it so I changed my focus to graphic design. After graduation I worked freelance for different publications before taking a position at Nordstrom department store where I did letterpress printing in their sign department and collateral advertising design. In 2000 I got a call to go in as a contractor for a company I hadn't heard of: Wizards of the Coast. My first project was designing for a Looney Tunes trading card game. From there I worked on many other games as a graphic designer and art director. Directing the Practical Guide series (A Practical Guide to Dragons, A Practical Guide to Monsters, and more) paved the way for me to join the core of Dungeons & Dragons. That was during 3rd edition. And I've been here ever since!

2 What do you love about working at Wizards?

I have been here a long time so there is a lot to like. First of all, the people – some of my best friends and people I will have stories about for years to come. Second, I get to make games. If I could go back in time and tell 5th grade Katie that she would make a living making games for a toy company, it would blow her mind. Third, working in the D&D Studio has been the best of both. I work with the smartest, most creative, and collaborative group of people I've ever known. We get to have tough conversations and differences of opinion, but we listen to each other with trust and respect. No one could do this on their own. Except maybe Chris Perkins. He's a unicorn.

3 Can you take us through a recent project you worked on, how did you approach the design, brainstorm ideas, etc?

The first art for a book is the concept art. This is an iterative process where artists take information from the lead and flesh out the world. They also define elements that are used throughout a story. These pieces are made into a Creative Concept Document for that setting or theme. That document goes to the group of artists (20-40 of them, depending on the project) that the art director gathers to make finished art for the product, along with other reference and their individual art orders.

We review sketches and give feedback before the artist continues to final finished pieces. Then layout begins. We usually start with a mood board that our graphic designers translate into shapes, textures, and palette that support the art and text of the product. The goal in layout is to not interfere with the words while showing off the art to its best advantage, resulting in a cohesive and beautiful product.

> ❝ I want to see how the artist layers story into an image ❞

Are there specific things you look for at Wizards of the Coast? A knowledge of D&D lore, for example?

If an artist has a passion for D&D, it is a plus but it isn't necessary. I want to see story in each piece. In fantasy books anything we can show instead of tell helps build that world. It's not just a pretty picture. For example, looking at a character, I want to know who they are and why they are there. An expression, interaction, stance, costuming... that shows how the artist layers story into an image.

How can an artist get noticed?

I look in a variety of places like Instagram, Concept Art World, ArtStation, and DeviantArt. I check out competing products, so working for a smaller publisher or niche game can sometimes catch my eye. Of course, Magic and D&D have overlap and the art directors share up-and-coming artists with each other. We use to go to conventions and have in-person portfolio reviews and I hope that we can do that again soon.

2D, traditional or 3D art? Or does it no longer matter?

It doesn't matter to me whether an artist works traditionally or digitally. Even the traditional artists scan or photograph their work for final submission and often do digital touch-ups so they have the same flexibility with edits. For complex pieces some artists will make 3D models to inform their paintings. Artist process is interesting but I care most about the final result.

Mark Behm

Lake Hurwitz

KIERAN YANNER

Kieran reveals his passions for illustration and storytelling

Tell us a bit about yourself and your background as an artist. Where did you start, and what got you into it?

My very first project was for Eden Studios' 'All Flesh Must Be Eaten', a zombie tabletop RPG. I was working as a web designer for Christopher Shy's Ronin Studios and showed him some sketches and pencil pieces. He had no idea I could draw. He ultimately was the catapult to me working as an illustrator in the industry. Over the years I've worn many different hats from graphic designer to art director, but my main expression has been through illustration.

I'm largely self taught and dropped out of high school after year 10 – growing up I didn't have access to any traditional illustration courses and classes and the 'fine art' path didn't appeal to me at all. After leaving Microsoft back in 2013 when I was working as a concept artist and UX designer, I had a "what do I really want to do?!" moment. I had noticed Donato Giancola was promoting his mentorship with Smart School and I decided to enrol. That gave me the passion, direction and confidence to push myself further and rekindled my love of illustration.

Do you play D&D yourself, and if so what's the appeal to you?

I played 2nd edition Advanced Dungeons & Dragons a lot as a teen, but it wasn't until recently I was able to start playing D&D 5e with my husband as DM. My current busy schedule has me as the random guest star.

D&D has a long history for artists, as well as gamers. How has it shaped your creative process and aesthetics?

D&D and the tabletop RPG industry itself has been core to my identity as an artist. I suppose my love of telling stories centred around the interaction of characters is where it's really honed in. If I have a viewer say, "That's what I imagine when I play my games!" I've done my job.

Do you have any heroes that have worked on D&D projects? Who are they and any key pieces that you particularly love?

I've met and had interactions with artists I've looked up to outside of projects, but unfortunately haven't worked alongside

PICKING THROUGH THE HORDE
An interior illustration for the Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition Player's Handbook.

them. Artists like Tony DiTerlizzi, Jeff Easley, Gerald Brom, Larry Elmore and the late Keith Parkinson had all branched out in their own respective paths.

When creating art for D&D, what inspires you? What's your relationship to D&D from an artist's perspective?

I suppose the memories of games I participated in myself is core to my inspiration for my D&D illustration work. The beautiful and rich imagery of 2nd edition will be forever etched in my mind and that has influenced my choices in composition, colour and story.

What is it about fantasy art, and D&D in particular, that you enjoy the most? As either an artist or as a consumer?

The escapism – I struggled with being gay growing up and found my outlet through music and gaming. Without that in my life I'm not sure where I would be. The unusual situations our games placed our characters and ourselves in opened my mind and helped me accept myself. I feel it also opened the minds of my friends. Your friend being gay isn't such a big thing when you've spent months evading and

ELF RANGER
One of the joys of D&D is being able to create your own characters, with unique abilities and backstories, to go adventuring with.

BEHOLDER
From the 5th Edition Monster Manual – beholders are powerful, magical beings.

destroying an evil lich. I think that's the core difference between computer-based RPGs and tabletop. You play in the settings you and your friends built, there is a deeper emotional context and connection.

What changes have you seen in fantasy art over the years?

I think the influence in anime is undeniable. Fantasy art considered being a 'higher' form of art and credible career path is also something I've seen change. Sales of original Dungeons & Dragons and Magic: The Gathering art has also caught the eye of the 'fine art' industry. When there is money involved I guess people miraculously see the level of craft and skill involved in fantasy art…

Is there anything from D&D that you would love to illustrate?

A cover or a DM screen would be fun! An expansive panoramic vista showing a party, the setting and their foes. Having worked in the industry for such a long time there is not a lot I haven't illustrated. Working on Xanathar for the Magic: The Gathering Forgotten Realms release was a big highlight!

Magali Villeneuve

Rob Rey

Livia Prima

Scott M. Fischer

KATERINA LADON

A journey of hard work and perseverance led to Katerina landing her dream role

Tell us a bit about yourself and your background as an artist. Where did you start, and what got you into it?
Since I can remember I have always had the need to express myself through art. I was born in Uzbekistan and moved to Italy at the age of ten. I grew up without the support of a family, and in a very poor situation, so trying an artistic career was very, very risky for me. Despite this I wanted to paint, so during high school I worked, saving money, and as soon as I graduated I left for Florence to study illustration.

From there it was a climb made of study and apprenticeship, but the turning point in my career came at the end of 2018 when I was recruited by my first editor Wyrd Edizioni and Robert Schwalb in the world of role-playing. I signed my first contract in January 2019. From there my career was on the rise and then, in 2020, I signed with Wizards of the Coast to illustrate Dungeons and Dragons.

D&D has a long history for artists, as well as gamers. How has it shaped your creative process and aesthetics?
For me, the art of D&D was fundamental to understand what I wanted to do when I grew up and the level of quality that I wanted to achieve. Studying the art of D&D, I learned a lot about storytelling, composition, and above all that genuine realism that I simply adore, and that has become the backbone of my art.

When creating art for D&D, what inspires you? What's your relationship to D&D from an artist's perspective?
When I paint I enter a limbo made of dreams, my dreams, where I can live all the adventures I want, and D&D does not disappoint in this! When I create a piece I tie it to a memory, something intense that I

IT'S ALIVE!
From Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft – perfect for players who wish for a more horror-themed adventure!

> **When I create a piece I tie it to a memory, something I want the character to tell**

CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES

A creature design for the Candlekeep Mysteries collection of short, stand-alone D&D adventures.

want the character to tell. I like to paint emotions and I try to make the tension feel.

What is it about fantasy art, and D&D in particular, that you enjoy the most? As either an artist or as a consumer?
I love to paint fantasy humanoids, creatures and horses, macabre things and evocative things, if they combine together even better! As a consumer, on the other hand, I like everything that is far from me and that I don't know, this way interesting ideas can often arise.

What changes have you seen in fantasy art over the years?
Surely the most radical change was the introduction of digital art and 3D. And luckily, I would say – if there is something that technically helps us to create extraordinary pieces and enable us travel further with our imagination, then it deserves to be studied.

Is there anything from D&D that you would love to illustrate?
All that I already illustrate and continue to do so. I wish this dream would never end – as a fan and as a personal goal I have always looked to Dungeons and Dragons as the pinnacle of where I want to be, and I am happy. Well, maybe one day I would love to illustrate a D&D cover, that would be fantastic!

How I create...
DRAGON PAINTINGS

1 Start from a sketch
Once you have found the right sketch to develop, start by cleaning the lineart on a separate layer, decide the light source and then create a new layer for the main shadows.

2 New layers
Next up, create a new layer for the flat colours, and if the shadows work you can turn the shadow layer to Multiply. You can also enhance the colour with a new overlay layer.

3 Refine the details
Create a copy of the layers used so far and flatten them. At this point you can begin to paint and refine the details. Remember not to focus on a single area, but focus on the whole piece.

JEDD CHEVRIER

Jedd talks his favourite artists and love for roleplaying games

Tell us a bit about yourself and your background as an artist. Where did you start, and what got you into it?
I am an art director, illustrator and concept artist. Over the course of my career, I have had the privilege of building worlds for games, film and TV, alongside some truly awesome creators.

I grew up in the great state of Michigan. Like a lot of artists, I'm sure, I started drawing the likes of robots, dragons, and spiky-haired muscle-dudes at a really young age.

I was lucky enough to have art mentorship from a young age that carried on through high school. When I graduated I had collection of drawings and paintings that thankfully got me a scholarship to College for Creative Studies in Detroit where, after realising it was possible to make a living painting monsters, I got my BFA in Illustration.

My most substantial artistic growth came when I began to work professionally. One of the best parts about painting is that it's really a lifelong journey – you're never done learning.

Do you play D&D yourself, and if so what's the appeal to you?
I do! My group has played weekly for just over six years. When our campaign began, we had a draft of pre-generated characters – which was really interesting because we needed to roleplay as a character we might not ordinarily choose. I play a Halfling Shadow Monk.

D&D is an incredible platform for self-expression. Getting together with your favourite people on a regular basis to go on adventure and tell stories together is one of the most enjoyable things I do.

Roleplaying is a wonderful way to learn more about yourself, as well as build a deeper empathy with people who might have a starkly different point of view from

TOMB OF ANNIHILATION
Awe-inspiring work by Jedd for the Tomb of Annihilation D&D adventure.

your own. Empathising with your character's needs and wants, especially when they differ from your own, is a healthy thing to do.

Shout out to all the hard-working DMs out there.

D&D has a long history for artists, as well as gamers. How has it shaped your creative process and aesthetics?
When working on an iconic project with such a rich history like Dungeons and Dragons, it's important to be cognizant of both honouring its past as well as bringing a fresh perspective and modern ideas. D&D has taught me the importance of when to shoot for entirely new ideas as well as when to lean on the familiar for narrative impact.

Do you have any heroes that have worked on D&D projects? Who are they, and any key pieces that you particularly love?
There is an incredible legacy of artists who have contributed to D&D and have had an impact on me personally. It's difficult to narrow down – but a few that come to mind are:

Keith Parkinson – one of my all-time favourite illustrators. His work epitomised a period of fantasy illustration that had a huge impact on me as a developing artist. The fearless and layered compositions and the sense of high adventure in his work is something I've always tried to emulate.

> ❝ I really love building worlds that people can explore and escape into ❞

How I create…
EPIC LANDSCAPES

1 Frame the goal
The brief for this piece was to design an ancient dwarven architectural landmark in the snowy tundra of Icewind Dale. It was meant to be eroded, covered in ice and integrated into the surrounding landscape. This piece was also used to help establish a tone by evoking a sense of isolation, frigid landscape, and loneliness.

2 Ideation
Graphic compositional sketches are a great way to make sure you're laying a good foundation for your painting. Sketching this way really helps you focus on the shape design, lighting and composition of the image.

Clint Cearley

Daren Bader

Jesper Ejsing

GITHYANKI ASTRAL SHIPS

Artwork of a githyanki fleet, for the D&D Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes sourcebook.
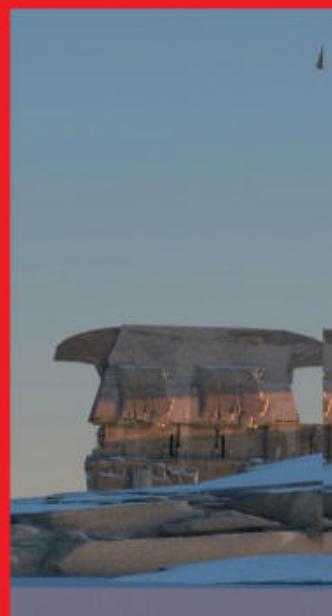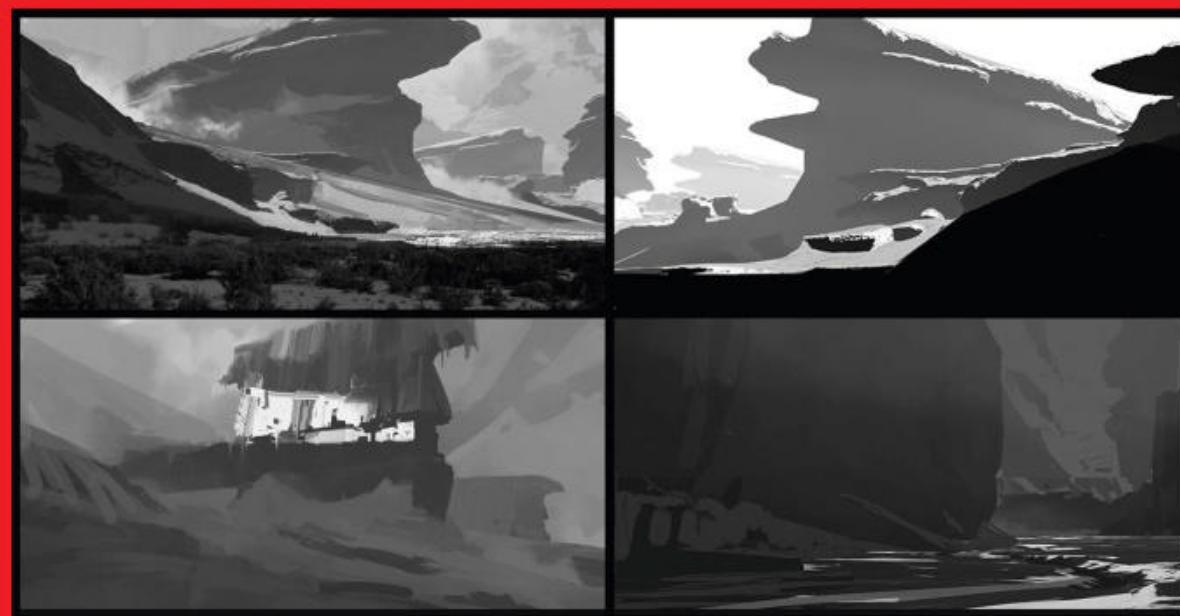
Brom – as my knowledge of painting and image-making grows, my appreciation for Brom's work does also. He has created so many iconic pieces and has had a huge influence on the current generation of artists. I am particularly fond of his work on Dark Sun. It doesn't get more metal than that. Brom has also been a kind and thoughtful mentor to many in the illustration community.

Thom Tenery – an amazing concept designer, illustrator and art director. He has only contributed a few paintings to D&D – but his Elven City illustration in the 5th Edition Players Handbook is still one of my all-time favourites.

When creating art for D&D, what inspires you? What's your relationship to D&D from an artist's perspective?
My favourite D&D art often has notes of romanticism and classical renaissance painting in it. When I create a piece for Dungeons and Dragons I draw a lot of inspiration from classical painting masters of the romantic era, as well as painters that can capture a dramatic sense of adventure like Albert Bierstadt.

I draw a tremendous amount of inspiration from real life. Whenever I travel, I try to take a small gouache paint kit, or my iPad, with me and plein air paint to sketch people. I like to think of painting as a way of thinking, or processing, the incredible world around you.

What is it about fantasy art, and D&D in particular, that you enjoy the most? As either an artist or as a consumer?
I really love building worlds that people can explore, escape into, and tell their own stories inside of. At its core, I believe that D&D is a platform for self-expression. For me, creating a painting for D&D feels a lot like reading a wonderful fantasy book.

What changes have you seen in fantasy art over the years?
Artists are always standing on the shoulders of the giants that came before them – but I think digital illustration has matured a lot over the past ten years both in quality of craft and conceptual thinking. I think this has a lot to do with more widely available education and mentorship.

Additionally, many illustrators and concept artists (myself included) are integrating 3D into their workflow. Learning to work with 3D in an illustrative way can be difficult – but when used effectively can offer a distinctly different way to think about your designs. It also encourages more unique compositional choices as it allows illustrators to think like a cinematographer and not be afraid to quickly try out several potential ideas before settling on a direction.

Is there anything from D&D that you would love to illustrate?
I've want to paint a big ol' ogre piece.
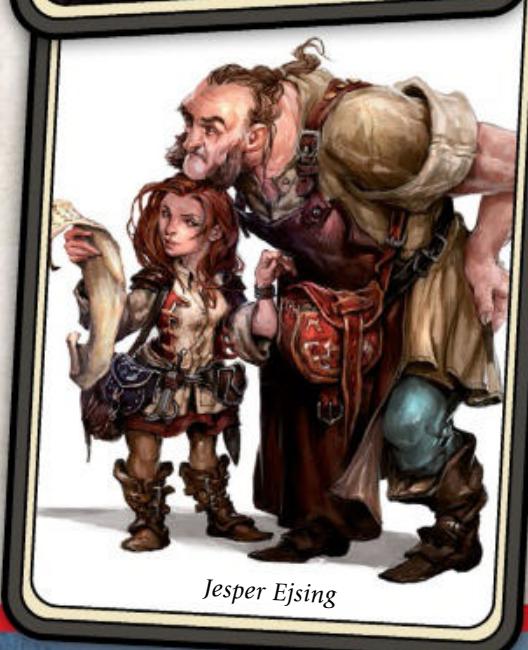
3 Refinement
After selecting a composition – we agreed to move onto refining the idea. My art director requested that we make the building feel more like a massive architectural axe. I did a quick mock-up in Blender to get a better sense of the construction method.

4 Final painting
After the design of the structure, the composition and the lighting were figured out and approved, we moved onto the final painting.

APRIL PRIME

April shares how she tackles concept design

Tell us a bit about yourself and your background as an artist. Where did you start, and what got you into it?
I'm an Australian concept artist and illustrator with a specialty in creature design. I was always super into learning about animals as a kid, so I just continued on that path! I went to Sydney University's College of the Arts, where I studied print media, but most of my current skill set was developed myself through interacting with my mentors and peers. These days, it's quite easy to access learning online.

Do you play D&D yourself, and if so what's the appeal to you?
I do! As both a dungeon master and as a player. Currently I play a high elf wizard in an incredible homebrew setting based off of ancient Australia and New Zealand, created by my dungeon master David Simon. I'm also currently working on fleshing out my own world, but it's still a tad rough around the edges. On top of that, my best friend Evyn Fong (an amazing artist on D&D and Magic: The Gathering herself) and I are making a pretty cool adventure together too. I love collaborative world building and storytelling; as a DM it's a great way to engage my own creativity, and as a player I get the joy of seeing the wonderful creations my friends make.

D&D has a long history for artists, as well as gamers. How has it shaped your creative process and aesthetics?
D&D was (and is!) a HUGE influence on my art aesthetic. I grew up in the 90s, in that period where tabletop games had sort of died out a little, so as a young kid I was exposed more to fantasy through movies like Dragonheart, and cartoons like Rainbow Brite and My Little Pony. I was in high school when I first started to develop an interest in D&D, and by the time I was in university, 5e had been released, which is when I took the plunge. Ever since then, I really hold the values of D&D creature design to heart – monsters that are just believable enough in the world to be grounded, but are also goofy.

Do you have any heroes that have worked on D&D projects? Who are they, and any key pieces that you particularly love?
Tyler Jacobson for sure is one of my favourite artists, I wasn't super into illustration at first (I still have a strong preference for concept art) but seeing his Red Dragon DM screen really made me go "Hey, I wanna do that!" I love all of his pieces for D&D, it's really a treat to get to concept creatures and characters and have such amazing illustrators paint your designs. Jason Rainville and Evyn Fong are also right up there, they're both my peers and idols, I'm glad I can bug both of them regularly for help!

When creating art for D&D, what inspires you? What's your relationship to D&D from an artist's perspective?
I get inspiration largely from the natural world, as well as from haute couture fashion. As a creature specialist I'm usually tasked with redesigning existing monsters or making up brand-new ones; I

LICHEN LICH
An incredible concept design of a fungus-covered undead creature.

like to look to real-world animals so my designs feel like they have a strong anatomical base, but then I like to add shape and flair from fashions I see on the catwalk. I'm mostly interested in creatures that are beautiful and elegant, but I'm also very attached to the big, fluffy, fat polar owlbear I got to make for the Rime of the Frostmaiden tale.

From an artists' perspective, my relationship to D&D is definitely one of a cycle of inspiration. D&D is inherently a creative exercise, and I'm constantly delighted by the amazing things I see people make for their own games, on top of pulling inspiration from the canon lore.

> ❝ I like to add shape and flair from fashions I see on the catwalk ❞

WERERAVEN
A classy-looking wereraven design, for D&D's Candlekeep Mysteries collection.

What is it about fantasy art, and D&D in particular, that you enjoy the most? As either an artist or as a consumer?
Monsters! I just love the strange unbridled creativity of fantasy creatures. Creatures made for sci-fi tend to have heavier elements of real-world biology and anatomy (which is awesome, I love that too), but there's just something special about the odd mish-mash creatures that tend to populate fantasy worlds. From ten-headed undead hydras to giant floating eyeballs, flesh-dissolving cubes of jelly to talking magical unicorns, it just hits different.

What changes have you seen in fantasy art over the years?
Definitely we're seeing more diversity in everything – locations, depictions of people and non-human species, inspiration sources are becoming more varied, and more and more voices are being given the opportunity to create. As people around the world are given the space to create, we're tapping into fresh and interesting fonts of inspiration.

ZOLTAN BOROS

Zoltan talks his favourite aspects of D&D art

Tell us a bit about yourself and your background as an artist. Where did you start, and what got you into it?
I went to Art High School and the University of Fine Art in Budapest.

D&D has a long history for artists, as well as gamers. How has it shaped your creative process and aesthetics?
I have always loved the storyteller fantasy art, like the art of Dungeons and Dragons.

When creating art for Dungeons and Dragons, what inspires you? What's your relationship to D&D from an artist's perspective?
The challenge is what inspires me. Telling a story in one picture is always hard to paint.

What is it about fantasy art, and D&D in particular, that you enjoy the most? As either an artist or as a consumer?
I like the classic style of D&D because I like the medieval age. I also love that the art of D&D just gets better year after year. The quality gets higher.

Is there anything from D&D that you would love to illustrate?
I'd love to paint the Saltmarsh scenes and the attacking zombie toys in the toy store, or Zariel and Yeenoghu.

FLYING MONKEY
This beast is an adorable mix of fur and feathers.

COUPLEOFKOOKS

Story is an important foundation to this artist's designs

Tell us a bit about yourself and your background as an artist. Where did you start, and what got you into it?
I finished art high school here in Poland, then studied photography for a couple of years and took a break from drawing. After that I studied animation, which remains my primary work field to this day. Somewhere along the way, about ten years ago, I picked up drawing and painting again – this time in digital form, mostly to do personal work and fanart, and this gradually evolved into work. Currently I work as an animation teacher, PhD in Film Studies, and as a freelance illustrator and comic artist.

**Do you play D&D yourself, and if so what's the appeal to you?**
Yes, once or twice a week for about four years now. The main appealing aspect for me is meeting with friends and telling a story together. The stories we create are a big source of inspiration for me and a drive to draw, paint and write.

D&D has a long history for artists, as well as gamers. How has it shaped your creative process and aesthetics?
I started to think about the art I make – no matter if it is for a D&D book or a personal work – as a piece of narrative, a story element, something that either adds to the existing story or prompts you to explore further. In art made for roleplaying games, be it for books or for our own campaigns, it is a given – the story is always the core element, everything revolves around it. But I've noticed that I started to think that way also about other, non-RPG related personal pieces. Coming up with a narrative context, even if it is not directly visible on the piece or ends up completely out of the picture, helps me in shaping out the idea, the mood and the form of it.

Do you have any heroes that have worked on D&D projects? Who are they, and any key pieces that you particularly love?
Tony DiTerlizzi is the artist that made a big impression on me in the AD&D times and remains one of my favourite fantasy artists to this day. Particularly his work on Planescape (and Changeling: The Dreaming, a non-D&D RPG title) has stuck
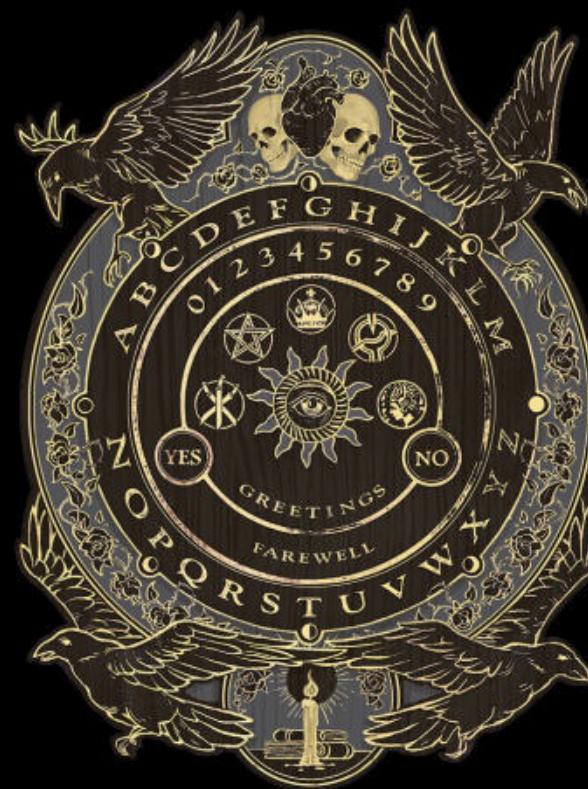
DWENDALIAN EMPIRE CREST

(Above right) CoupleOfKooks' illustration of the official crest of the Dwendalian Empire, for the Explorer's Guide to Wildemount – written by Matthew Mercer of Critical Role fame.

with me and I find myself coming back to these illustrations often. Unique designs, imperfect but beautiful faces, intriguing and intricate costume designs, the overall mood of the pieces that I always read as something drifting between very familiar and very alien – all that made me remember both his artwork and the worlds he presented in them.

When creating art for D&D, what inspires you? What's your relationship to D&D from an artist's perspective?
I had the pleasure of painting a couple of pieces (especially for the Ravenloft setting) that I could connect to characters I am playing in my own campaign, or find a connection to stories I participated in as a player, and this personal element I could put into the picture behind the scenes has turned out to be very helpful during the creative process.

Coming up with a story behind the picture I can connect to works is a great boost for me, so even if such connection doesn't come naturally, I try to build even a small narrative around it. Very often it is something that already is prompted by the

art description delivered by the art director: for example, a handmade amulet made out of bones and pieces of wood easily prompts an image of a character who could make it and wear it. Or, a coin carried in a pocket and used as a lucky charm allows me to add tiny personal touches. So again, little stories.

What is it about fantasy art, and D&D in particular, that you enjoy the most? As either an artist or as a consumer?
The story. In art made for roleplaying games even the smallest piece exists to add to the bigger story and create a bigger world, adding details to the story. Exploring this world is probably the favourite thing for me as a consumer, and adding to it, as an artist.

Is there anything from D&D that you would love to illustrate?
Anything from Planescape if this ever makes a return. Anything from Nine Hells too, the deeper the Circle the higher the excitement. Another thing I would one day love to do would be designing the villain for the campaign.

Mark Zug

Justin Gerard

Sam Keiser

Greg Rutkowski

Sketchbook

Max Dunbar

The comic book illustrator shares his incredibly detailed Dungeons and Dragons character designs, and the inspirations behind them

Artist PROFILE

Max Dunbar
LOCATION: Canada

Max Dunbar is a Canadian comic book illustrator and concept artist who lives in Vancouver, British Columbia. He has done work for Dungeons & Dragons, Hasbro, DC and Marvel Comics. When not drawing for work, he draws for fun, or hangs out with his wife Claire and their two cats Barney and Lloyd.
www.artstation.com/max_dunbar

HALFLING FIGHTER

Sometimes it's fun to go against type. This halfling fighter is unpleasant and a bit of a dirtbag, as well as being tough as nails.

A WITCH, AN OWL AND SOME PUMPKIN MEPHITS

Most of the time, I like to sketch whatever comes to mind or seems fun to draw at the time. It was Halloween and I thought a witch and some weird pumpkin creatures would be fun to design.
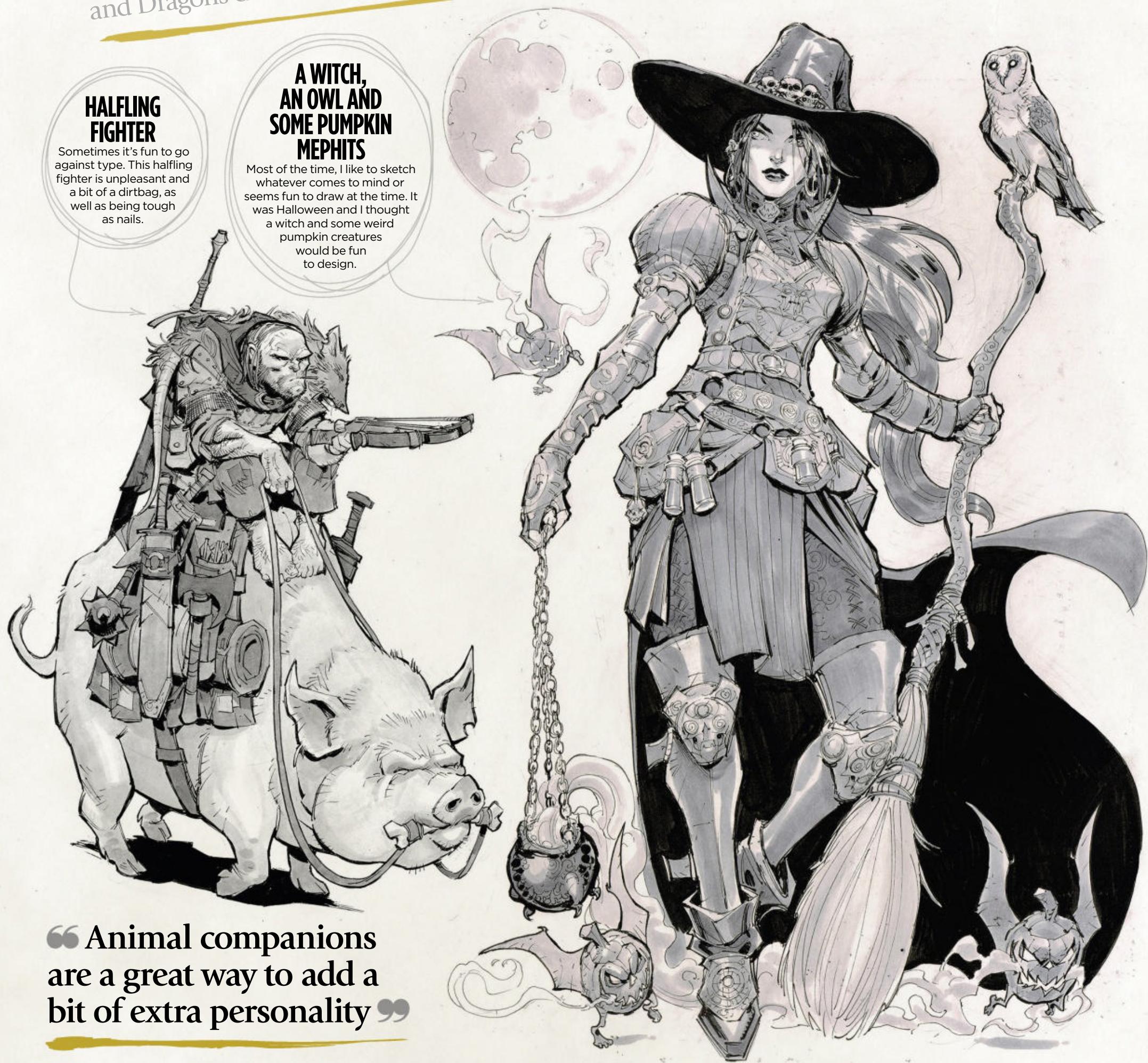
" Animal companions are a great way to add a bit of extra personality "
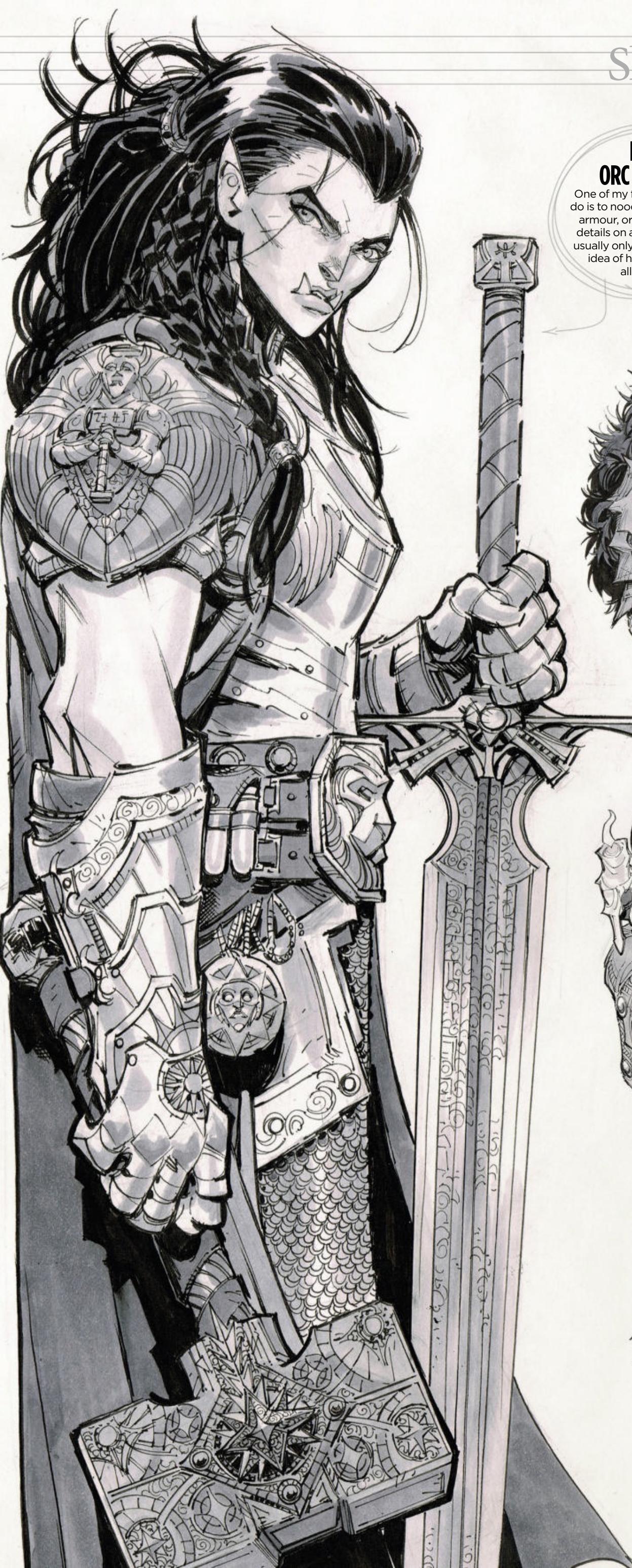
HALF ORC PALADIN
One of my favourite things to do is to noodle away on ornate armour, or all the extra little details on a magic weapon. I usually only have a very loose idea of how it's going to all turn out.

DRACONIC KNIGHT
Bust sketches let me play around with a character idea without committing too much time to the drawing. Sometimes a fun idea pops into your head and you want to get it down on paper as fast as possible.

DRACONIC WIZARD
Sometimes you find yourself with a whole bunch of time, and it's fun to spend hours drawing a character from head to toe. I love giving characters animal companions, it's a great way to add a bit of extra personality to the drawing.

Sketchbook

ELF VAMPIRE
Most of these sketches start with a super simple idea or prompt. In this case, I think I just wanted to see what a warrior would look like if they had eternity to acquire the best armour and craziest weapons. Being an elf and a vampire seemed like a good way to go about it.

"Most of these sketches start with a super simple idea or prompt"

SPRITE ON A BAT

I love the idea of a tiny little warrior riding a small creature as a mount. In this case, I thought an evil little sprite or brownie riding a bat could be a ton of fun to draw.
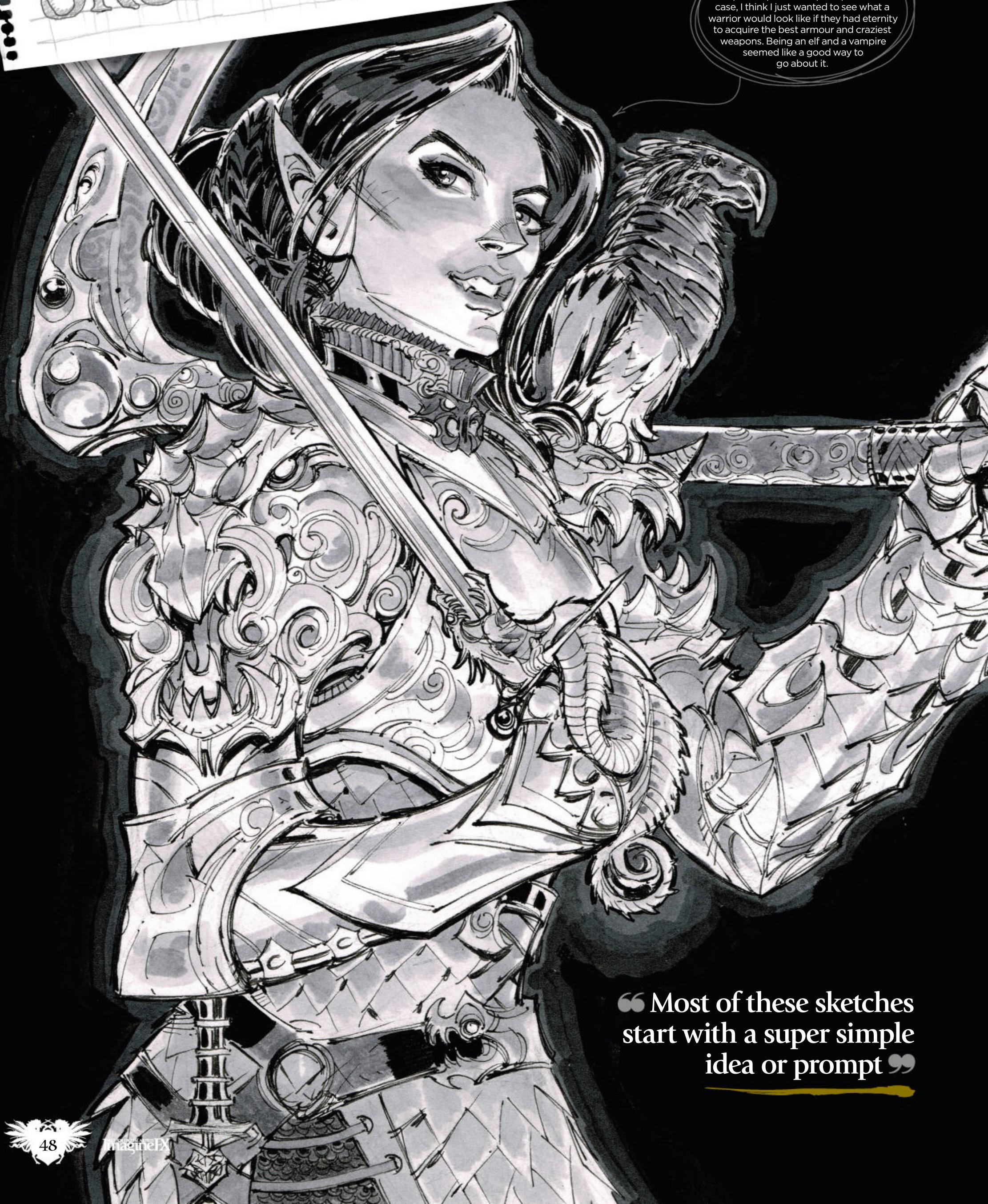
ORC WAR BOAR

I love orcs, and I wanted to draw a character on a mount. I think I settled on a boar pretty quickly... seems like a good fit.

ELF FIGHTER

Sometimes I'll just start moving the pencil on the page and see what starts taking shape. I think it's a great way of finding out what you want to draw if you don't always go in with a set plan.
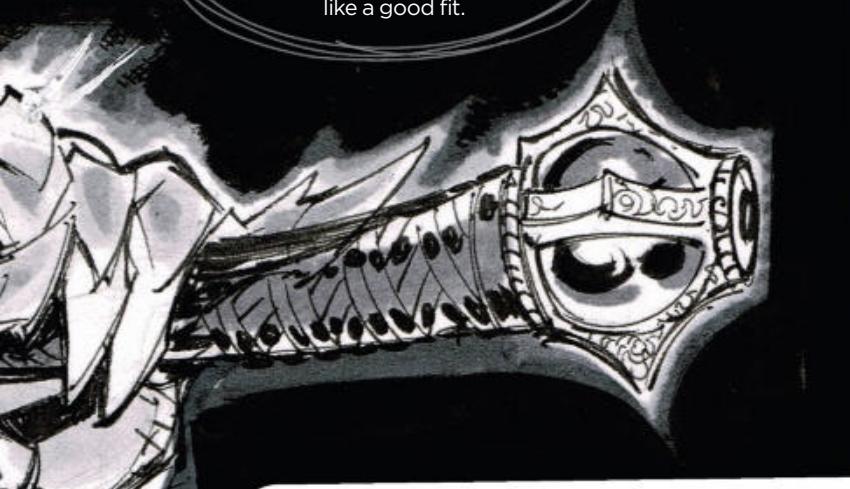
### ELF HUNTER AND DIRE CARACAL

A hunter with her animal companion. I sketched a few different big cats before settling on the idea of making a smaller type of cat much larger (in this case a caracal). A fun way to put a bit of a unique spin on an animal and make it your own.

Sketchbook

LONG REST

I really like the idea of seeing what the adventurers are doing when they take a break for the night. Sharpening their swords, making arrows and cooking a meal makes for a fun scene (especially if it involves an orc, a goblin and their vulture buddy).

DWARF MONSTER HUNTER

I love dwarves, and I really enjoy trying different, slightly unexpected character designs with them. A more sophisticated swordsman was a fun angle to sketch out.

OLD ORC

My sketchbook has way too many orcs in it. I love them. Sometimes a fun angle for a shot pops into your head (in this case looking over the shoulder). Drawings like this usually go a lot faster with less erasing.

HUMAN FIGHTER

Sometimes you just get an inkling to draw an angry-looking guy holding a couple of weapons. Sometimes it's that simple.
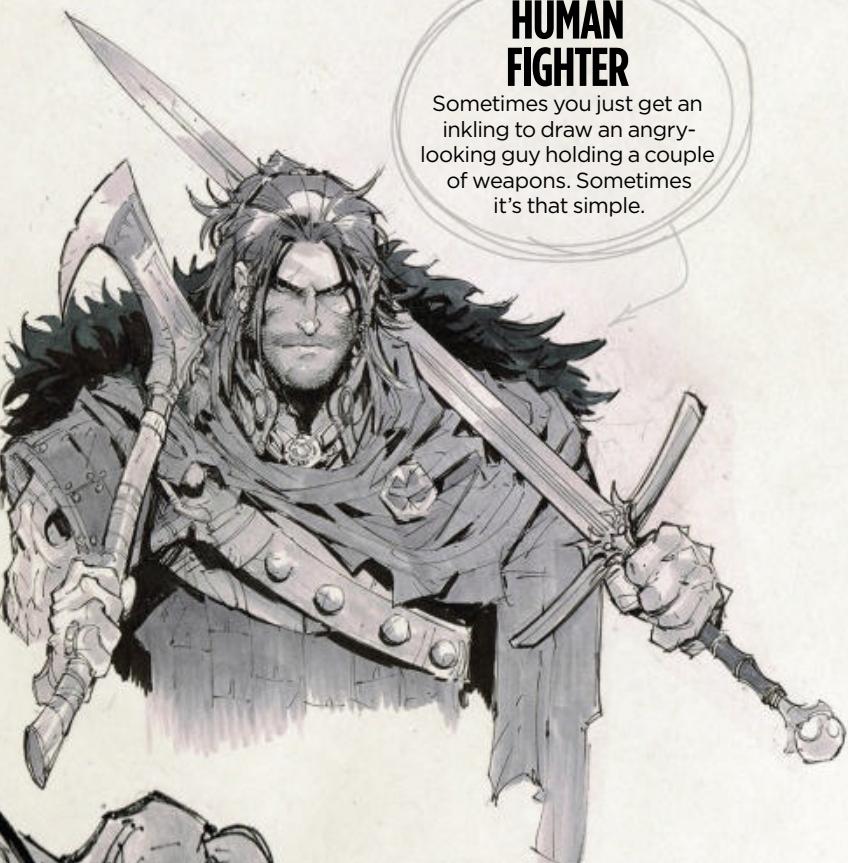
VAMPIRE WEREWOLF

Once in a while I'll get an idea or a visual will pop into my head and it will take a couple of tries before I can figure it out. I thought a mix of a vampire and a werewolf could make for an interesting-looking character, especially if he was decked out in crazy armour.

ORC AND RAVEN

My love of orcs continues, as does my animal companion obsession. I love the idea of a grizzled orc knight travelling the land with his eldritch raven friend.

> **My sketchbook has way too many orcs in it. I love them**

HALDAR THE DWARF WIZARD AND BRISBEE

My D&D character! Haldar is a disgusting, strange character who collects a lot of odd monster parts and relics. He's been cursed multiple times, so he doesn't look or smell too great. Brisbee is his fiendish owl familiar.

Do you want to share your sketches with your fellow ImagineFX readers? Send us an email with a selection of your art, captions for each piece and a photo and bio of yourself to **sketchbook@imaginefx.com**

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This issue:

Clip Studio Paint
LEARN ADVANCED REFERENCE SKILLS

Reference creator **Rachel Bradley** shows you how to expand your painting possibilities with this expert guide

Artist
PROFILE
Rachel Bradley
LOCATION: US

Rachel Bradley is an independent artist focused on helping others break through their barriers, create artwork, and pursue careers that they find personally fulfilling.
imrachelbradley.com

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

Using high-quality reference is a game-changer. The process of creating art can be seen as a series of problems to solve, and reference contains the answers to those problems. But with all those answers presented to us so readily, we can fall into the trap of sticking too closely to our reference material, simply copying or making decisions dictated by what we were able to find and not what our creative instincts tell us. This can lead to stiff or dull paintings, devoid of the artistic potential we have to breathe life into our work.

So how do we use reference without becoming beholden to it?

This tutorial shows you advanced reference techniques, allowing you more creative freedom and the opportunity to tap into your imaginative skills in a logical, informed way.

In this painting, I'll be working from many different images to bring my character, Ava, to life. She is the protagonist in my work-in-progress novel, The Sum of Our Deeds, so the narrative is really important to me here. I want to clearly show her character and her world which, as neither are real, is a great opportunity to demonstrate how to get the most out of your references! I'll be working from my own reference images, which you can find on my website.
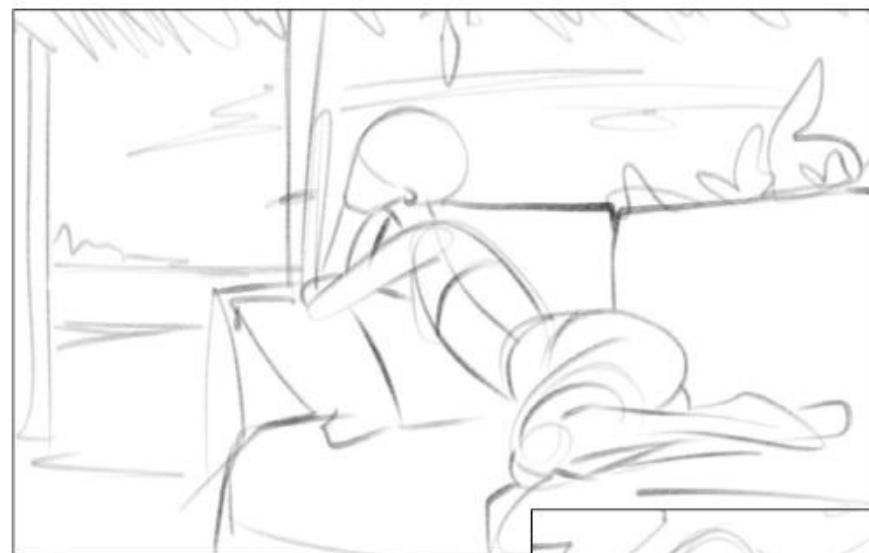
1 Ugly thumbnails
I dump my ideas down in a messy, vague format. At this stage, story comes first, and I focus on how I can use fundamental skills like perspective and shape language to tell that story. In this painting, I want to show the relaxed, dreamy disposition of my character, Ava, so I'm looking for expansive skies and gentle breezes.
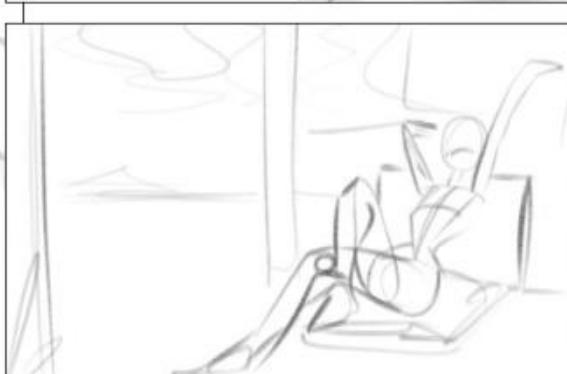
2 Explore your options

After narrowing down to my favourite thumbnail, I do some fast mockups to develop my values and colours. The first, more muted option was how the image appeared in my head, but after further exploration, I find that a more vibrant and sunny scheme fits the story better. This is why exploration is so important! ➽

3 Drawing reference

When searching for reference, I prioritise two things: images that help me draw forms ('drawing reference') and images that help me construct the colours and lighting on those forms ('supplementary reference'). I like my drawing reference to be high resolution and well lit. The image is like a blueprint, showing me how the shapes look at a particular angle and which planes face which direction, allowing me to reason my own lighting scheme.
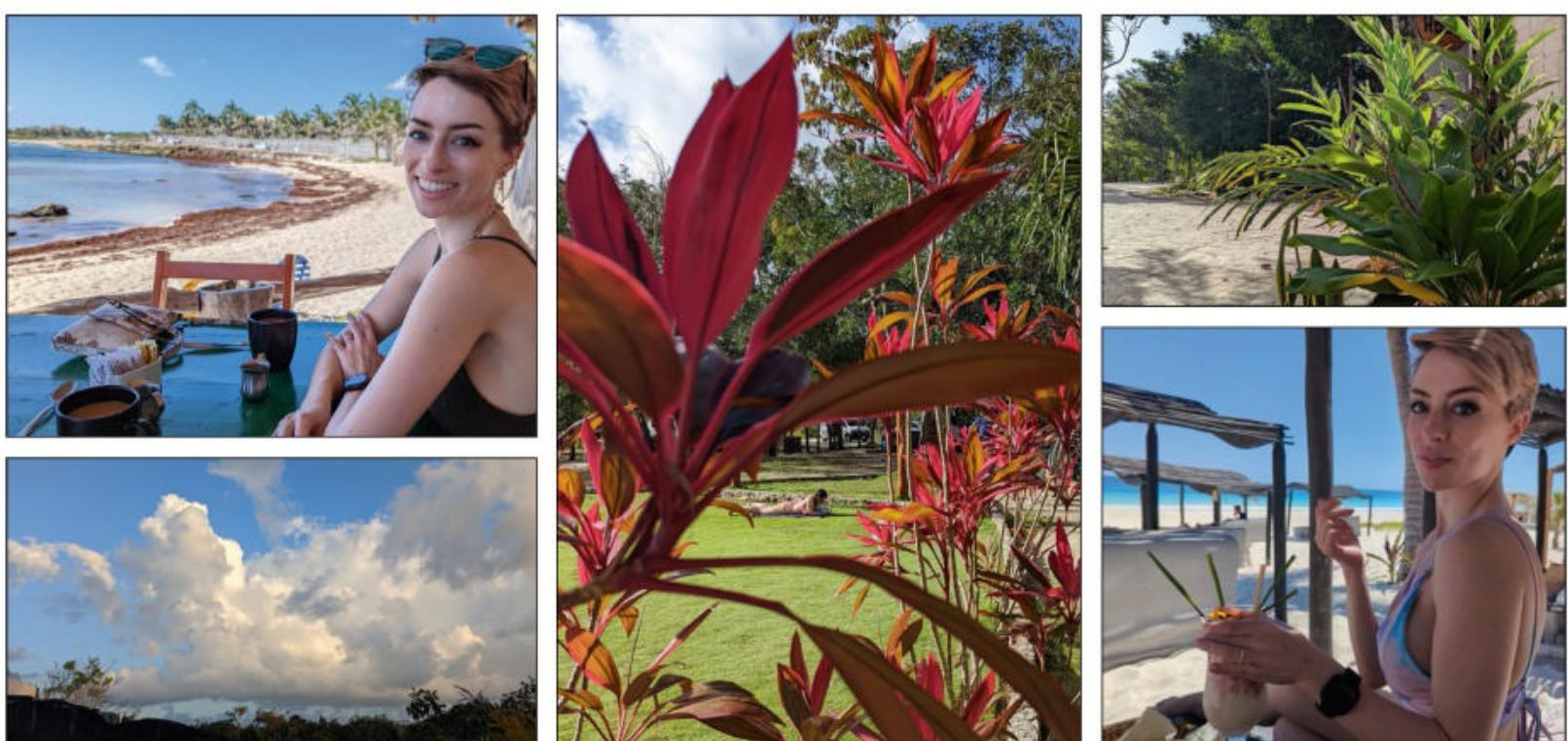
4 Supplementary reference

Now I gather photos with similar lighting schemes and subjects. When I block in my painting, I will use these images to inform colour choices. These images are all from recent travels, shot using my phone! I do not need high resolution or studio lighting here. Instead I'm looking for mood, colour and lighting – how local colours change under different lighting, and how the colours appear relative to one another.
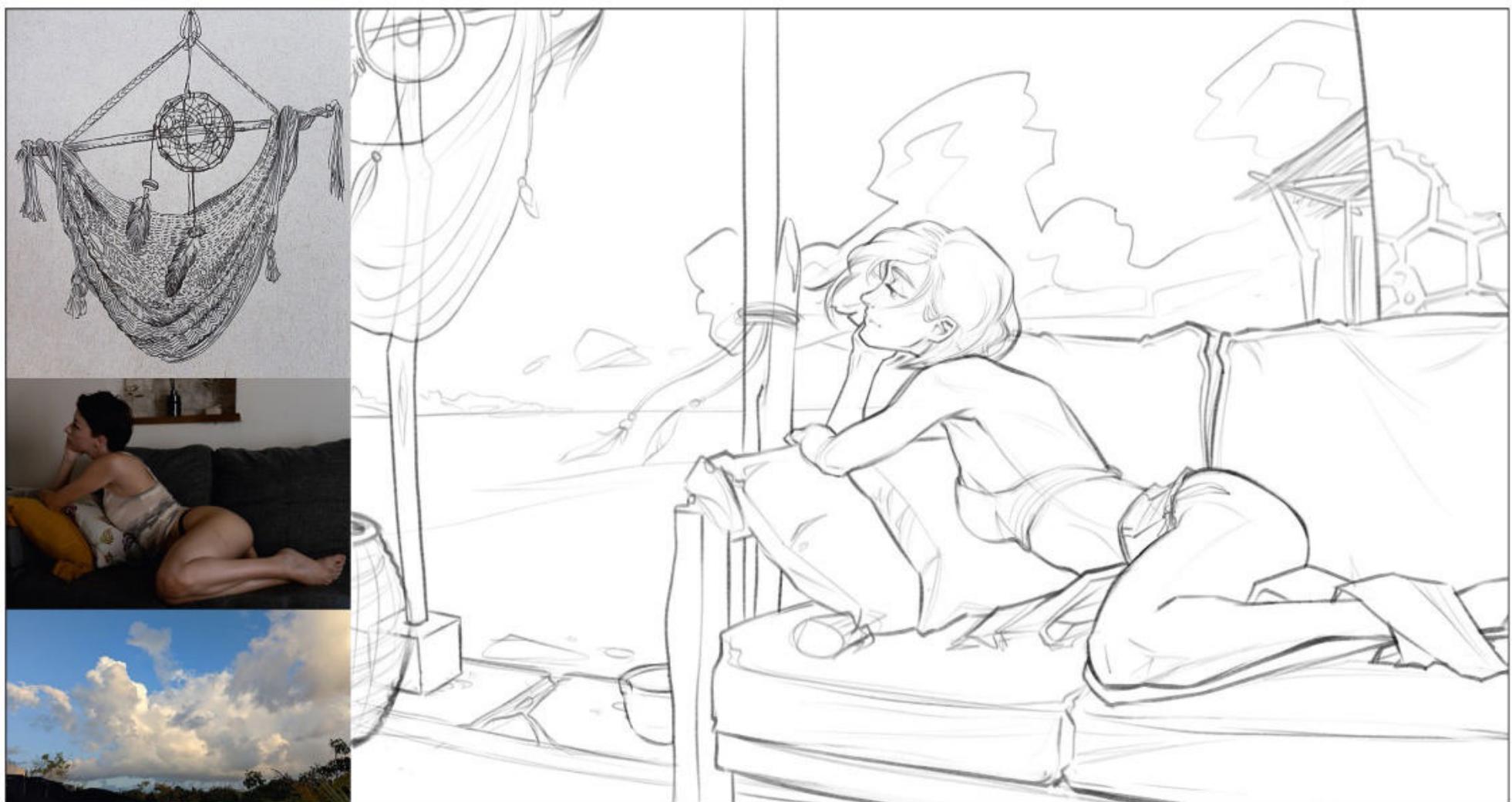
5 Tight sketch

With the preparations complete, I can start sketching! I lean heavily on my drawing reference, capturing silhouettes and vital information such as overlapping forms (like the calf overlapping the thigh) or significant plane changes (like the side-plane of the torso). When drawing the environment, I match the perspective to the figure using a grid. I even get to reference a sketch I did in 2018 for details in the upper-left!

6 Environment block-in

Using my supplementary reference, I block in the environment. This provides solid context for my foreground and makes it easier later on to choose colours that fit with the scene. I establish the overall lighting – the primary light source is the afternoon sun, illuminating the background, and Ava is in shadow. There is blue bounce light from the sky and warm bounce light from the interior (behind the viewer).

7 Foreground block-in

With the background providing context and my lighting scheme determined, I block in the foreground. I do some rough rendering to better help me visualise the colours, but at this stage, I do not worry too much about my brushwork or edges (for me personally, that is a part of finishing). Before I commit to careful rendering, I have to get the foundations just right. ➤➤

8 Push it further

Squinting at my block-in reveals a few issues. I love the vibrant greens, but they don't make sense under these lighting conditions, and their high contrast (both within themselves and with surrounding elements) has them fighting for attention with the focal point (her face). I begrudgingly darken the leaves and make a mental note to try to bring that vibrancy back later.

9 Fix the composition

Now that the values and colours are approximately correct, I realise I've missed an opportunity to use composition to tell my story. I want everything to appear breezy and expansive, but currently, Ava's gaze is interrupted immediately by the pole that's in front of her. While technically correct, it interferes with the overall flow of the image, so I move that section behind her.
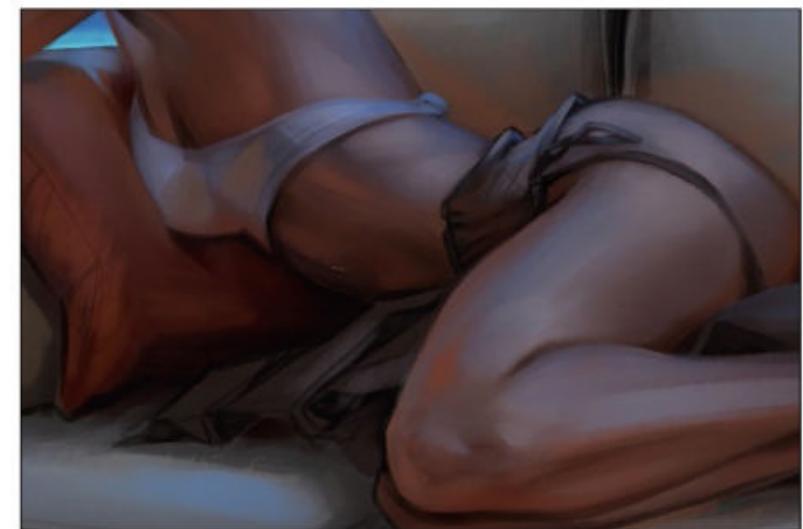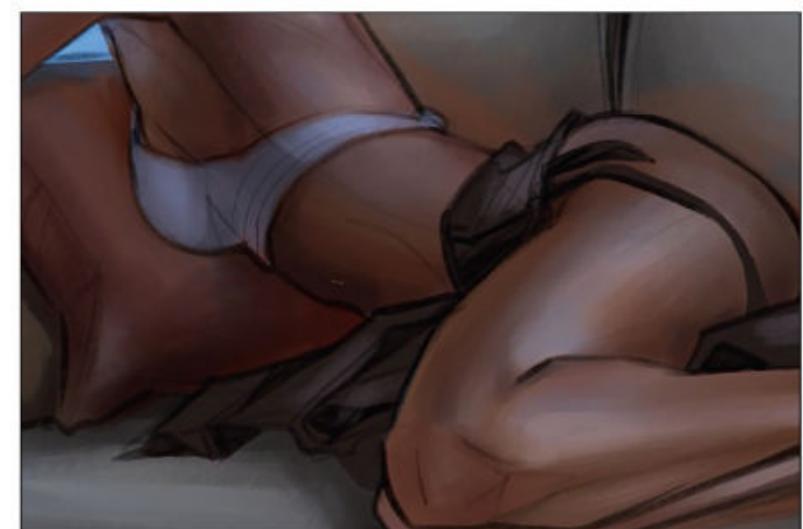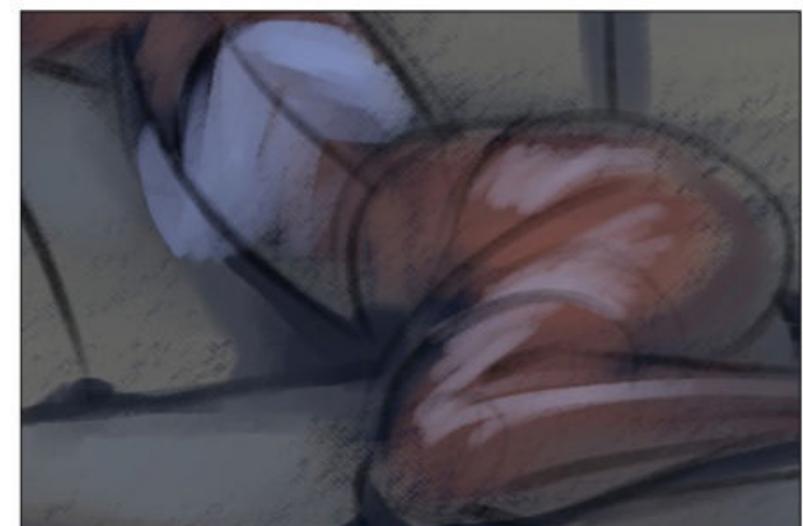
10 Nail the skin tones

I'm using myself as pose reference, but Ava has a different skin tone. I have to tackle this iteratively and logically. I look at photos of models with similar skin tones and note key differences: colours are warmer, values are darker, and contrast between the shadows and light is higher. Using my drawing and supplementary reference as a base, I apply these observations incrementally to build a cohesive skin tone.
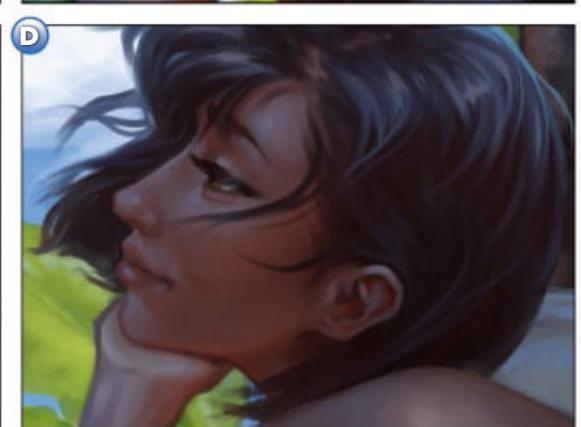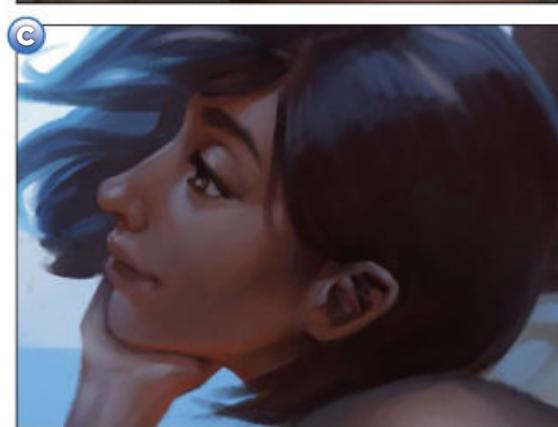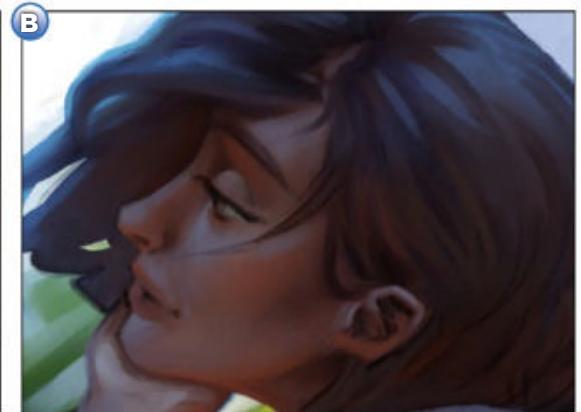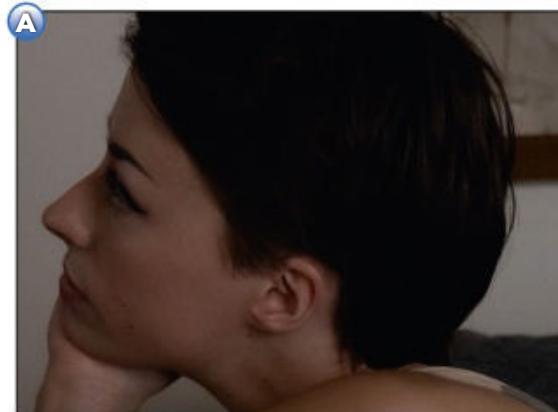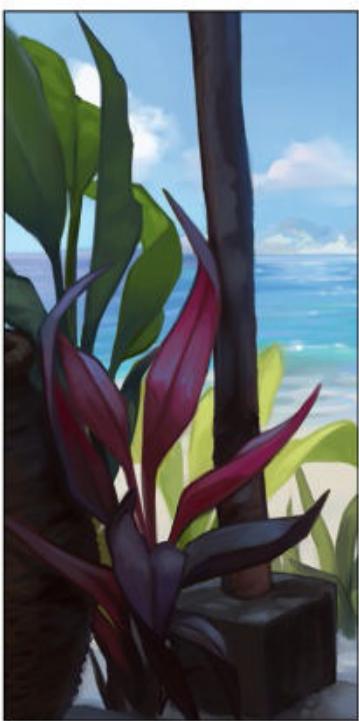
11 Leaves, leaves, leaves…
Leaves pose a real challenge to us artists. It's tempting to hyper-focus on the details and betray the original design and fundamentals. Instead of closely copying the reference, I use it only to inform the 3D shapes of the leaves (and plants as a whole) and the effect of light on them. This way, I can be sure to add well-rendered details without muddying the painting with excessive competing details.


12 Change the face
As with the skin tones, Ava and I do not really look alike. Additionally, I'm turned ever so slightly away, which is obscuring my features and conflicting with my open, expansive intention for the painting. Rather than finding new reference, I work imaginatively. The original reference is a good start, but I allow myself to play until I find Ava in the features. This can (and did!) take several attempts.

13 Create the environment
To get the background right, I have to apply the same principles as to the foreground. I use a photo of clouds on a sunny day and, remembering that the sun is high and to the left, design my clouds to show depth and perspective. For the water, I study several photos to understand how the colours change across distance and apply these principles to my painting.

14 The finishing touches
Now that everything works together cohesively, I can push the surface finish of my painting. I tidy up my edgework, ensuring the foreground is more crisp and densely detailed than the background. I find a way to work in that vivid green I'd been missing since step 8, placing it behind her head and keeping the contrast down so it doesn't compete again. And with that, I call it finished!

ArtRage Vitae
CREATE A FANTASY ILLUSTRATION

Twin artists **Raide and Leffie** reveal how they collaborated on this delightful scene inspired by their childhood art

Artist PROFILE
Raide and Leffie
LOCATION: Germany

Raide (@RaidesArt) and Leffie (@LeffiesArt) are twins with German and Portuguese roots. They are freelance illustrators with a passion for character art, and have collaborated with the likes of Ambient Design and HarperCollins.
https://raiffiesart.com/

Together we collaborated on this project, and in this workshop we'll take you through our steps, from the initial ideas to the final edits. In this guide, you'll discover how we created a fantasy illustration featuring an enchanted owl tree.

This project was inspired by our childhood artworks: we used to draw owls with matching presents on a large, magical tree. We recently found one of these older drawings and decided it'd be a nice idea to tackle this concept again. The drawing was supposed to be very whimsical, so lighting played an important role. We will demonstrate which blend modes we use to create the enchanting lighting effects, and explain how we created unique character designs for the owls and their matching presents.
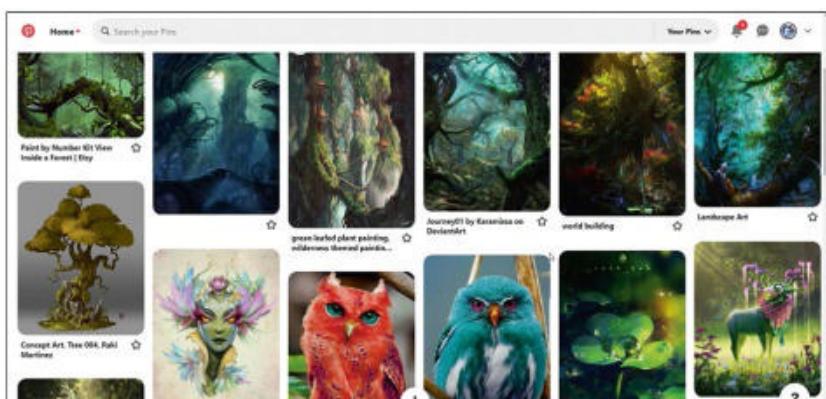
1 The idea and moodboard

For a children's book project we needed to create a populated forest scene. Browsing through our legacy sketch collections, recurring subjects were owls guarding their individual presents. We collaborated to expand these characters and developed them to bring the forest scene to life. After we have formed a general idea, we like to put together a moodboard. In this case, we saved inspirational images of forest concept artworks, photography and owl designs in a Pinterest board.

2 Thumbnail sketches

Based on those images, we created a series of small and quick drawings. We picked our favourite ones and used them as a guide to create a compositional sketch.
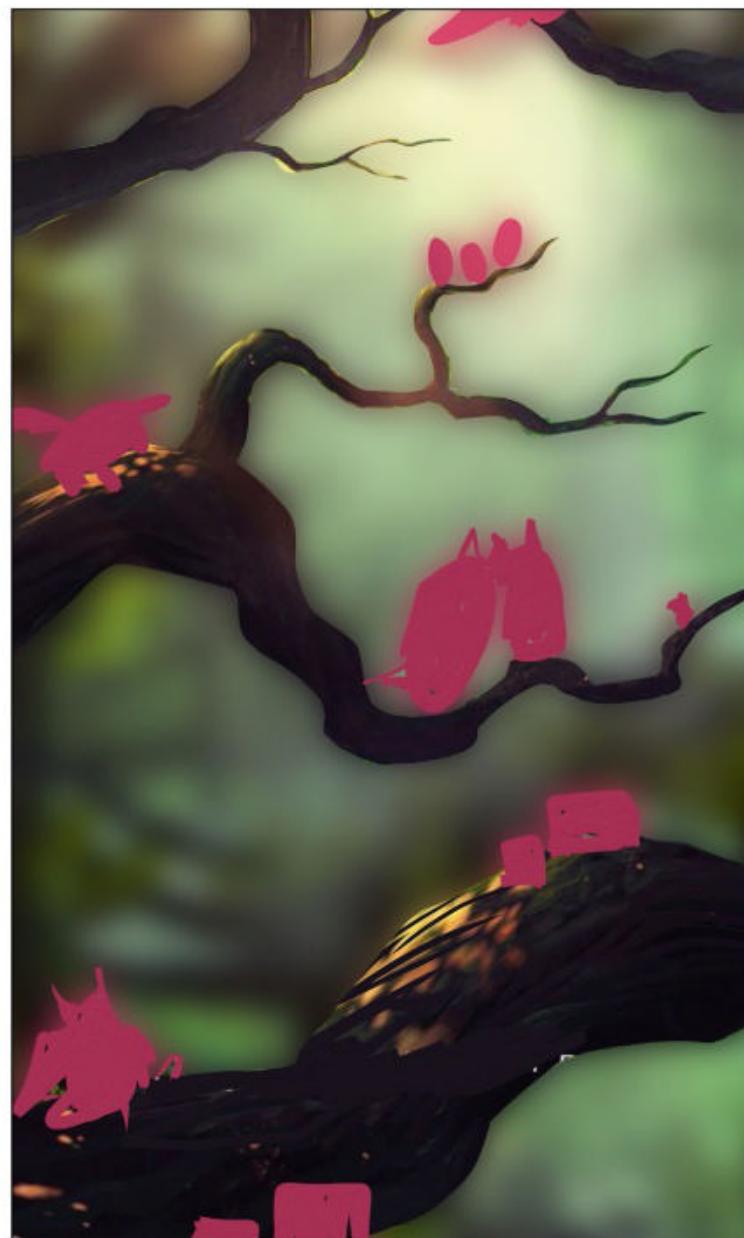
3 Colour key – colour scheme and lighting

With the composition in mind, we used different photos from our Pinterest board and edited them together to create a blueprint of our final piece. We used this edit as a reference for our palette. ➤➤

4 Background base colours

After we were both happy with the blueprint, Raide started working on the background. She loaded the edited image from earlier into ArtRage as a reference. First, Raide used the lasso tool to outline the silhouettes of the main branches, and then used the paint roller to add the base colours.

5 Textures and custom brushes

For the woody texture of the large tree, Raide mainly used a pre-made custom brush called 'Bristle 6 Blend'. Although we wanted to focus on the foreground, it was important to us that the scene's background did not look lifeless. So, to add more interest to the forest setting, Raide created her own custom brushes with leaf-like brush heads. She tweaked the relevant settings, for example the dab spacing, in the Custom Brush Designer throughout the process.

6 Character design

Meanwhile, Leffie explored the character designs of the owls: she wanted each one to stand out and have its own uniquely wrapped present. So, Leffie created a sheet filled with different owl designs. She heavily focused on interesting silhouettes and body shapes. The paint roller was used on a layer below the lineart to quickly add large and bold strokes of colour. The paint roller itself mixes colours nicely together and thus makes it easier to find some interesting and pleasant hues. She made sure the owl's colour palettes worked with the overall green tone of the background, by placing a dark green base underneath the drawings.
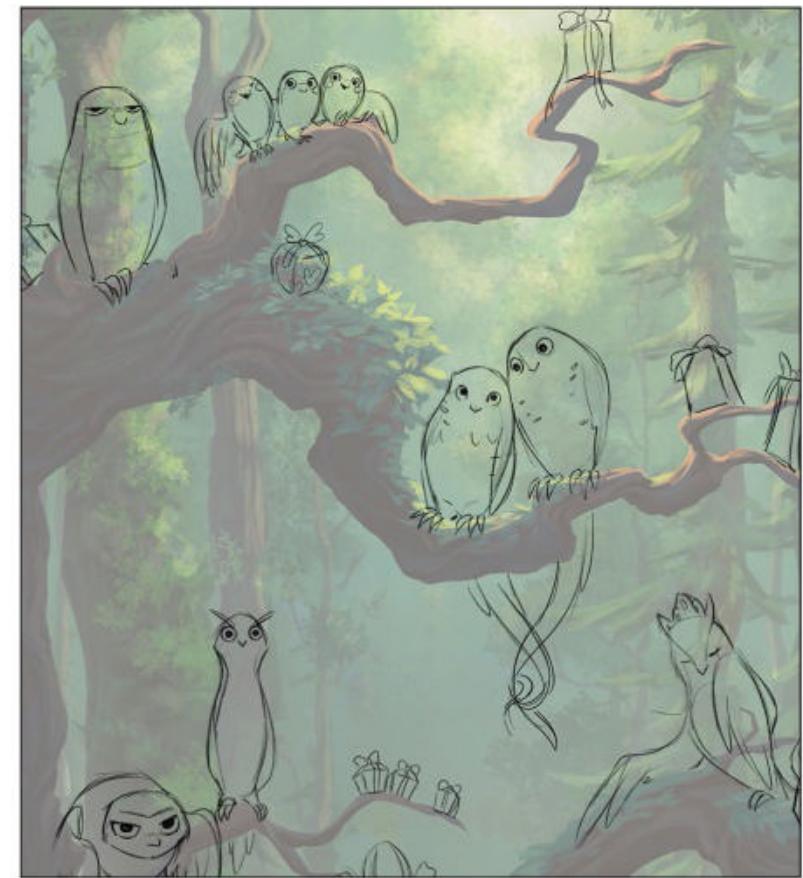
7 Size and placement

In order for Leffie to focus on the placement of the characters, she imported Raide's background on a single layer, and added a white layer on top. She set the opacity of this layer to around 80%, so she could still peek at the background. This setup helps her determine the sizes of the characters and their position within the composition.

8 **Character shading and lighting**
Leffie decided to add base colours with neutral shading first, before she proceeded with the final lighting. To blend the characters into the scene, she used different blend modes to her advantage. She enriched the shadows with a blue colour through the Multiply mode, and increased the brightness by using a yellow colour set to Soft Light. More layers with different blend modes were added to achieve a whimsical look.

| 1 SOFT LIGHT | 2 NORMAL | 3 NORMAL | 4 MULTIPLY |
5 SOFT LIGHT	6 MULTIPLY	7 NORMAL	8 MULTIPLY
9 SOFT LIGHT	10 SOFT LIGHT	11 MULTIPLY	12 MULTIPLY
13 NORMAL	14 SOFT LIGHT	15 SOFT LIGHT	16 NORMAL
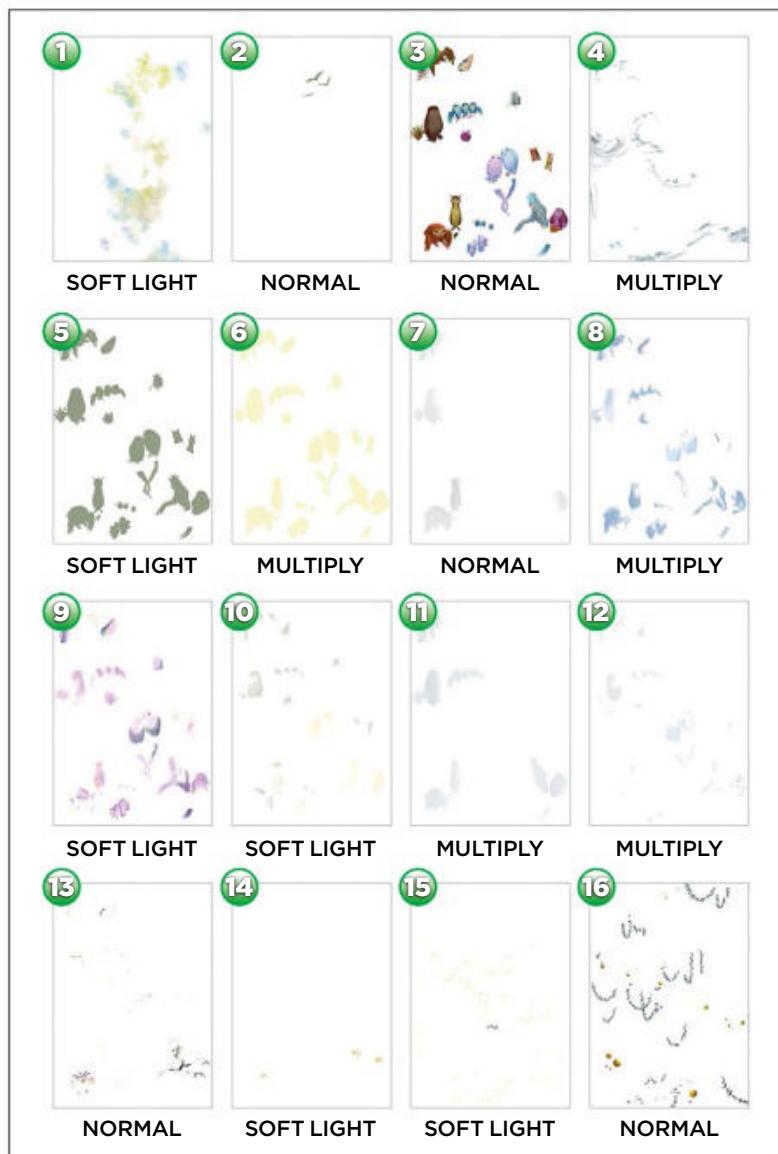
9 **Merging our files together**
Next, Leffie prepared her ArtRage file in order to combine it with Raide's. To do this, she first merged as many layers as possible. For blend mode layers, she needed to make an exception and export them separately as PNGs, as they would otherwise lose their blend mode effect. Once everything is exported, Leffie named the files chronologically and made a note of which layer should have which blend mode. Raide then imported these PNGs into her ArtRage file, and proceeded to add the final effects.

10 **Colour editing and final details**
At this stage, we noticed that focus was still missing in the piece. To fix this, we made the two central owls larger. The final lighting was also designed to help guide the reader's eye; the strong yellow sunlight makes the two main owls glow, while the others remain in the shadows. Once happy with the final composition and lighting, we imported the piece into Photoshop to enhance the colours. The darker regions were given a blue tint, while the lighter ones became warmer.

Procreate
DRAWING INSECTS: THE BASICS

Glen Southern demonstrates how to get started with macro insect sketches on the iPad, beginning with anatomy research

Artist
PROFILE
Glen Southern
LOCATION: UK

Glen runs SouthernGFX, a small, Cheshire-based studio specialising in character and creature design. He has been using and training ZBrush in the UK for over 15 years and more recently he has been creating in the VR space working with companies like Adobe Medium and Gravity Sketch.
**https://ifxm.ag/3JFeJdE**

Insects and macro work in general is a popular subject for photographers, painters and even sculptors like myself. As a creature designer I get asked to create all kinds of insects and insect-inspired creatures. To produce really convincing concepts you need to know how a living thing works, and in the case of insects you have a number of advantages. Firstly, they all have the same basic body plan (roughly), so you only have to learn that once. Secondly, the reference material is all around you and you can get stunning reference images using just an iPhone these days.

For this type of project, I spend a lot of time researching the overall subject and then hone in on the actual species, in this case it was the humble bumblebee.

In this tutorial, I will focus on doing colour roughs to establish the basic look of the creature, and will also talk a little about basic insect anatomy – which, as I mentioned earlier, you only have to learn once as most insects have similar body plans, with a few modifications for their individual requirements.

Let's start off by refreshing our knowledge on the basic body plan of a bee.
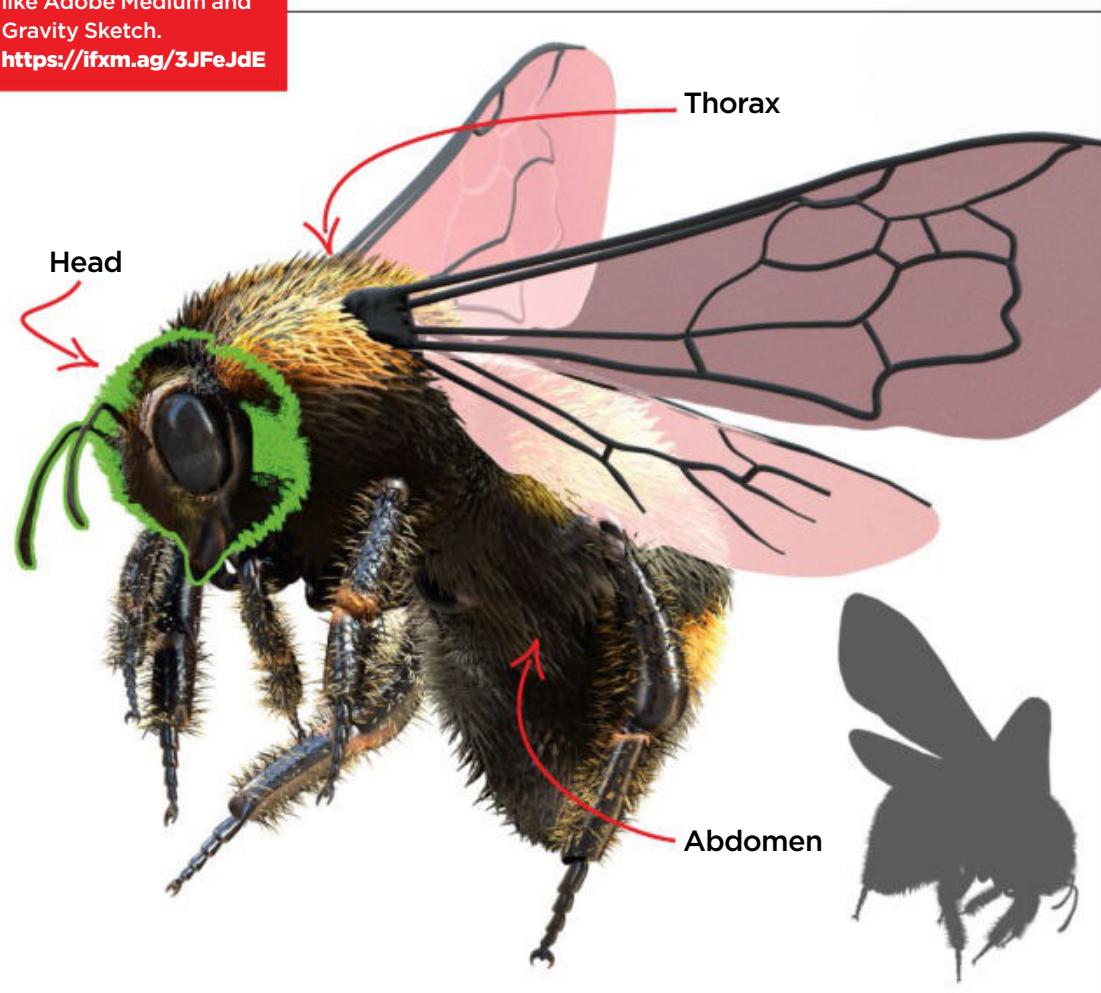
1 Basic anatomy – head, thorax and abdomen

An insect has very specific features that distinguish it from other invertebrate groups such as spiders, earthworms, sponges, jellyfish, lobsters, crabs, snails etc. The main features are: a hard outer skeleton (exoskeleton); they all have a three-part body made up of head, thorax, abdomen; six legs usually coming from the thorax; a pair of antennae; and if they have wings, most will have four. If the creature you are looking at has those characteristics, then you will most likely be dealing with an insect.
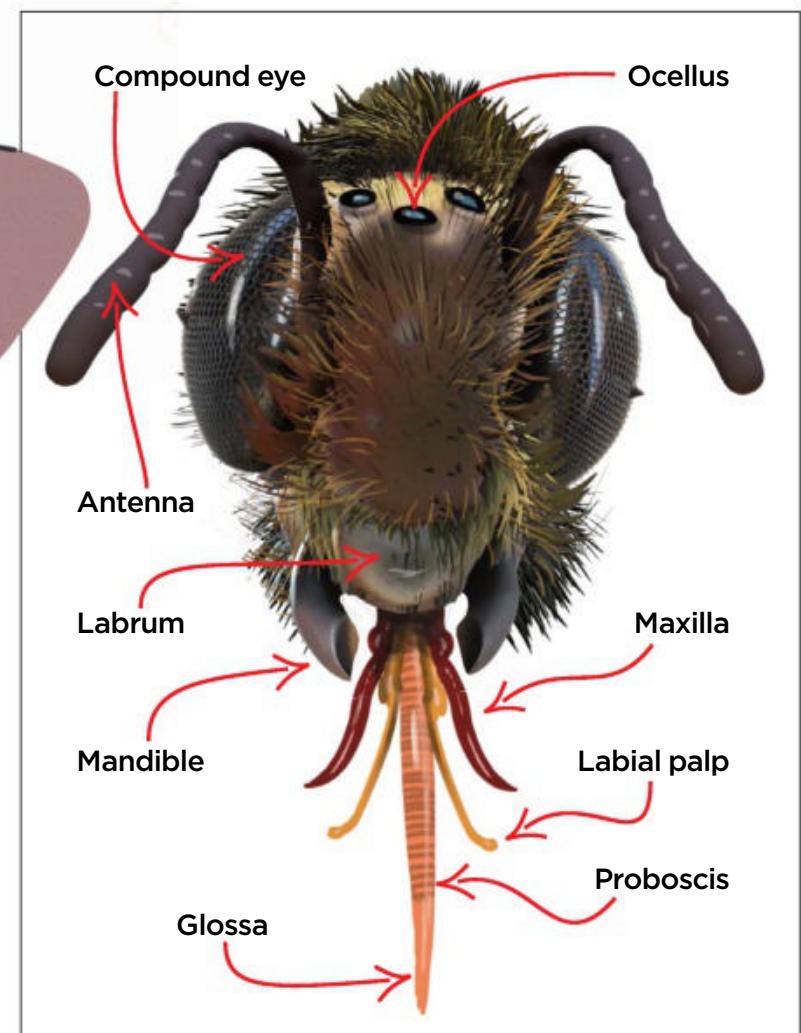
2 Details on the head

Most macro photographers will focus on the head of their subject; it is probably the most interesting part of many insects, and it has a lot of complexity if you are going to learn to draw or paint them. The main feature is the large compound eyes, but don't forget most have five eyes which include three ocelli.

Labels: Coxa, Basitibial plate, Trochanter, Femur, Floccus, Tibial spurs, Basitarsus, Tibia, Tarsal claws
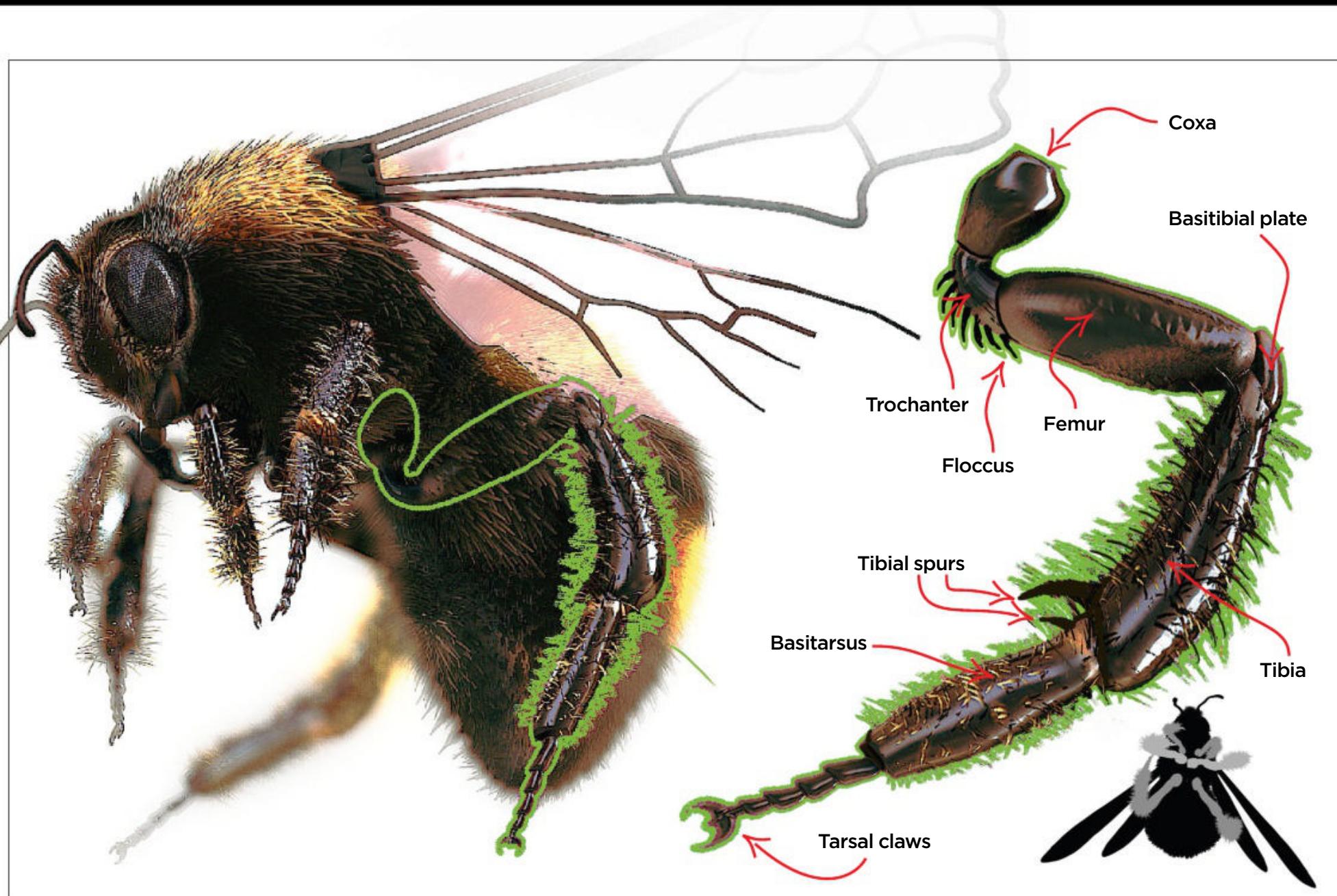
3 Leg plan

After the head, the legs are the most complex and it's worth taking a bit of time to understand how they are constructed. Bees have six legs, and some of the naming conventions will be familiar to anyone who has studied mammalian anatomy, such as the femur and the tibia. Once you have understood the leg anatomy it becomes very simple to draw them in different poses. Try and find references that show insects standing on all six legs, but also images showing them in flight and how they hold their legs as they manoeuvre. Insects have a hydraulic system but also have muscles running inside their legs. Because they are located internally, we never have to show different surface features as we do with vertebrate anatomy.

Labels: Forewing, Forewing, Hindwing, Hindwing
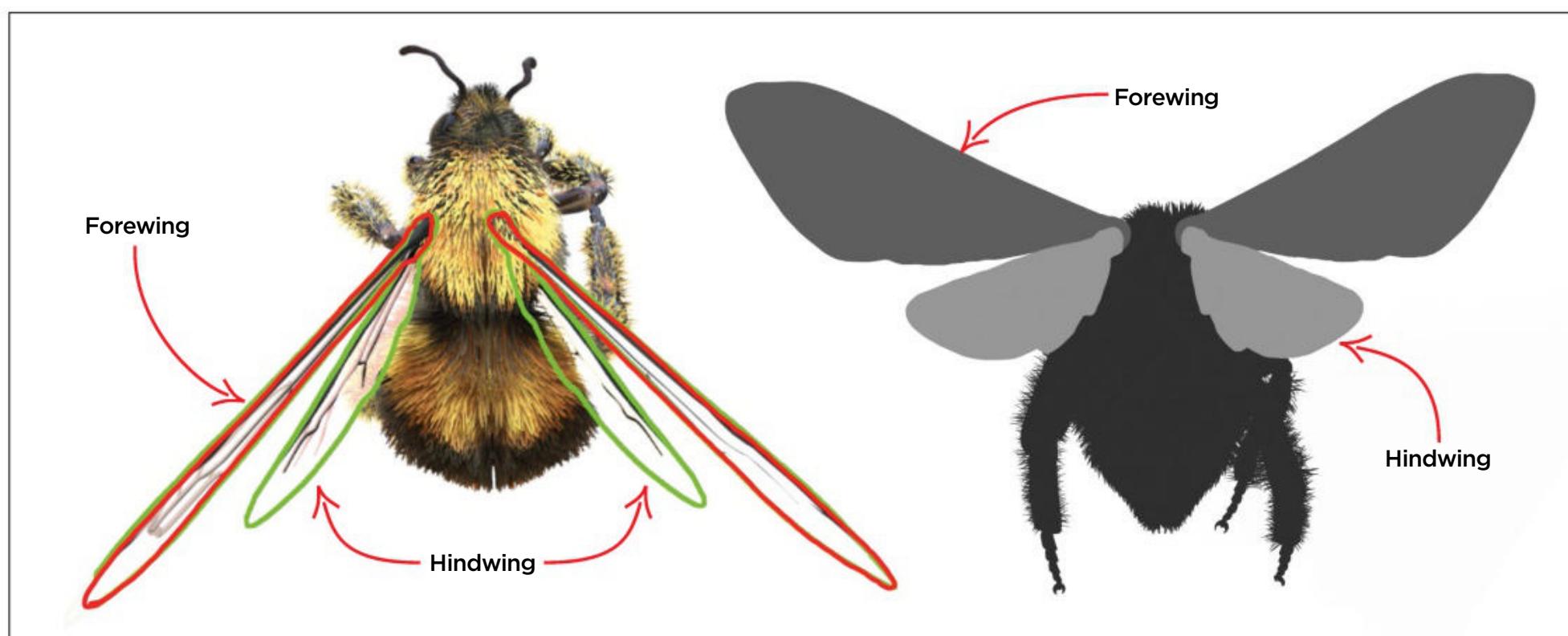
4 Four wings are better than two

Most flying insects (aside from a few exceptions like houseflies and mosquitoes) have four wings: a pair of frontwings and a pair of hindwings, and they both attach to the thorax. Some insects including flies have changed their hindwings into a sort of gyroscope to help them perform mid-air aerobatics and avoid being swatted! ➥

NOMAD SCULPT
BUMBLEBEE

5 Poses in flight

I use my iPad to sculpt a lot of my work and this example here is a series of bee poses made with Nomad Sculpt. They are simple models and even simpler poses, but they really help me to understand how a bee can move and I referenced lots of images in my own reference library to create this sort of contact sheet. It's great to do these as simple sketches at first.
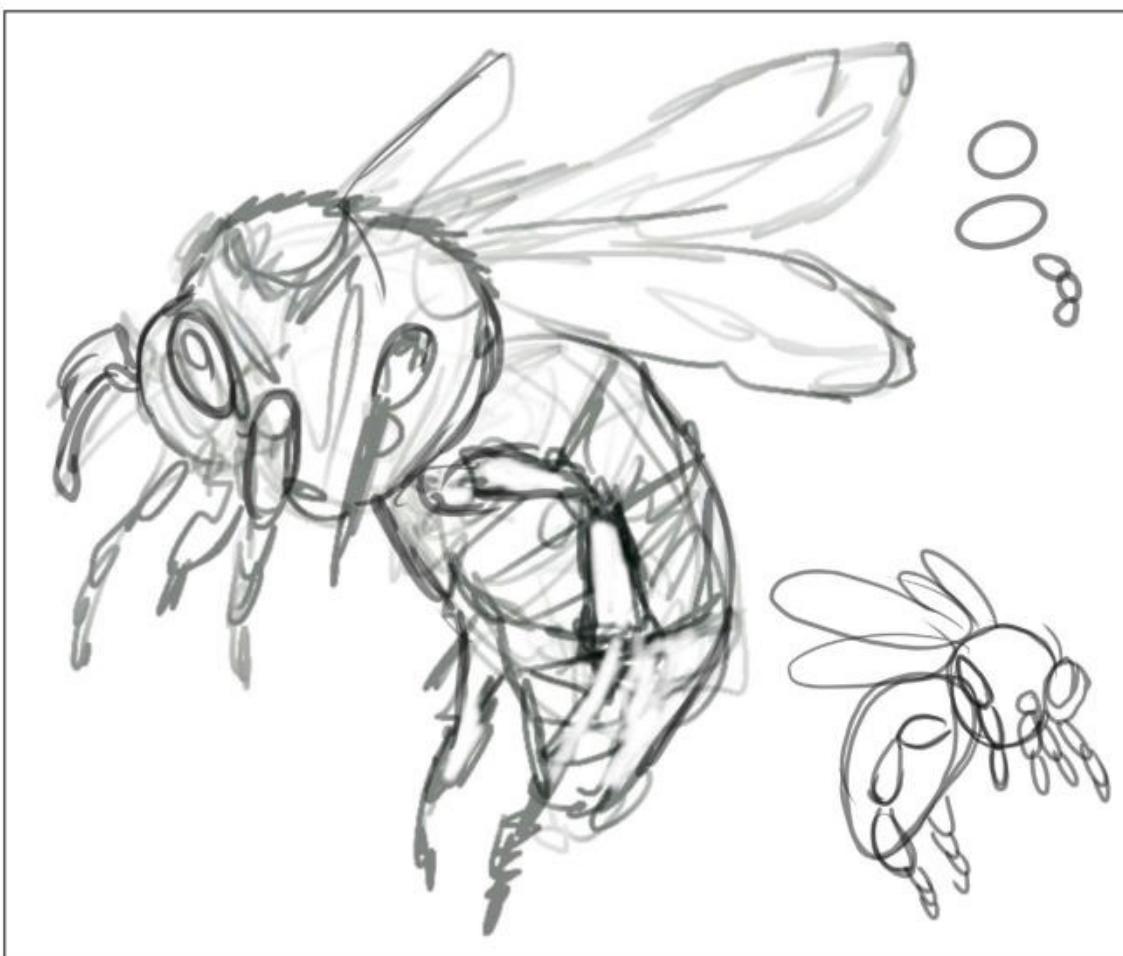
6 Line work
When I'm ready to paint my first bees I usually rough out the body plan in basic primitive shapes, mostly circles and ovals. When I'm doing colour roughs like this I don't use a lot of layers. I usually have a sketch layer and a block-out layer 90% of the time. These are really small documents at this stage (500 x 500 roughly) and I don't make them bigger until I'm ready to add details later.

7 Block fill the body
On a layer below the sketch line work I block out the shape of the overall body. I will add the outline of the legs at this stage but later on I might remove them and work them up on a separate layer. I use dark colours here, but it doesn't really matter at this stage. This will all change in the next section.

8 Local colours
Local colours are the colour of a subject in normal daylight and not in any type of shadow. Here I just used dark browns and yellows. I took the basic colours from a reference of a bumblebee and used a basic hard brush to lay the colour in with no real thought for accuracy. Try to unfocus your eyes and look at the image, as this sometimes helps to *not* focus on details.
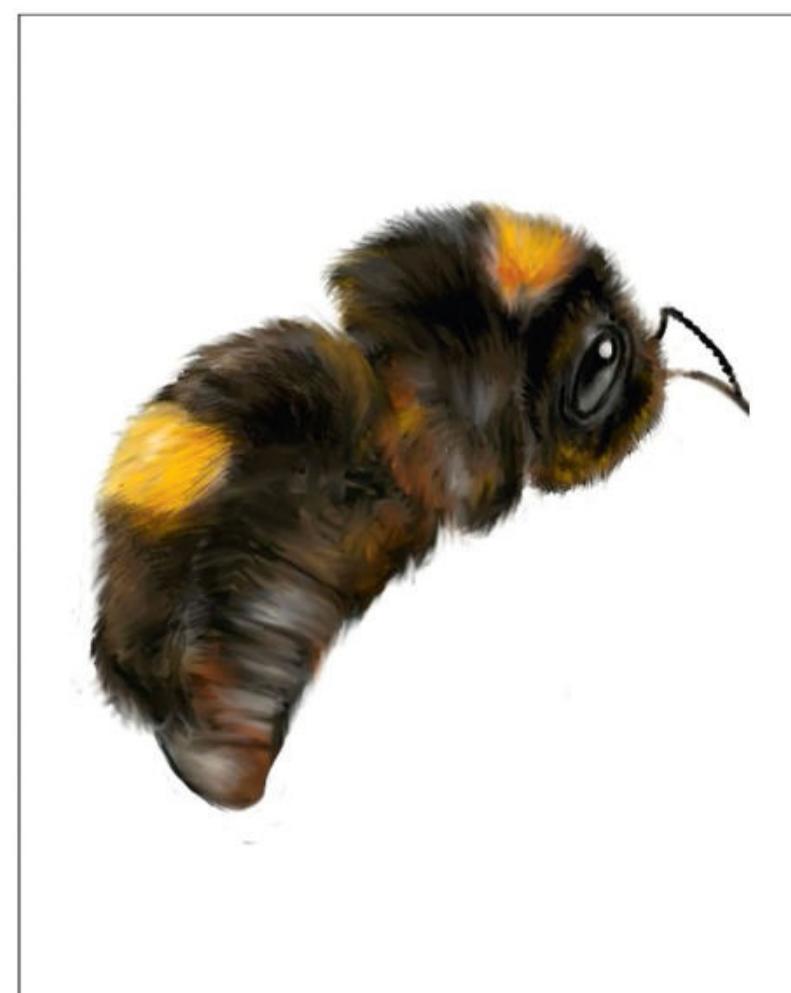
9 Smudge tool for fur/hair
At this point I decided to remove the layers to their own layer for ease. That meant all I had to focus on was the head, thorax and abdomen. I often add some lighting now to start giving the design a more 3D look. I used the smear brush in Procreate for the fur-like appearance. ➤➤
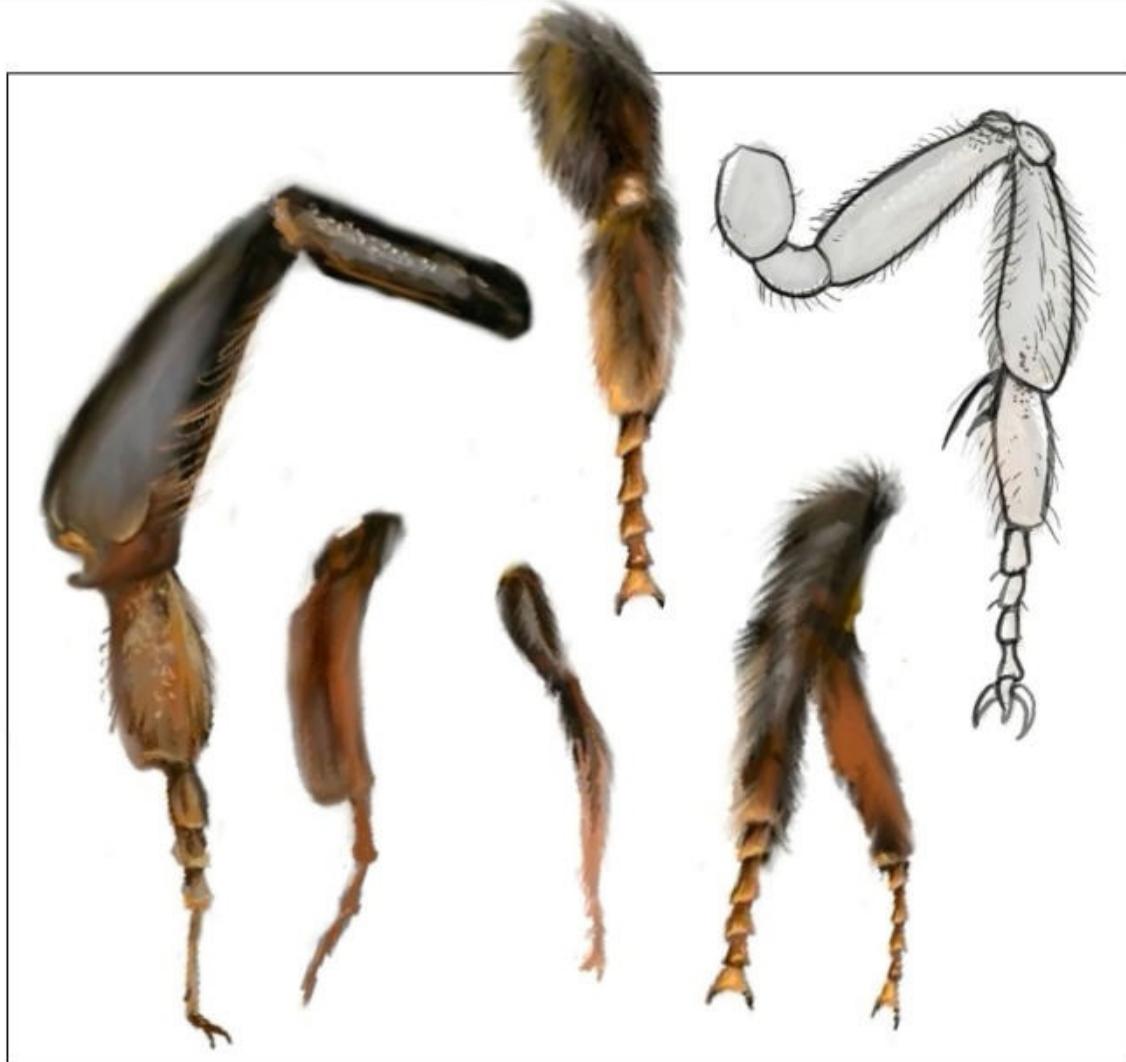
10 Leg layers

With the legs on a separate layer now it is easy to work out their anatomy and pose. I painted in the basic colours and then used the smudge tool again to add fur details to the edges of each leg part. Look out for big spikes called tibial spurs as they can add some fun detail.
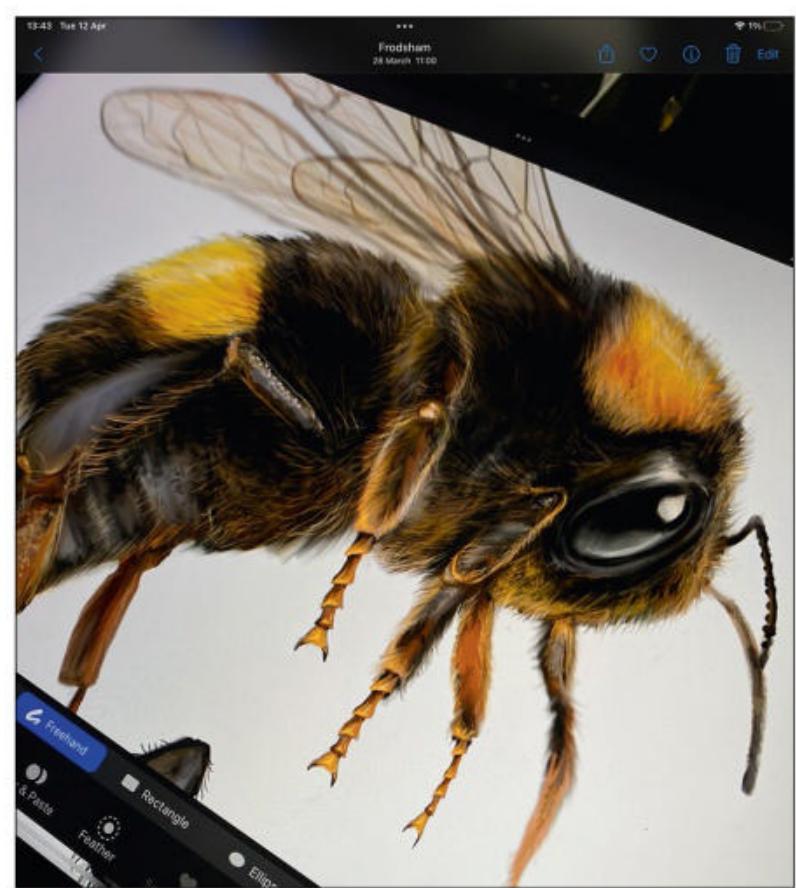
11 Detailing – make it bigger!

It's about this point that I make the document canvas much bigger. I usually go from about 500 x 500 up to at least 4,000 pixels on one dimension. It's not exact but I like to always assume that I might print the image one day. You can also increase the DPI up to 300 if you know you want to print larger. I add hair detail with a technical brush at this stage.


12 Adjustments

This type of image is a 'colour rough' and is used to make decisions about where to go next – it's not usually taken to a fully realised image. I do spend some time with smaller details if I am trying to emphasise something on a creature, for example I might put lots more detail in the eyes or the wings.

13 More bees than I can handle

Experiment with a range of alternative backgrounds for the most striking result, and see how your subject looks in context with other creatures. I often try a range of plain backgrounds to check how the values look (black to white range) and in this case I also added a few other bees that I have been working up.

Photoshop & Procreate
PAINT ABSTRACT PORTRAITS

Learn how to create surreal portraits with Procreate and Photoshop libraries with this guide from **Ken Coleman**

Artist PROFILE

Ken Coleman
LOCATION: Ireland

Ken lectures in Game Art and Design at TUS Clonmel Digital Campus in Ireland. He also designs for clients such as Catalyst Games, The Cranberries, Morbid Angel and is a regular contributor at photomanipulation.com.
artofkencoleman.com

This tutorial for me was a fun journey of discovery, as I have recently embraced Procreate as my go-to finishing and painting application, replacing a lot of desktop editing. In my personal work I have learned to value the power of the cloud and Adobe's cloud libraries. As someone who loves building and prepping their own stock elements for artwork, I've developed this tutorial to work on Photoshop on desktop as well as straight from the iPad, before finalising the artwork in Procreate.

You can either follow the full development of this project, or simply load the library file into Photoshop, and kitbash to build an abstract portrait using the same techniques without the use of the desktop application if you wish. I love discovering new ways to work and that I can now sit on the couch and 'sketch' beside my family, creating work at the same capacity as if I was devoted to the desk. The portability of my personal library and workflow has levelled up!
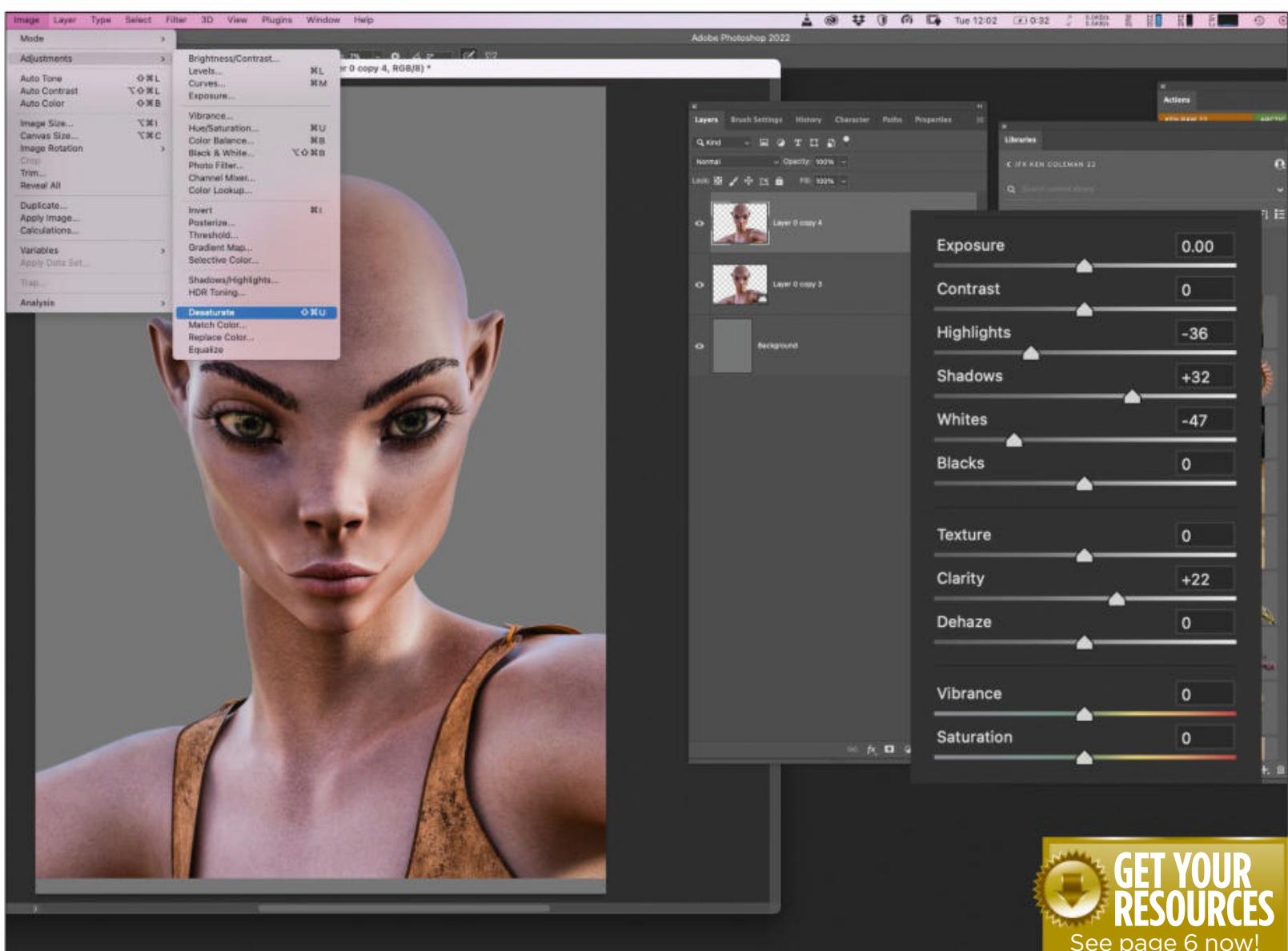
1 Prep and cut out

To begin my image I prep all my stock elements by cutting out anything I need with the Lasso tool. Once I'm happy with my initial face image, I duplicate the layer, desaturate it and set it to the Soft Light blend mode. I merge these layers and use the Camera Raw filter for a final prep. I usually bring shadows up 50% and highlights and whites 50%, finishing with an increase in clarity of 25-50%.

2 Layer and mask

The next phase after all the elements are prepped is to start to build the image using various elements and layer masks. This is also a good point where you can place all elements as smart layers into the file. From there you can go to Libraries, create a new folder and drag your layers in. For this project you will find a library folder already created called IFX KEN COLEMAN 22.
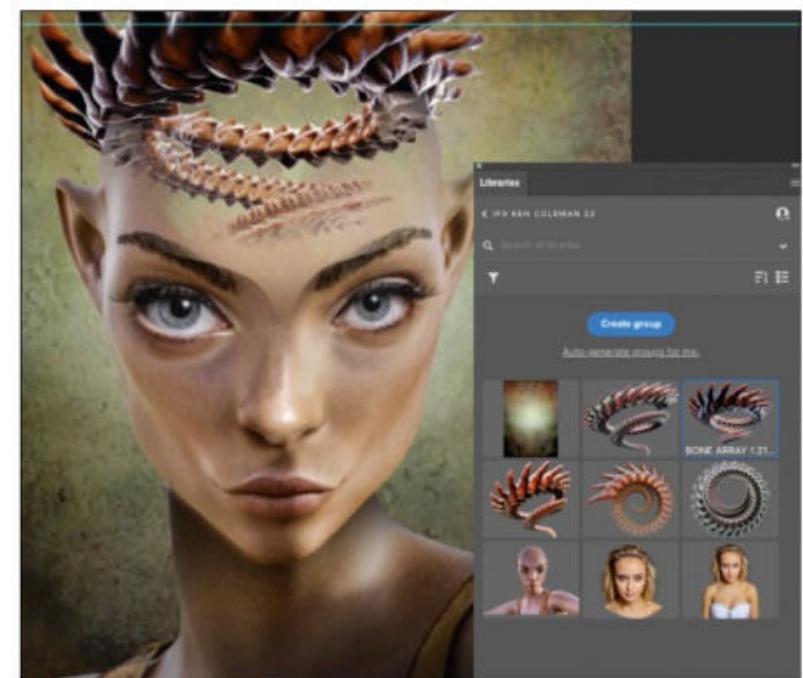
3 Build the image

Now that the base portrait has been established along with the textured background, it is time to start building up the image using the assets that have been saved for this project. I like to start with the abstract 3D elements called arrays, which were created in ZBrush. When I create this abstract type of portraiture I like to start with a combination of facial features, organic and/ or mechanical objects combined with the textures to start building up a visual base.
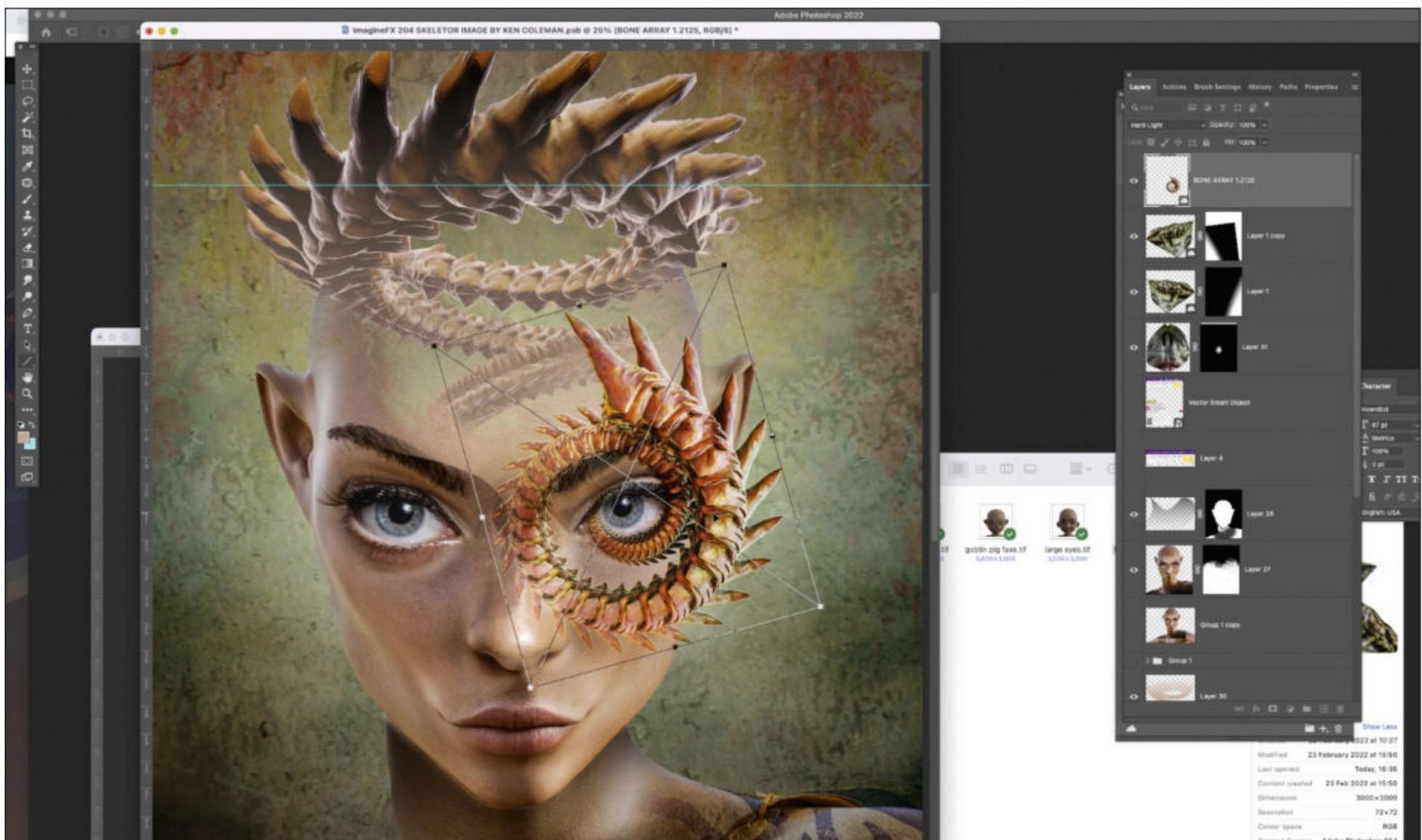
4 Detail with simplicity

I use a blend of layer masks and paint out the top of the head to create a sort of crown-style detail with the large 3D shape. I also like to keep the abstract details similar, so I'm using the same model rendered from different viewpoints in order to not over-complicate the image as I develop it. By keeping the patterns and shapes similar, I can quickly build up something that can seem ornate and complicated out of the repetition of simple or similar shapes.
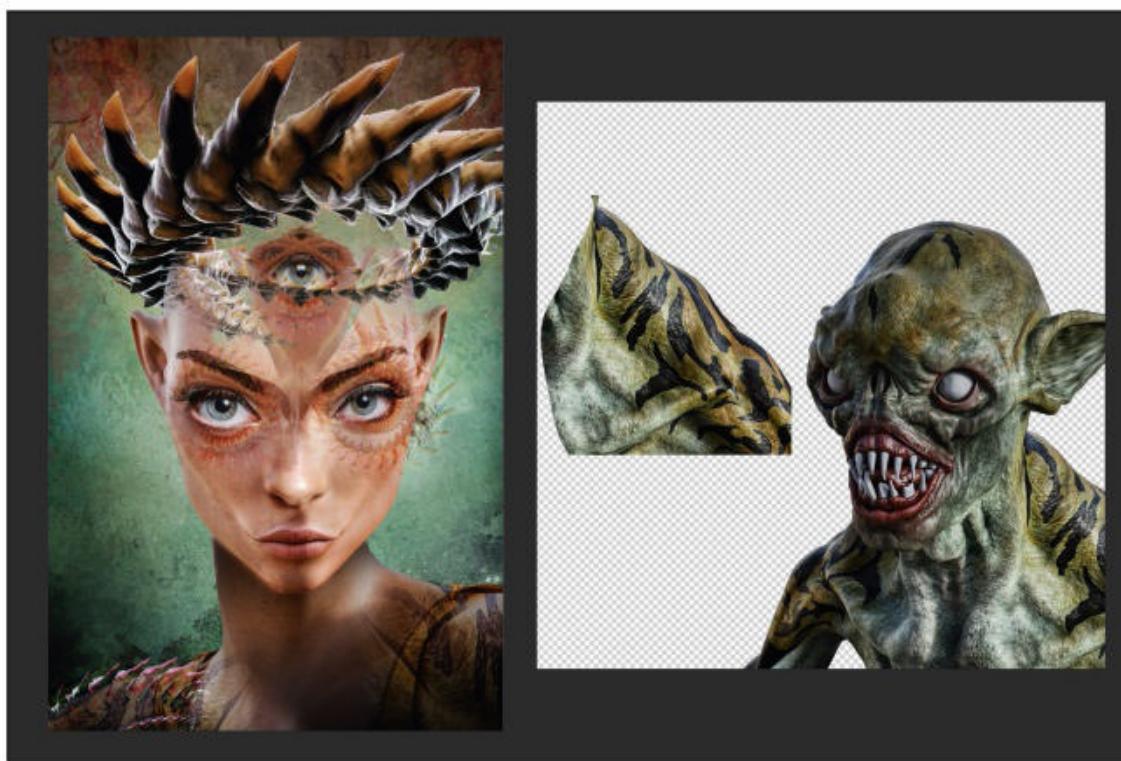
5 Add some creature detail

Now that the abstract images are helping to develop the overall silhouette, I add some elements from my other DAZ 3D renders which are prepared for this project. These creatures' shapes were created using Genesis 8 models in DAZ 3D and using creature morphs. They are useful tools for concepting designs and for helping with my abstract creations when photos are not available. These creatures have been graded by duplicating the layer and adding a desaturated layer just as before, to make sure the shadows match as I blend the elements.
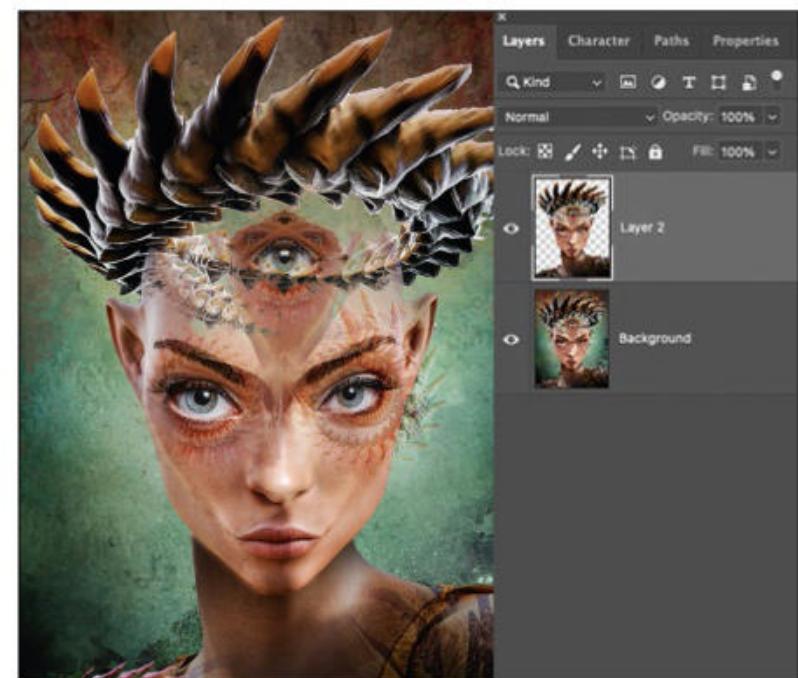
6 Jump to Procreate

When I'm happy with how the figure is developing, I decide it's time to bring it into Procreate. To prep for the painting and drawing, in Photoshop I go to Image> Duplicate and make a copy that I can merge down to a manageable file size. Before I flatten the image, I make a selection of just the figure and its elements and press Copy. I then select Layer>Flatten Image. Next, I press Paste In Place, which puts the figure selection back in over the merged artwork, and save for my iPad.
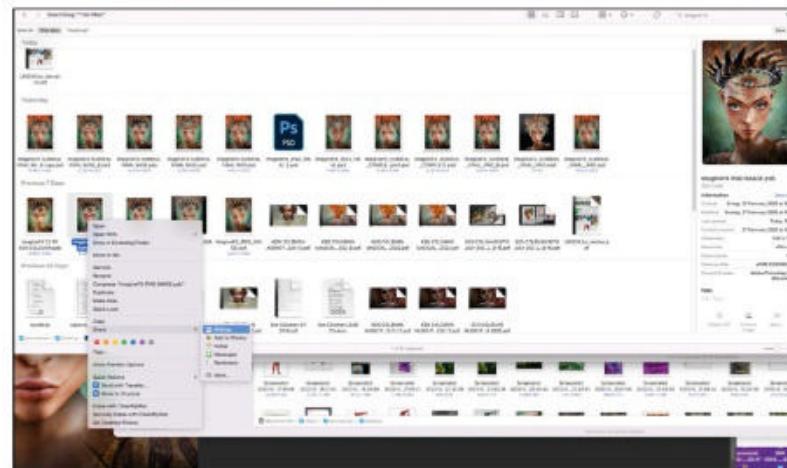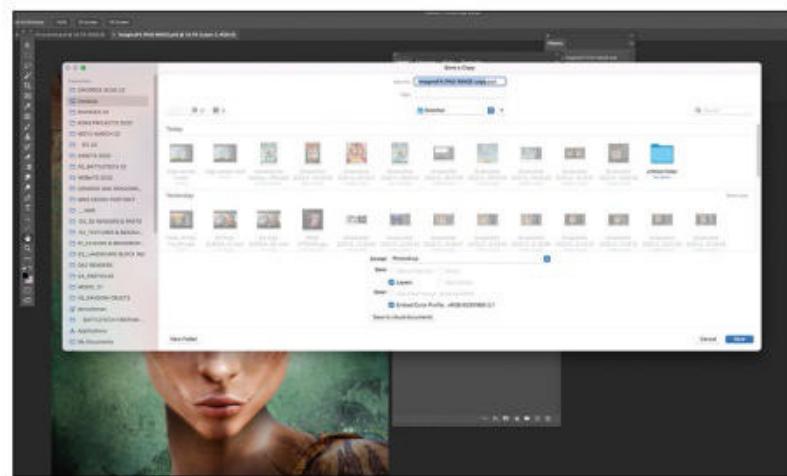
7 Cloud or AirDrop

At this point I can choose to save my file to my cloud documents in Photoshop. Make sure the file is a PSD file in order to do this, as PSB files will not save to cloud. It is good to note that this project has been set up with the cloud library and that you can just start building directly in Photoshop rather than the iPad. I prefer to AirDrop my image directly from my Mac to my iPad as I have that option and do not have to wait for the cloud version to upload.
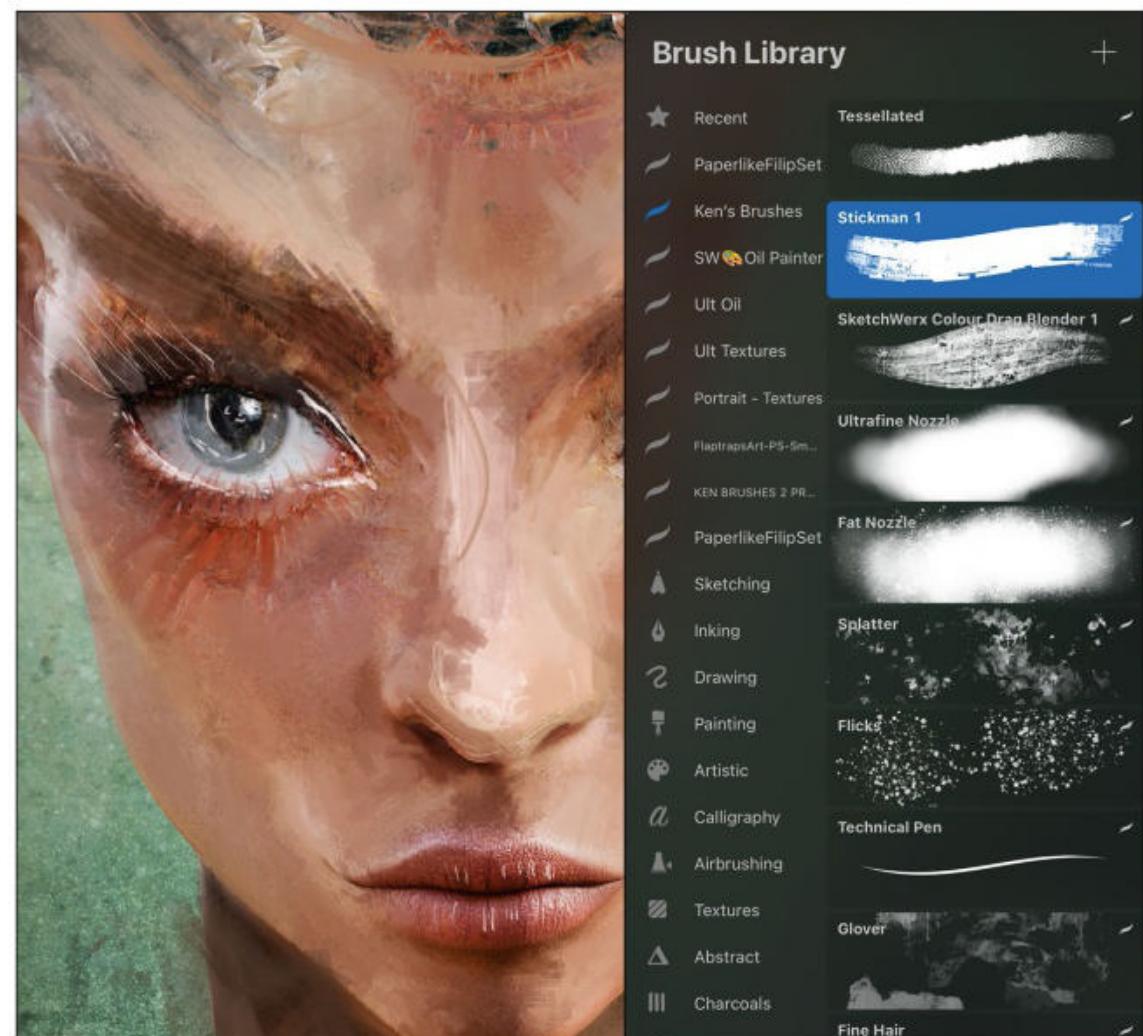
8 Blend in Procreate

Now that I have loaded the image to my iPad I can open it in an editing software and continue to develop it. In this case I decided to open the image in Procreate and develop some paintover, brushstrokes and textures. The first thing I do in Procreate is select the top layer of the figure and swipe left to duplicate. By doing this I'll keep a base layer and duplicate anytime I want to experiment with a brush. I tend to keep my brush selection simple and mostly use Procreate's own Stickman brush under the blender tool options. ➡➡
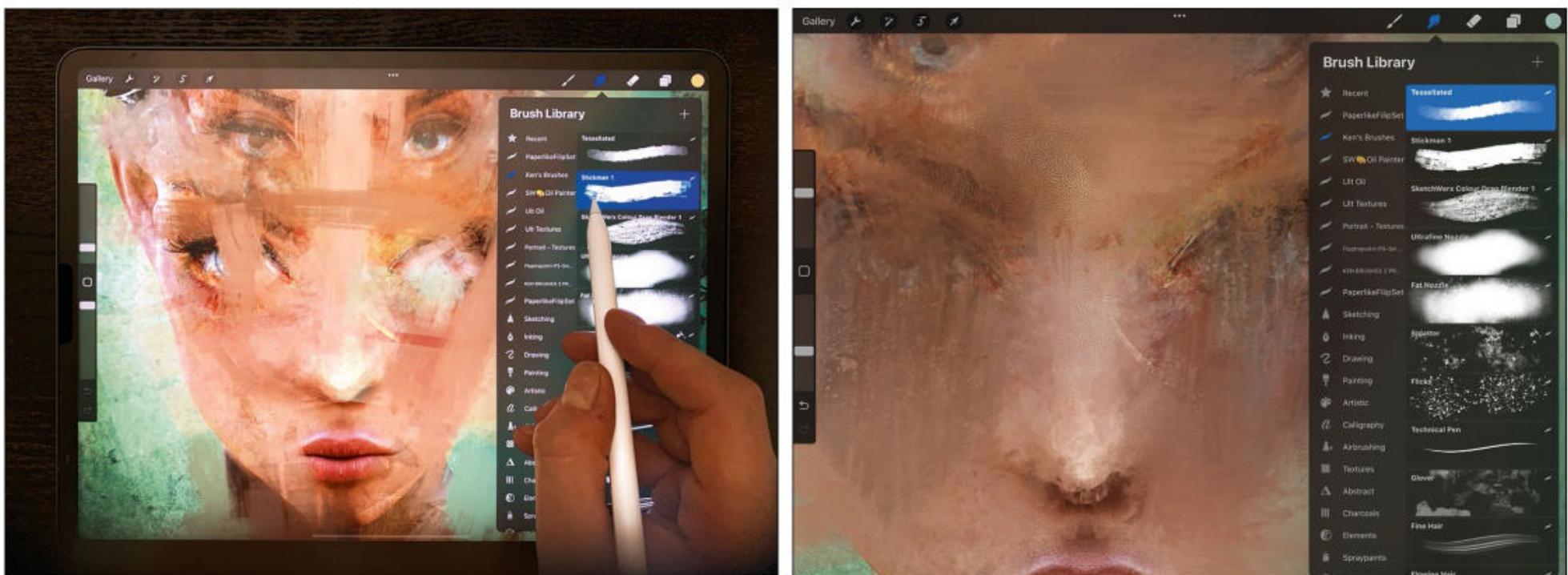
9 Paint and duplicate

I duplicate and unlock the background layer and also experiment with blenders to achieve a feel of bigger underpainting brush strokes. I really enjoy using the Stickman 1 brush at different opacities and sizes as it can give a very geometric but abstract feel. I also like to create duplicate layers to experiment with other brushes to see what might complement how the piece is developing. I particularly like the Tessellated brush amongst the other texture brushes for experimenting with.
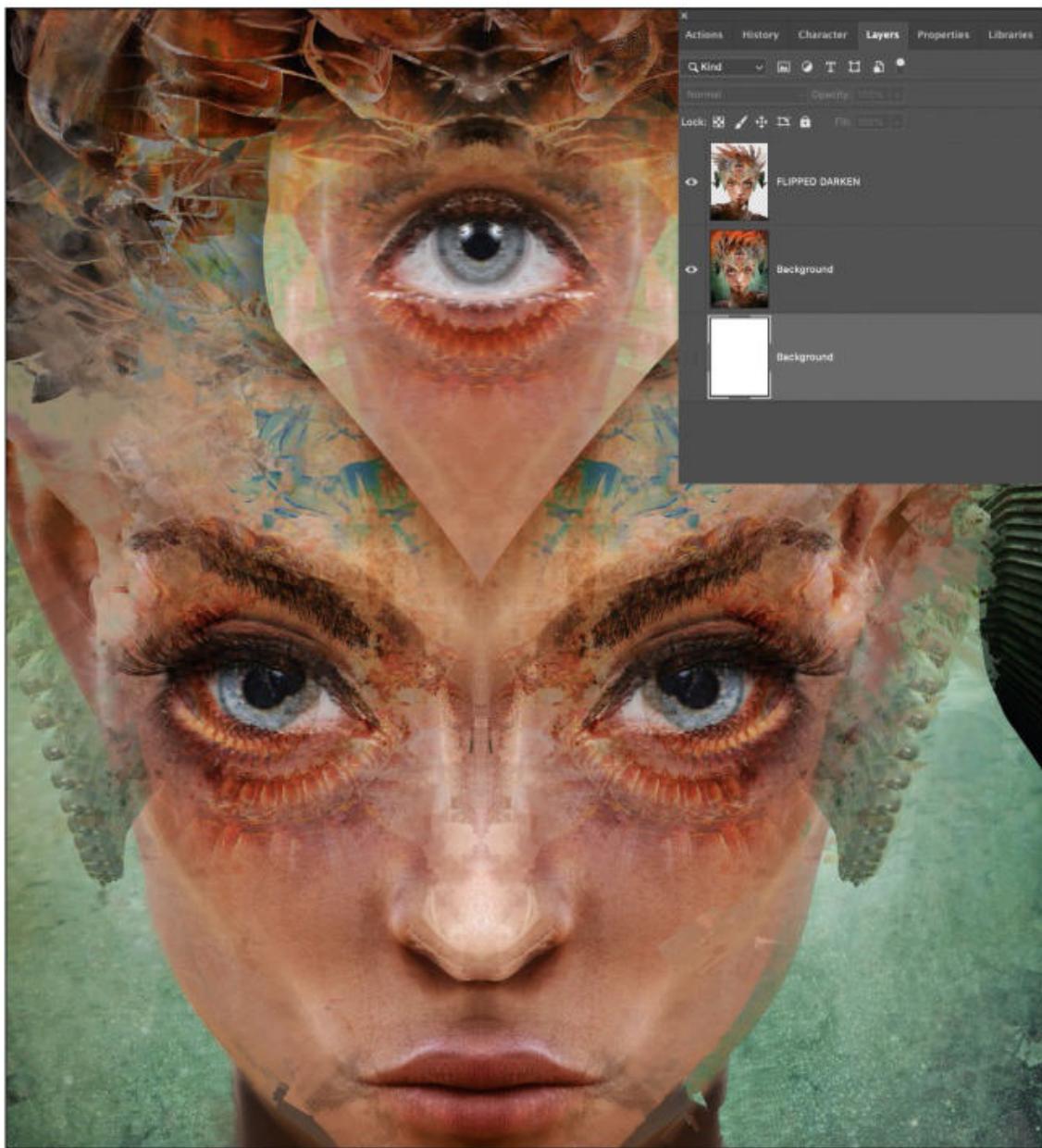
10 Flatten and mirror

Once I am happy with my paintover layers, I can either bring my image back to Photoshop on the desktop or share and export as a PSD file on the iPad directly into Photoshop CC. I chose to further work on the image on the desktop in order to undertake my next experiment. I copy the file again, flatten the image and duplicate it, and flip it horizontal on itself. I set the mode to either Darken or Lighten and move the layer around to find interesting symmetry.
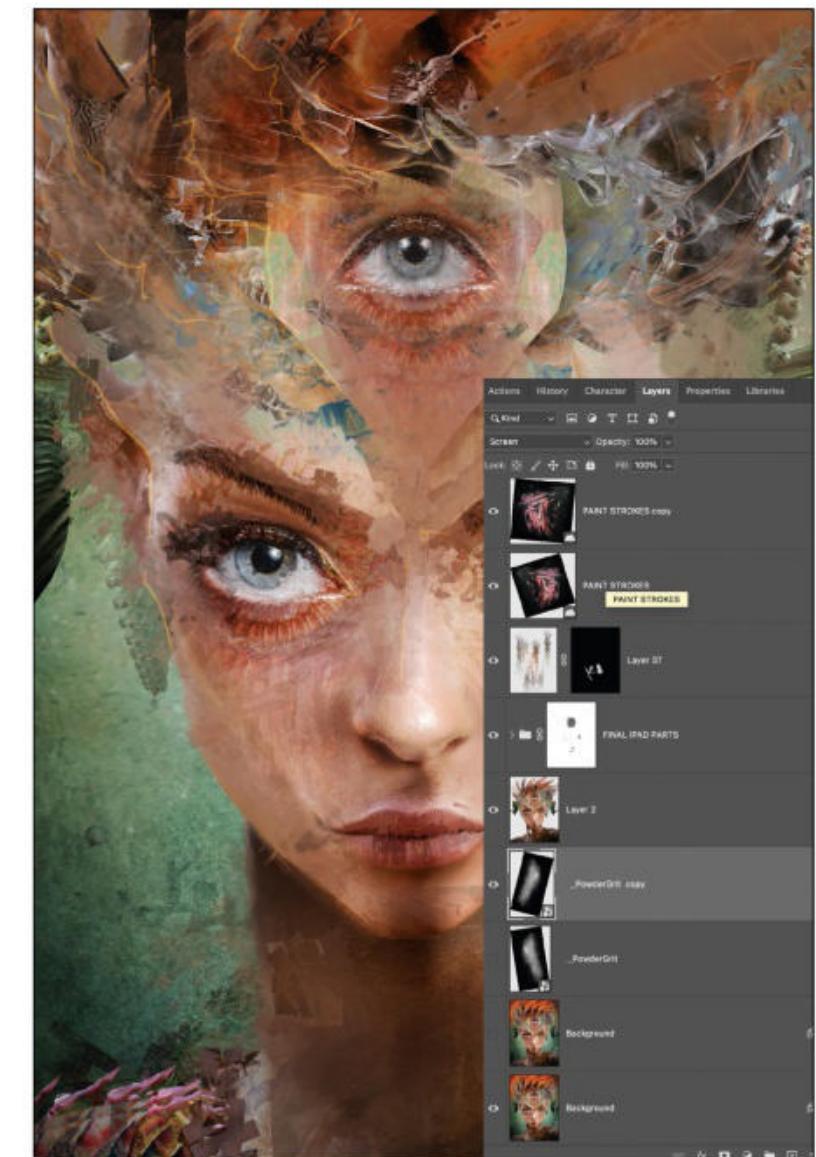
11 Abstract copy and paste

I copy the part I like back to my original image and bring in the paintover layers from the iPad Procreate file. At this point I'm starting to choose which painted and non-painted/photographic or textured elements work in balance together. I use layer masks and some of my own Abstract Photoshop brushes to break up the image. At this point in a lot of my personal work, I go overboard on abstract visual elements so I can pull it back later.
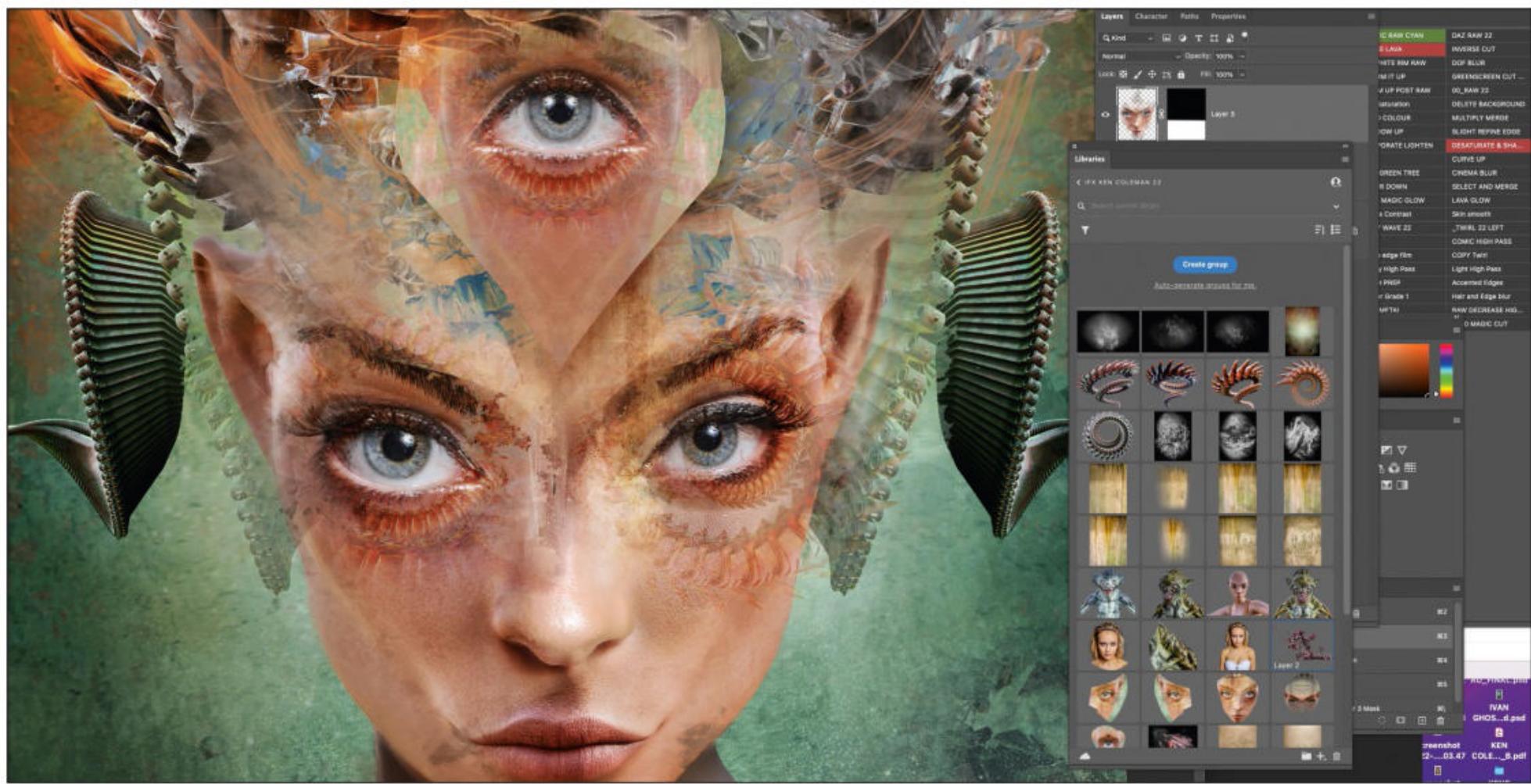
12 Add more elements

While I'm happy with how the piece is going, I feel something is missing. I have added the symmetrical third eye, so now I add some more mechanical-looking array models rendered from ZBrush as almost ram-like horns. I have an Imagine FX cover template of text layers that I like to turn on and off to check the negative space. I like to often visualise my work as a cover as that is how a lot of my work is often used. I add a gradient layer of bright orange which helps bring more contrast overall.
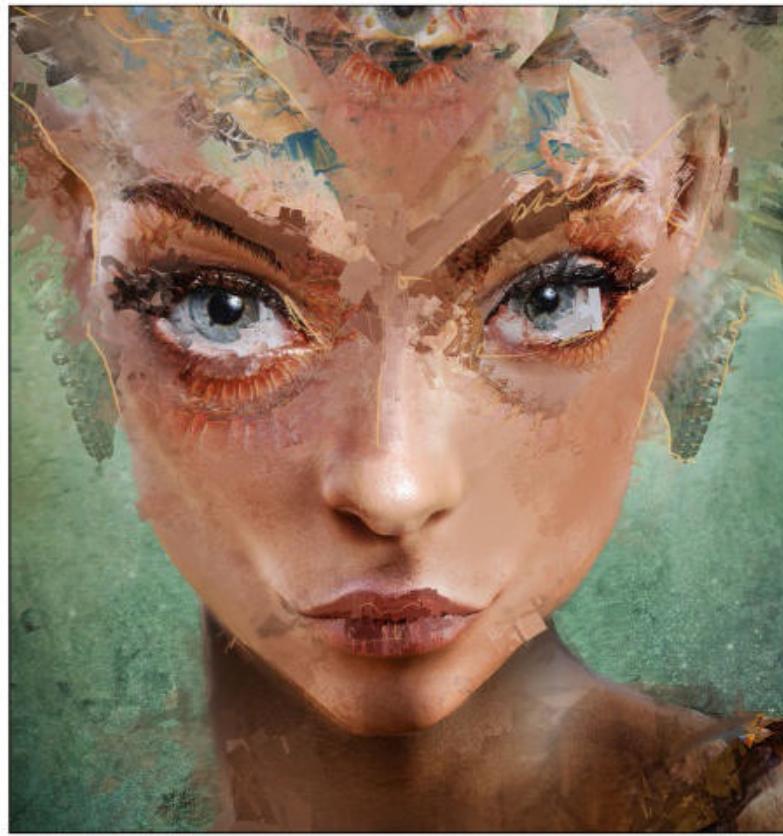
13 Let's try this again

Now I feel the piece is balanced and the overall composition is complete. I decided I will give this version of the image one last render in Procreate. I send the image back to the iPad. I again duplicate the layers so as to keep the integrity of work as it is before painting over it one more time. It is important as a digital artist to know when to stop, as it is very easy with this 'rinse, wash, repeat' method I use to overwork the artwork and lose a lot of the important details.

14 Final steps

With the Procreate painting workflow complete, I like to send the image back to Photoshop one more time on either the iPad or the desktop. For me it is important to inspect the final composition on a large screen as a whole, as I have added some extra line-work elements and added/subtracted elements with layer masks. Now that the artwork is complete and balanced, I like to merge the work, rename to 'Complete' and save a final layer. I then use Filter>Sharpen>Unsharp Mask set at around 150% with a Radius of 1.5 and a Threshold of 2 to finish.

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ImagineFX
Reviews

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

5 PRODUCTS ON TEST

HARDWARE

78 Mac Studio
Fast, ultra-compact and delivering powerful performance, the Mac Studio is ideal for heavy creative workloads.

80 Studio Display
This Apple's monitor is stylish and has some nifty features, but extra spending is required for maximum benefits.
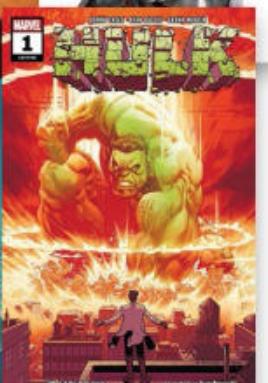
BOOKS AND COMICS

82 The Art of Turning Red
Go behind the scenes of Pixar's Turning Red, with production art, character studies, storyboards and more.

83 Dark Knights Of Steel
Discover the fun, 12-issue miniseries reimagining the DC Universe in a fantasy medieval era.

83 Hulk
A new direction for this beloved Marvel superhero, brimming with action-packed fight sequences and some chaotic twists.

RATINGS EXPLAINED ★★★★★ Magnificent   ★★★★ Great   ★★★ Good   ★★ Poor   ★ Atrocious

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© Apple

An ideal creative workstation if you're after high performance in a small form factor.

Mac Studio

ULTRA-COMPACT Apple's latest Mac for creators is here. It's fast, compact and looks good, but is it worth buying?

Price From £1,999 / $1,999 **Company** Apple **Web** www.apple.com

The Mac Studio is Apple's latest workstation aimed at creative professionals. It's an impressively compact PC that comes with a huge amount of power. Remember the hugely powerful M1 Max that powered the MacBook Pro 14-inch and MacBook Pro 16-inch? Well, the Mac Studio comes with one as well, offering you the kind of performance that'll make light work of even the most intense projects.

Still not enough power? Well, the Mac Studio can also be configured to come with the brand-new M1 Ultra chip. This is essentially two M1 Max chips connected together via a low latency, high bandwidth connector, turning them into one large M1 Ultra chip, which offers double the cores, memory and bandwidth of the already uber-powerful M1 Max. With an M1 Ultra installed, the Mac Studio is one of the most powerful machines Apple has ever built, coming close to rivalling the most expensive Mac Pro configuration, all while keeping the overall size of the machine small enough to fit on a desk. But is Apple's latest machine really a viable purchase for most creative professionals?

POWERFUL PERFORMANCE

The biggest feature of the Mac Studio is the raw power it provides, especially with the M1 Ultra. According to Apple, the Mac Studio with the M1 Ultra offers 3.8 times faster CPU performance compared to the most expensive 27-inch iMac. Additionally, it also offers 90% faster CPU performance than the Mac Pro with a 16-core Intel Xeon processor, and up to 60% faster CPU performance than a Mac Pro with a 28-core processor.

Those claims are certainly impressive, but not only is the M1 Ultra incredibly powerful, it's also incredibly efficient. Again, according to Apple, the M1 Ultra offers 90% higher multi-thread performance compared to a 16-core PC chip whilst using the same amount of energy.

It can also offer faster GPU performance than the highest-end PC GPU, while using 200W less. What this means in practice is that running costs are lower (especially important in these times of rising energy bills), and the M1 Ultra also runs cooler. This means it's nearly silent in use, without the need for fans to spin up to keep it

If you opt to go for the Mac Studio with the M1 Ultra chip, the asking price jumps to a huge £3,999/$3,999.

> **"** If you do heavy creative work and want a small workstation, this is absolutely the right product for you **"**

© Apple

The Mac Studio offers excellent performance, especially for creative workloads.

The workstation weighs 2.7kg with the M1 Max, and 3.6kg with the M1 Ultra.

This sleek, compact workstation barely takes up room on a desk, and is nearly silent in use.

cool, and it's also allowed Apple to make the Mac Studio so compact.

We ran several creative apps on the Mac Studio, and they all performed exceptionally well. In Photoshop, for example, we loaded up high-resolution photos in a few seconds, and applying effects and filters was instantaneous. The 'Neural Engine' cores of the M1 Max and M1 Ultra also allow the Mac Studio to make use of the artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning tools of Photoshop. These tools can help make what were once tedious and time-consuming tasks quick and simple, and Photoshop is a great showcase for what AI and machine learning can bring to creative workflows. So, the fact that the Mac Studio can utilise these (and do them well), is a big selling point.

The Mac Studio also coped well with us editing a complex video project in Final Cut Pro, with certain scenes incorporating multiple 8K sources. All while remaining basically silent in use, and it also rendered our 3D footage in Houdini incredibly quickly.

ATTRACTIVE DESIGN
The Mac Studio's chassis is a single aluminium design, with a square footprint of 7.7 inches and a height of 3.7 inches. It can easily be picked up in a single hand, and the size means it won't take up much room on a desk.

Apple has also adorned the Mac Studio with a very good selection of

© Apple

ports: four Thunderbolt 4 ports, a 10GB Ethernet port, two USB-A ports, an HDMI port and audio jack on the back. On the front, there's two USB-C ports and an SD card slot, making this a great choice for photographers. Having the SD card slot and USB-C ports at the front means they are easy to access on a desk, though the power button being at the back is a bit fiddly. There's also Wi-Fi 6 and Bluetooth 5 for wireless connections.

It's one of the nicest looking workstation PCs around, and its compact size really is remarkable, considering what the Mac Studio is capable of.

There's a lot to love about the Mac Studio, particularly its excellent performance and compact design. If you're after a powerful and petite

There is a very good selection of ports on offer here, plus two USB-C ports and an SD card slot on the front.

workstation for doing your creative work on, you're not going to find a better machine.

But is it a product we'd unanimously recommend to people? The answer is no. This is a niche device aimed at quite a specific audience. If you do heavy creative work and want a small workstation, this is absolutely the right product for you. However, if you don't need the kind of performance on offer here – and many people simply won't – then you'd be better off buying something more affordable, such as the Mac mini. If you're looking for something to work on while you travel, a laptop, such as the 14-inch MacBook Pro, may also be a better bet. •

DETAILS
- Height: 9.5cm/3.7"
- Width: 19.7cm/7.7"
- Depth: 19.7cm/7.7"

Apple M1 Max chip
- 10-core CPU
- 24-core GPU
- 400GB/s memory bandwidth
- 32GB unified memory
- 512GB SSD storage

Apple M1 Ultra chip
- 20-core CPU
- 48-core GPU
- 800GB/s memory bandwidth
- 64GB unified memory
- 1TB SSD storage

Rating
★★★★☆

Frustratingly, if you want a height adjustable stand, you'll have to pay extra.

© Apple

Studio Display

FOR CREATIVES With some nifty features and a stylish design, is this monitor worth the price (and extra costs) despite its flaws?

Price From £1,499 / $1,599   **Company** Apple   **Web** www.apple.com

Apple's Studio Display was launched alongside the new Mac Studio, with both products aimed at creative professionals. While the Mac Studio handles the computing side of things, the Studio Display, as the name suggests, is the screen.

A good monitor is an essential tool for creative professionals, and there's some stiff competition out there. So is the Studio Display worth it?

As the price hints at, this isn't your standard monitor, as Apple has packed it with some interesting features. Unusually for a monitor, the Studio Display comes with a built-in webcam and studio-quality mic array. These days we're increasingly relying on video calls, so having a high-quality webcam and microphone is extremely important, especially for people who are working remotely.

The webcam is boosted by the inclusion of the A13 Bionic chip, offering a feature known as 'Center Stage', which uses artificial intelligence to keep you centred when

using the webcam – even if you move around. The A13 Bionic also works with the built-in speakers of the Mac Studio to offer special audio via Dolby Atmos. While this doesn't compete with a physical Dolby Atmos surround sound setup, it offers an impressive level of sound that you wouldn't expect from built-in monitor speakers.

VISUAL APPEAL

The Studio Display offers a decent level of performance with bright and vivid image quality, and viewing angles were particularly good. If you want a monitor to show off your work to lots of people at once, this is useful, though the glossy finish of the screen meant that distracting reflections were an issue.

But the performance of the Studio Display didn't wow us, which is a

> **❝ It's an interesting product from Apple, but one we feel is a little bit of a misfire ❞**

Some may find the ports a bit lacking.
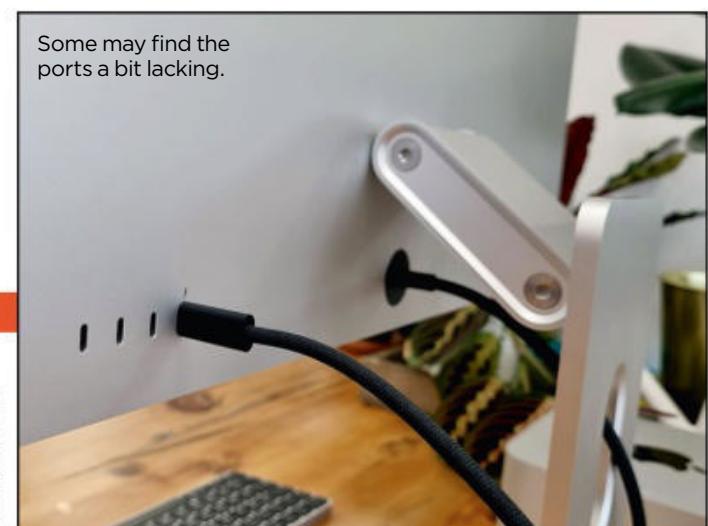
shame considering the steep asking price. The lack of HDR support is baffling, to be honest, with cheaper monitors supporting it. The Studio Display also has a max refresh rate of 60Hz, and while this is pretty standard, there are a growing number of monitors that support higher, such as 120Hz and above.

The webcam has also come under scrutiny. While we found that it was fine in brightly lit situations, many people have noticed that the quality can be quite poor. Apple has stated that this is a software issue and a fix is underway. While it's not a deal breaker, it's still disappointing.

The Studio Display's design is reminiscent of the 24-inch iMac from last year, but without the choice of colours. As you'd expect, it's stylish and minimalist, with straight edges, and it does make us think how nice it

© Apple
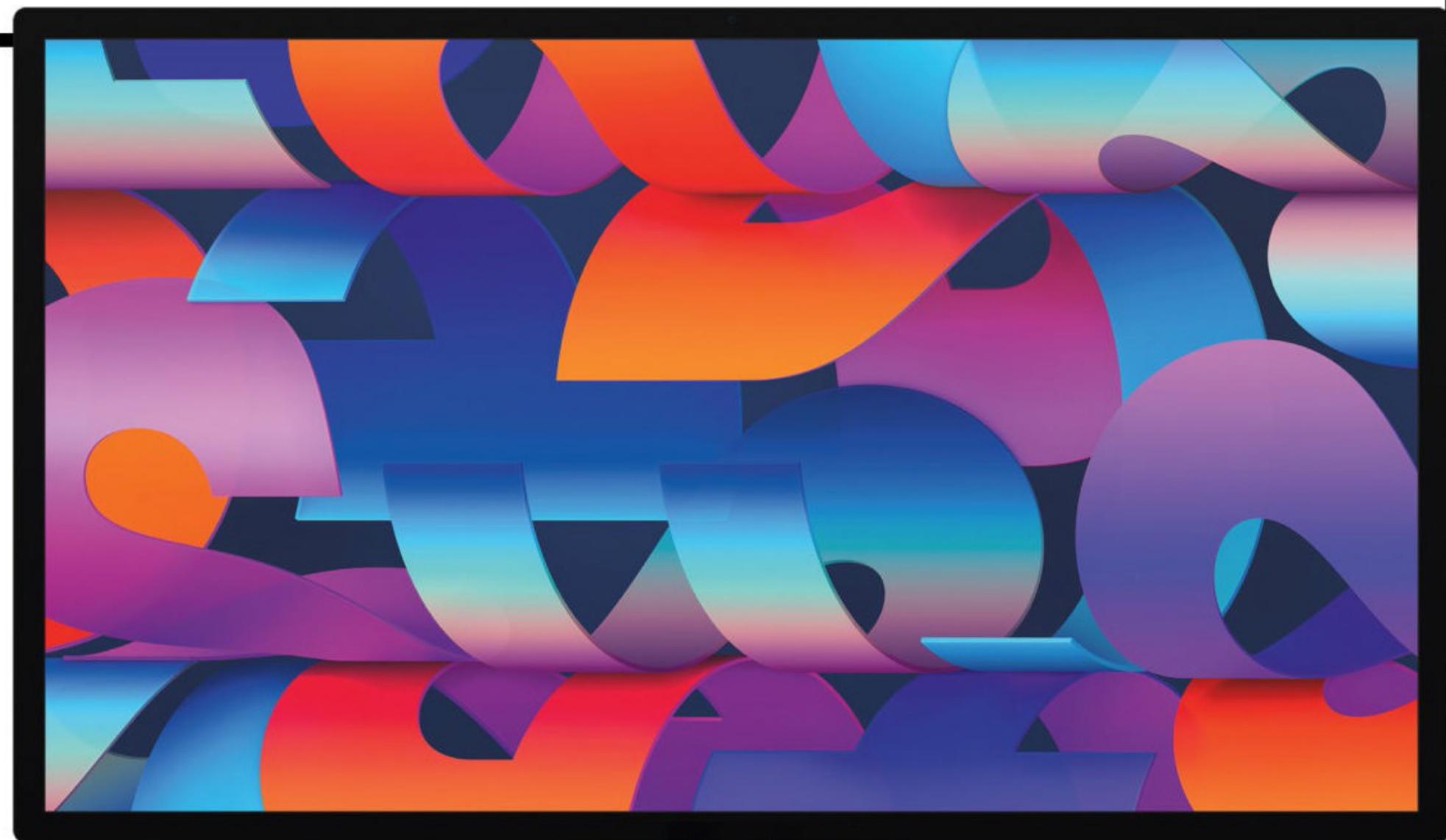
would have been to see a 27-inch iMac in this design.

EXTRA EXPENDITURE

We had the standard screen without nano-texture, and especially when it's off, you can see just how reflective the display is. Along the top of the screen are vents for keeping the Studio Display cool, and on the back are the ports. This is where the Studio Display's minimalist design arguably goes too far, as rather than a range of inputs we'd usually see in a monitor, such as HDMI and DisplayPort, there's just four USB-C ports, and only one of them is actually the input.

If you're planning on plugging in a MacBook or a Mac, this won't be an issue, and a nice feature is that the Studio Display will also charge your device while it's plugged in. The other USB-C ports allow you to plug peripherals in, essentially turning the Studio Display into a USB-C hub which is handy. But if you have a device that uses HDMI for its video output, then you're going to need an adaptor, which isn't included.

One of the biggest criticisms people have with Apple is the fact that there are sometimes hidden costs that usually come included in the price in rival products, and that's true here. While the Studio Display does come with a stand, it only allows you to adjust the display by tilting it. You can choose to swap the stand for a VESA mount, useful if you want to attach it to a wall or already have a stand, but many other monitors come with both options, making Apple's forced choice between the two feel a little tight.

If you want to adjust the height of the monitor – and why wouldn't you? – then you'll need to pay an extra £400, a pretty substantial extra cost for something that, once again, comes with most other monitors for free.

You can also configure the Studio Display to come with a nano-texture glass, which helps eliminate glare and reflections, but it will cost an additional £250.

The Studio Display is an interesting product from Apple, but one we feel is a little bit of a misfire. The lack of HDR and high refresh rate support is a blow, and the limited port selection means this is a monitor that won't be appealing to many people.

Image quality is decent, but for the full effect you're going to want to invest in the nano-texture screen. The added AI features are nice, but inessential, and they only work with modern Apple devices.

If you're a content creator that is fully invested in the Apple ecosystem, then we can imagine the Studio Display being a decent investment – as long as you have the cash. For other people, though, there's better alternatives out there.

Lack of HDR, limited ports and an underwhelming webcam means the asking price will be too high for many.

The Studio Display has a 'boxy' yet stylish look.

© Apple

DETAILS

Features
- 27-inch (diagonal) 5K Retina display
- 5,120 x 2,880 resolution at 218 pixels per inch
- 600 nits brightness
- Support for 1 billion colours
- Wide colour (P3)
- True Tone technology
- 12MP Ultra Wide camera with 122° field of view
- f/2.4 aperture
- High-fidelity six-speaker system with force-cancelling woofers
- One Thunderbolt 3 (USB-C) port, three USB-C ports

Rating
★★★☆☆

Quirky protagonist Meilin "Mei" Lee is proud to be a dedicated fangirl of popular boy group 4*Town.

p.67 Carl Kaphan and Molly Meyer, digital

The Art of Turning Red

TEENAGE TALES Get an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at the incredible art of Pixar's latest animated feature

Foreword Pete Docter **Introduction** Domee Shi **Publisher** Chronicle Books **Price** £30 **Web** www.chroniclebooks.com **Available** Now

Pixar's newest feature film, **Turning Red, tells the story of 13-year-old Meilin Lee whose adolescent world is turned upside down after a family curse causes her to transform into a huge, fuzzy red panda whenever she gets too excited. This artbook offers an exclusive look behind the scenes of the film, featuring gorgeous production art and making-of details.**

The Art of Turning Red is a nicely printed book, with a hardcover and quality glossy paper that helps the art stand out. The book itself covers a lot of ground and, unlike some, doesn't rely heavily on stills from the finished film with some paintovers. Pixar have often shared varying styles in their projects, with credits that hark back to more traditional times, and Turning Red celebrates that too. There are

This book follows other Pixar 'Art of' titles in terms of its quality and content.

p.26 Rona Liu, digital

> ❝ **There are pages upon pages of character studies and concept pieces** ❞

many styles on show, and it is clear to see how everything led to the finished, polished result.

Artbooks should show the background art, the decision-making processes and the way art is used to drive the narrative, and you get all that here. There are pages upon pages of character studies, storyboards and environmental concept pieces. It's a fantastic display of what the talent at Pixar has to offer, with some insights into how they think and work. Don't expect much text; there is a little, but really it's the art that is allowed to shine and it does that very well.

RATING ★★★★★

There are some epic action highlights, like this Batman vs Black Canary scene.

© DC Comics

Dark Knights Of Steel

Issues 1-3
Writer Tom Taylor
Artist Yasmine Putri
Publisher DC Comics

Dark Knights Of Steel is a 12-issue miniseries that reimagines the DC Universe as a medieval-era land of swords and sorcery, throwing in a few twists along the way.

Writer Tom Taylor has an obvious appreciation for high fantasy, even naming certain locations and characters after writers like David Eddings and Raymond E Feist. This embracing of the genre makes the series a brisk if occasionally functional adventure that isn't afraid to adopt some predictable tropes while undercutting others. These opening three issues are clearly building tension for inevitable conflicts, but there's also plenty of entertainment in the way Taylor has transposed DC characters into a fantasy setting.

Yasmin Putri's expressive art maintains a good balance between fantasy-epic scale and kinetic super-powered action. There are points where it feels like the series could do with a few more iconic visuals, but Putri still manages some strong highlights, like the showdown between Batman and the 'banshee' Black Canary.

The series also makes use of its status as an Elseworlds tale to significantly up the stakes, making it clear that injury and death is far more permanent here than in the normal DC Universe, which is certainly refreshing. So far, it's been an enjoyable adventure delivering an entertaining blend of chivalry and superheroics.

RATING ★★★★☆

© Marvel

Ryan Ottley's incredible artwork truly brings the dynamic action to life.

Hulk

A NEW ERA Taking the story of Marvel's much-loved colossal superhero in an intriguing new direction

Issues 1-3 **Writer** Donny Cates **Artist** Ryan Ottley **Publisher** Marvel Comics

Following up an iconic comic-book run can be challenging, especially when the run in question gained as much acclaim as Al Ewing's dark, horrific take on the Hulk. So you can't blame Marvel for deliberately heading in a different direction, but any long-time Hulk fans may be a little thrown by this new adventure for the angriest superhero in comics.

Fresh off their Venom run, writer Donny Cates and artist Ryan Ottley aren't interested in picking up threads from Ewing's saga. Instead, they throw the audience straight into a setup where Bruce Banner has gone full anti-hero after apparently causing a
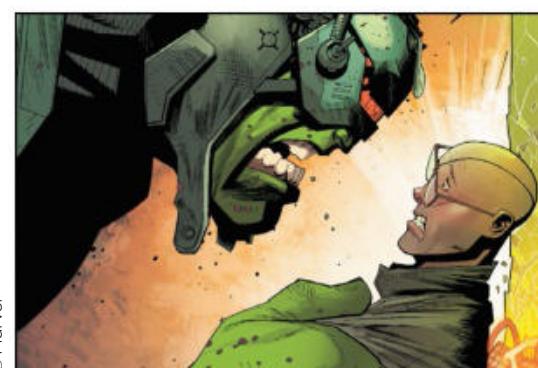
© Marvel
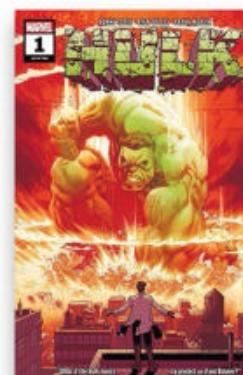
Unique concepts within this new take on the Hulk story sees Bruce Banner able to maintain control over the raging green giant.

mysterious tragedy in El Paso. Bruce has also managed to mentally imprison the Hulk persona, using its endless rage to fuel the 'engine room' of a surreal mind construct that essentially makes Banner the captain of his own personal starship.

Now with the ability to stay both permanently transformed and in complete control, Banner is off on a voyage across dimensions, and Cates doesn't hold back on the bonkers concepts or the extravagant violence. Each of these first three issues are crammed with over-the-top fight sequences rendered in vivid, energetic detail by Ottley, while the breathless plot pulls a number of oddball twists which vary from intriguing to downright silly.

Hulk comics are never really meant to be subtle, and Cates and Ottley are certainly staking their claim on the character. It just remains to be seen whether they can sustain this loud and lurid mix of over-the-top melodrama and sci-fi madness.

RATING ★★★★☆

Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists
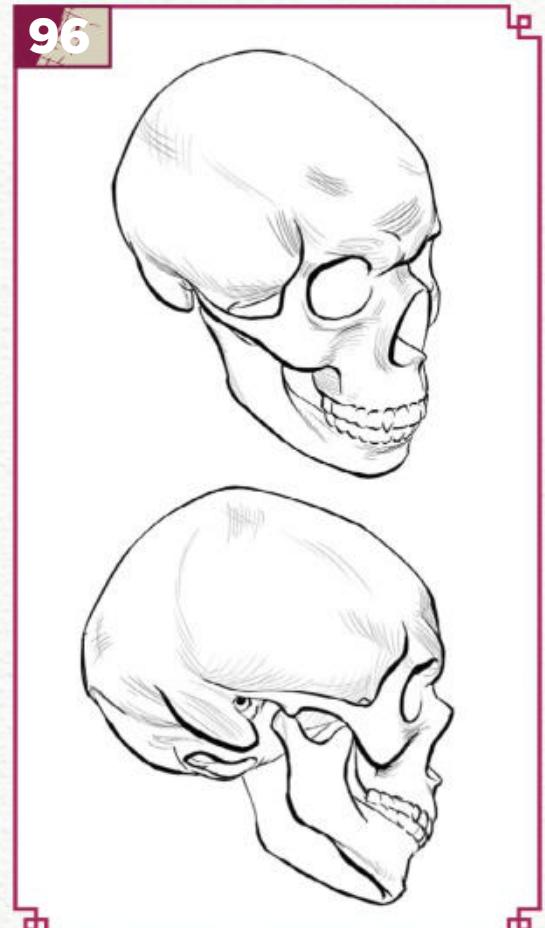
This issue:

FX**Posé**

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

Geto (Boban Savić)

LOCATION: Serbia **MEDIA:** Watercolour, gouache, ink and pen, coloured pencils, oil
WEB: www.geto.rs

Geto has dedicated himself to science fiction and fantasy illustration, out of a love for what painting once represented. He works as a concept artist and production designer in video and movie production.
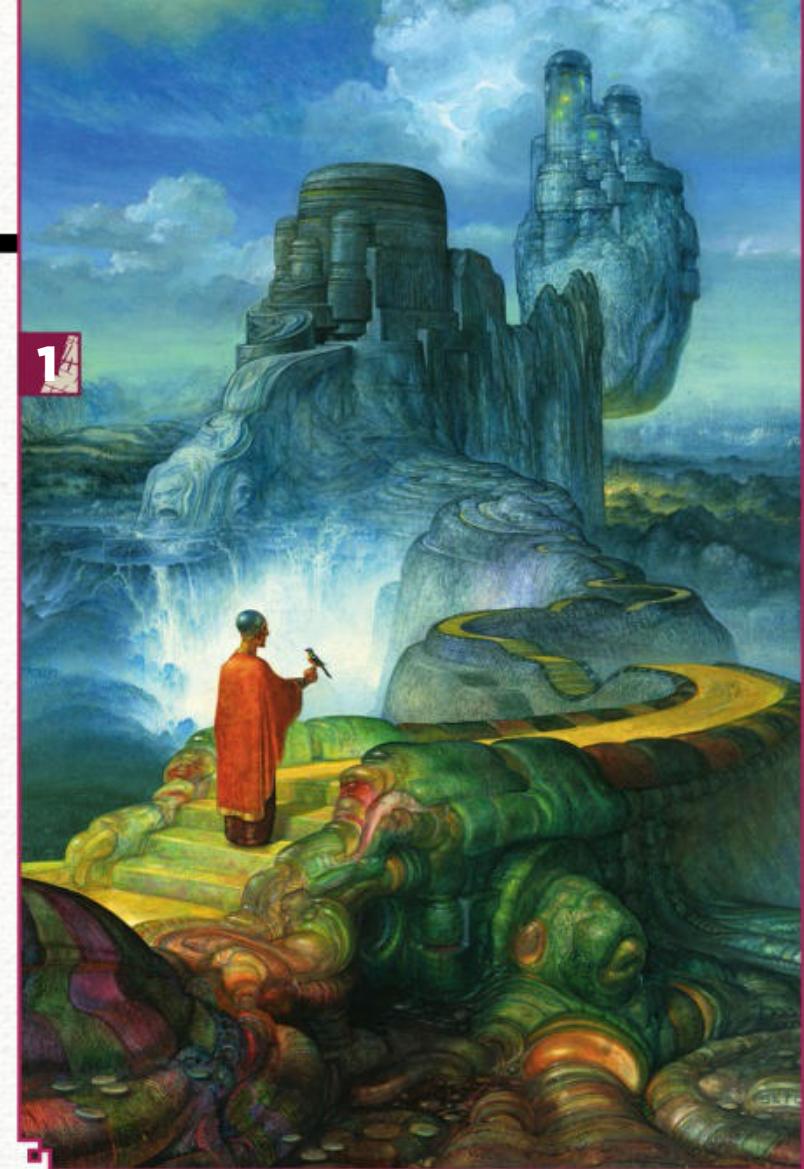
1 **VICTOR KRAFT AND A BIRD**
"An alter ego of an artist in a oneiric landscape with an archetypal vision of a city in the sky."

2 **HOMELESS**
"If you're feeling sad and alone then don't worry, there's always someone who still cares about you…"

3 **FARMER GILES OF HAM**
"The title illustration for J.R.R. Tolkien's Farmer Giles of Ham; the farmer is in the company of a dragon and a faithful dog."

Want to submit your work? Visit http://ifxm.ag/getinifx

Theodora Daniela Capat

LOCATION: Sweden **MEDIA:** Oil, charcoal, pencil, digital media **WEB:** www.capat.art

Theodora Capat is a Romanian fine artist and illustrator living in Sweden, whose work is built around her dreams and the love that she has for mythology and different cultures.

1 WATER NYMPH

"I always have and always will love mystical, fantastical creatures. This drawing started as an experiment but then it turned into my own conceptual fantasy project."

2 SERENITY

"This work was created during a calm time in my life. Serenity represents a state of being calm, peaceful, and untroubled. The crows symbolise transformation and change."

3 TIME, BRINGER OF DEATH

"This piece represents the passage of time. Time is a currency we can't afford to trade. Once it is spent you are not getting it back."

4 INNOCENCE

"This artwork depicts the danger of protecting a child from the outside world. The lions are sheltering the woman and the butterflies depict freedom and fragility."
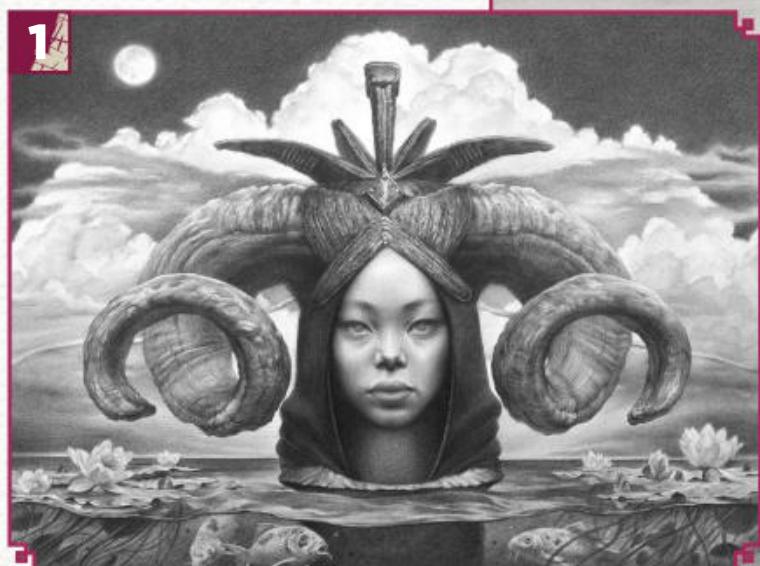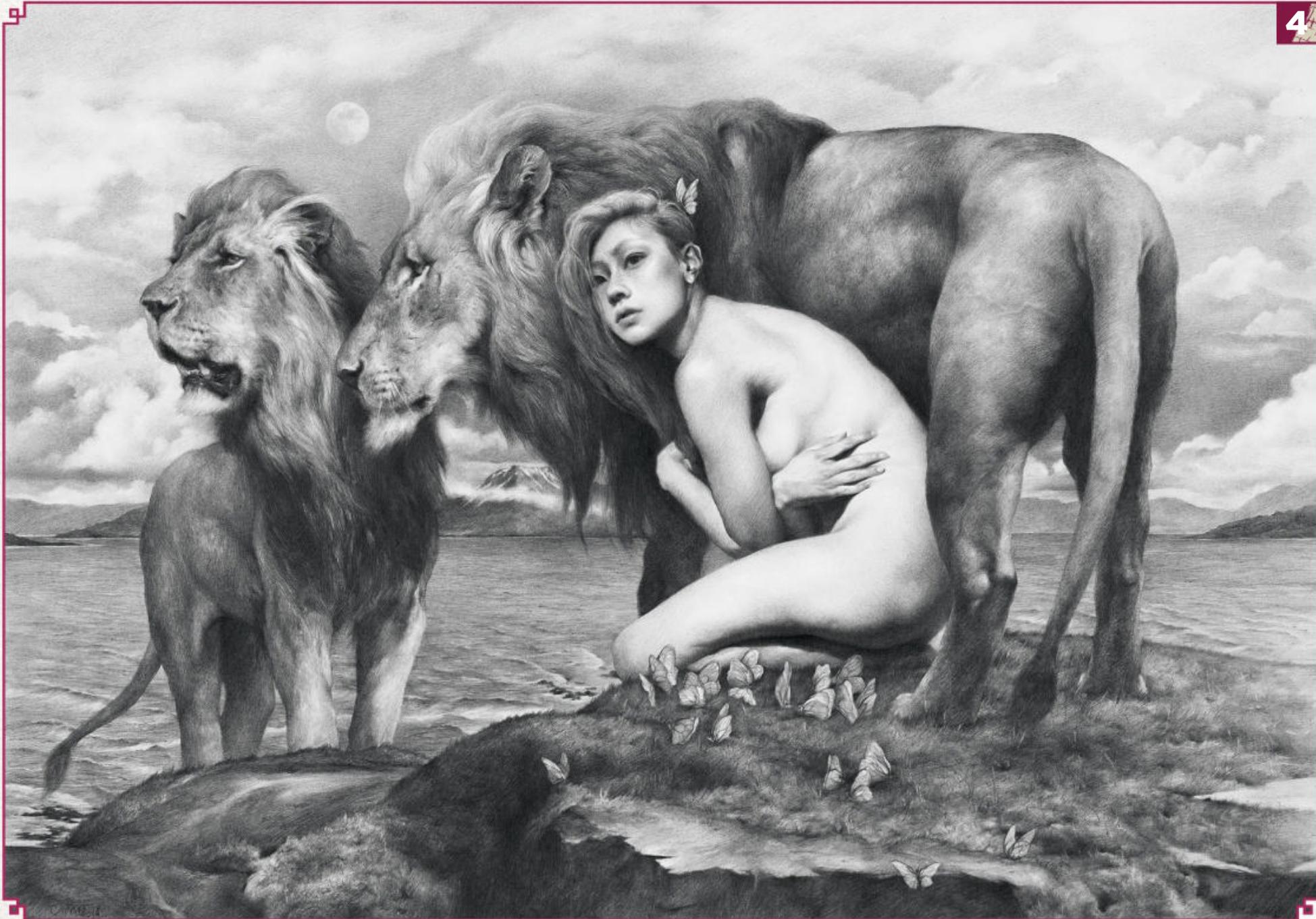
Oils

25 TIPS FOR DYNAMIC FANTASY SCENES

RALPH HORSLEY breaks down his oil painting process into 25 expert tips, explaining how to develop your own fantasy scene with a compelling narrative

This painting, 'The Scribe', is the back cover to my art book, Ralph Horsley: An Art Adventure. The book is a career retrospective, and this image encompasses the processes and techniques for creating fantastical oil paintings that I have developed over the past 30+ years of my career. These include a dynamic point of view, interesting lighting, storytelling and detail. My work

process has evolved through experimentation, trial and a degree of error. I believe that having a clear methodology helps me create stronger work. This article breaks down my approach into a series of tips that lead from the initial idea and thumbnail sketches through to a completed oil painting. I encourage you to think about your own approach, experimentation and decision making.

Art has been an exciting journey that has taken me from being a teenager playing Dungeons and Dragons to painting cover artwork for the game. I hope this helps you on your own path.

Ralph is a traditional artist who has successfully forged his passions for gaming and fantasy art into a career painting dragons and goblins. www.ralphhorsley.co.uk

1 *Preparation is key*
It can be hard to resist the temptation to launch into a painting straight away. Introducing some preparatory stages prior to that can feel like adding extra work (and time) onto a project, but good preparation will not only help you create a better picture, it's also a more efficient way of working. There is a lot of decision making in creating art, and parcelling them up into bite-size chunks does ease digestion of the whole.

2 *Write your own brief*
When working on a commercial assignment I will be given a brief. This will have the physical constraints of the dimensions, trade dress and key elements that need to be included. The latter might include specific characters, setting, and focus of the action. You don't need to be as prescriptive, but it is useful to give yourself a starting point and establish a brief for your project.

3 *Seek inspiration*
Having created my brief, I looked for elements that would work with it. I trawled pictures of medieval rooms, writing slopes, desks, artists' studios – my own in particular. This is a fun exercise where you can let your image search engine take you down all kinds of avenues and back alleys. The best of the bunch can be selected as reference material, but the key is to get your brain working creatively by giving it stimulus. ➤➤

4 Explore ideas

This is when I put pencil to paper and start sketching. I've generated lots of ideas and have piles of reference; this is the stage when I try to make sense of them. These simple sketches are what can be called 'thumbnails', small doodles that are about placing the key elements in compositional relationship to each other. The main figure might be shown by a couple of circles, the desk by a rectangle. This is when you have total freedom to explore compositional ideas. It should be a lot of fun; there is no pressure at this stage to get things 'right', just the exploration of ideas.

5 Methodology always helps

Okay, so thumbnails let you do whatever you want, however wacky, but following this method helps to guide that exploratory madness. I always cover some basic ground with my thumbnails. Firstly, viewpoint. Try out three different points of view, looking up (worm's eye), level, looking down (bird's eye). Each creates a different mood. A figure looming over us can appear more powerful, looking down can make the viewer more of a voyeur. Secondly, depth of field. Foreground, middle ground, background – try each of your elements in those different placements. How does that change the composition of your image?

6 Composition study

I filter out the ideas I like and create a scaled drawing a quarter the size of the final piece. This enables me to refine my decisions about placement, perspective and lighting. While not fully detailed, this study should resolve any ambiguity in the thumbnail. Perspective will be resolved, extra detail will be added, figure poses more clearly defined, maybe additional features brought in. This also tells me if something isn't working.

7 Be prepared to scrap

Realising an element isn't working is a key part of developing one's craft. It is important to be prepared to change. That can mean rubbing something out and starting again. This is so much easier to do with a thumbnail or scaled sketch than a final, so it's important to make that decision early on.

8 Colour takes the credit…

…but value does the work. My preference is to draw my study on toned board. I'll create a graphite pencil sketch, add linework with a brushpen, mid values with sepia ink, and highlights with white acrylic paint. This technique lets you explore a full tonal range, which is especially helpful in deciding upon the lighting. Lighting defines form, exemplified by rim light. Crucially it also provides focus.

9 Where is the focus?

Where is the action happening? Where do you want the eye drawn first? 'The Scribe' has a gentle spotlight on the table, the lighter pages and skulls offset against the desk. White sleeves and feathers triangulate our attention to the face. The lantern itself adds height, and thereby depth. The shadows do their part by providing contrast and recession. When constructing a picture, keep in mind that you are deciding how you want the viewer to read it.

10 The base layer

The surface is the foundation of any traditional painting. I like to paint over my sketch, and that influences the materials I use. This painting was going to be finely detailed, so I chose to work my graphite sketch onto the smooth surface of an art board. The board is robust enough to receive several layers of clear gesso, but priming is required to support oil paints. For my landscapes I often paint on more textured canvas that allows different brush marks. Try experimenting and see how surface affects outcome.

11 Preserve the sketch

My sketch is going to have three layers of clear gesso added to it, then oil paint applied. Those stages can easily cause the loss of some of the precious information our sketch has captured. To offset this I will add ink outlines first. Keeping the integrity of the sketch like this gives more freedom when you apply the paint. I also make sure to have a scan of the sketch, which can be referred to as additional backup. Lots of hard work has been done by now, so let's not lose that. ➡

12 Perspective is the scaffolding

As lighting aids focus, so too does perspective. Perspective is the physical rule that makes the pictorial world believable. In 'The Scribe' I use three-point perspective to funnel our view onto the figure and his work, adding a sense of drama to an otherwise still picture; another tool to emphasise the focus. The sketch is the framework for the paint, and perspective the scaffolding for the sketch.

13 Choose your palette

The complementary colours of red and orange will create a different mood to that of clashing purples and greens. I experiment with different combinations on a scaled-down printout of the sketch. I like to use acrylic paint because of its drying time, and flexibility to work into areas with additional layers. This can be a really exciting process; it's about laying down blocks of colour and not worrying about the details. There are no mistakes, just print out another copy and try something different. One exercise is to try limiting your palette to as few colours as possible.

14 Reference as visual memory

Through creating art one builds up a visual memory, but while we can easily recognise things, reproducing them accurately is more challenging. You can't be expected to rely on that memory alone, hence the value of reference material. I had lots of everyday objects to hand – bottles, jars, books, skulls, etc – that I could reference directly. For other items, like the lantern, I looked at photos to see how they are constructed then created my own design. The real world is the ideal starting point from which to build the fantastical.

15 Remember to tell stories

Your painting should have a narrative drive. This one is relatively simple, a scribe creating a book, but that story is embellished by the objects around him. Where did the cyclops skull come from? Or those masks? Is that egg going to hatch? I like to have an easily read, over-arching story, followed by lots of side quests and reveals when you look closer. Even the page he is working on echoes the contents of the book that this image is the back cover to. Telling stories is fun.

16 Hot and cold

Warm and cool colours give an interesting push and pull. The warm reds and browns in 'The Scribe' contrast with the cool blue-grey of the window, helping the latter act as a framing device.

17 One at a time

Lots of these tips encourage experimentation. That is how you learn preferences and outcomes. It keeps your creative process fresh and moving forward. Stasis is stagnation. Remember to change only one variable at a time, be it surface, medium or brush – that way you can know what is affecting your results.

18 How wet?

I've made lots of decisions up to now. What remains is the application of the paint. Oil paints are accompanied by different mediums. Each of those will change the consistency of the paint and accelerate, or retard, drying time. I use walnut oil, drying linseed oil and Liquin. The linseed oil is the mid-range, it adds flow to the paint and reasonable drying time. Walnut oil gives a lovely viscous quality, but stays wet for days; whereas Liquin dries fast, but is gloopy. I use them in different combinations. Walnut plus Liquin gives a nicer paint texture, and dries faster. Each equation has its own merits.

19 Make your mark

In digital art there can be a drive to personalise brushes to generate different marks. The same holds true traditionally. The three classic brush shapes – round, flat and filbert – combined with size and material, each offers their own distinct mark. I've already made my decisions about colour through my earlier study, now I can concentrate on how I paint.

20 Mix on the palette

I like to mix up my range of colours on the palette before I apply any paint. I lay out my colour selection as decided upon through my colour studies. This makes it much easier to pick from, without mixing as you go. Also by using a palette knife, or old brush, you are keeping your paint brushes in good condition.

21 Side by side

Transitions from one value to another can be accomplished in oils by applying the paints side by side, then use a dry brush to blend them together. This is a very effective blending technique.

22 Losing the edge

Remember we are trying to keep the picture's focus. That means the focal areas, the figure and desktop, are tightly rendered with clear detail. Conversely, as we move to the edge of the image everything becomes a little softer – edges are lost and merge into the shadows. This is a continuation of one's lighting choices. Use the blending technique above to soften and lose those edges.

23 Check values

Before calling a painting done, the main area I will assess is the value range. How do the lights and darks read against one another? A handy technique is to take a photo on your phone, then edit the image to remove all the saturation, turning it into a greyscale image. That helps you read the picture without the distraction of colour. Remember tip #8.

24 Look after your materials

If you look after your tools they will look after you. Take care to thoroughly clean your brushes. I use home decorating brush cleaner and liquid soap to remove the oil. Any detergent works well. Brushes will deteriorate, losing their shape over time, but in turn they can generate interesting and different marks.

25 Reflection

I like to keep a finished painting propped up in my studio whilst working on new pieces. This gives me the opportunity to reflect on it, and inform myself as I move forward. One needs to develop a critical eye to assess what could have been improved, but equally important is to credit yourself with what did work well. Take that knowledge and apply it your next painting.

Pencil

VISUALISE AND CONSTRUCT BONES

CHARLIE PICKARD continues his ten-part series of quick tips on anatomy; this month, we delve deeper into our understanding of bone structure

ast issue, we discussed the fundamental importance of studying bones when striving to understand anatomy in figure drawing. We made the distinction between 2D observational anatomy and 3D constructive anatomy. This month I would like to outline a method for studying this construction. The ultimate goal is to gain a comprehensive understanding of

ANATOMY – PART 4

these forms to be able to draw them from any angle from memory.

We will explore how to go about performing this study for the skull, but this approach can be applied to every bone individually and in the full context of the skeleton.

As we can see below, the three-dimensional drawing is merely the combination of multiple cross-sections, projected in perspective and joined by an outline. While this

basic idea is fairly straightforward, the complexity of the full form can quickly become overwhelming. Simplifying the problem will be an immense help for us.

Charlie Pickard is a classically trained fine artist and illustrator. Recently awarded the Philip de László Award for excellence, Charlie continues to work, exhibit and teach out of his studio in London. www.charliepickardart.com

1 Start with the orthographic views

While these cross-sections are essentially infinite in every direction around the form, we can take our study quite far by starting simply with just the cross-sections of the X, Y and Z axis. If we take these views out of perspective and view them alone they are called the 'orthographic' views of an object. There are six of these for every form.

Understanding and memorising these views first, without the complexities of perspective, should be our first port of call when studying any form. If you are ever confused, refer back to them.
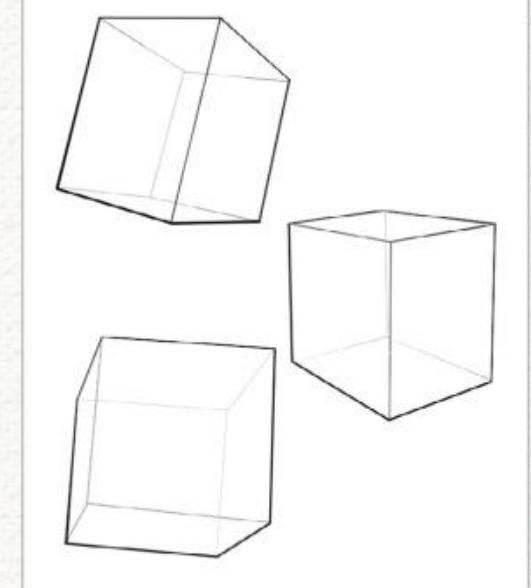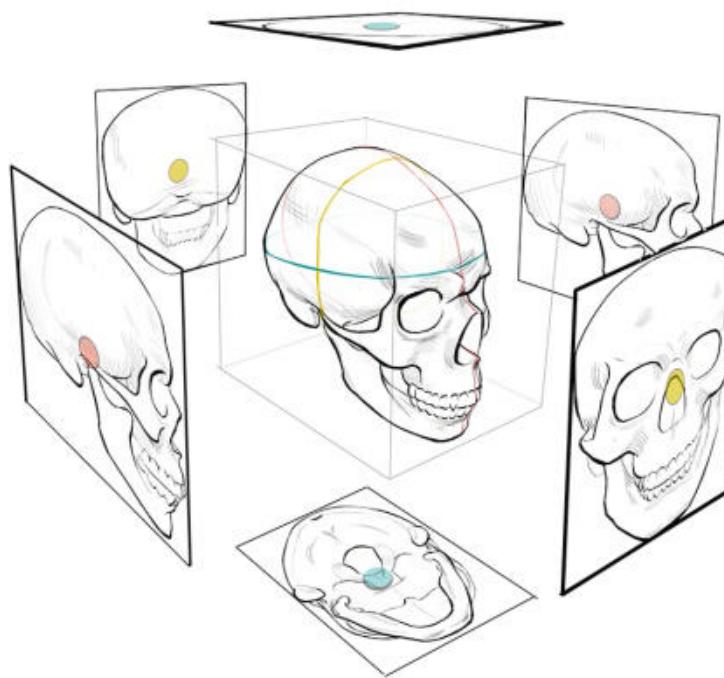
2 Visualise the box

The first lesson we can learn from these views is in regards to the simple proportion of our bone. Every form can be fit within a box of a specific proportion, and this is our first and most important concern whenever we draw anything.

The best beginning exercise here is to note the proportions of each face of the larger box of the form, and get used to visualising and drawing this box from every angle possible. The proportion for the skull box is 1 x 1 x 0.75. Try it out yourself!


1 unit

Side view (left and right symmetrical) 1:1	Frontal view 1:0.75	Back view 1:0.75	Bottom view 1:0.75	Top view 1:0.75

Side view   Frontal view   Back view   Bottom view   Top view
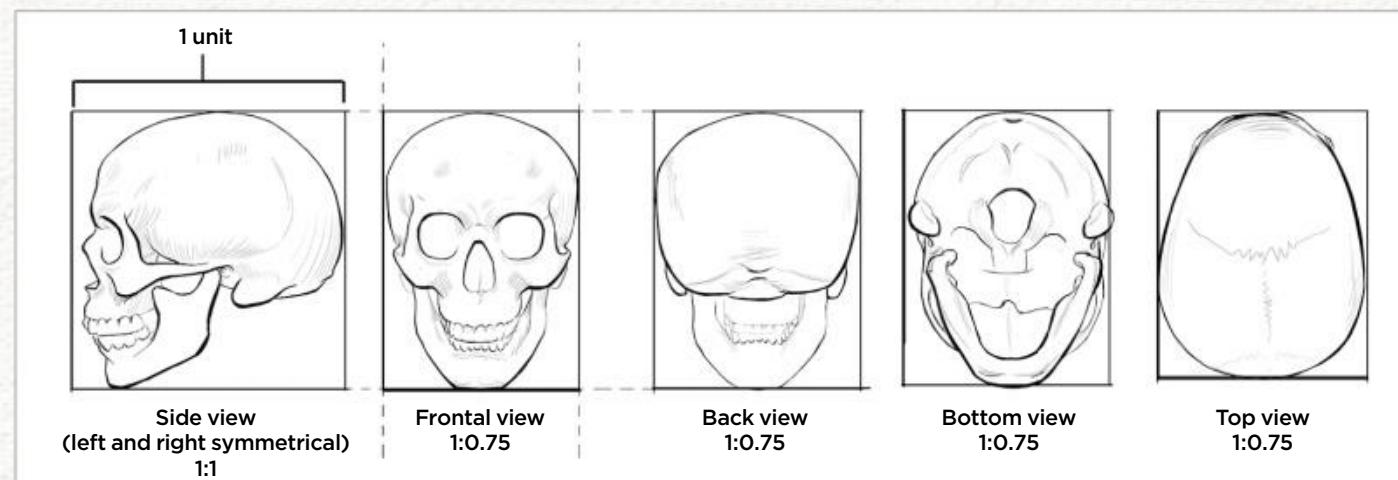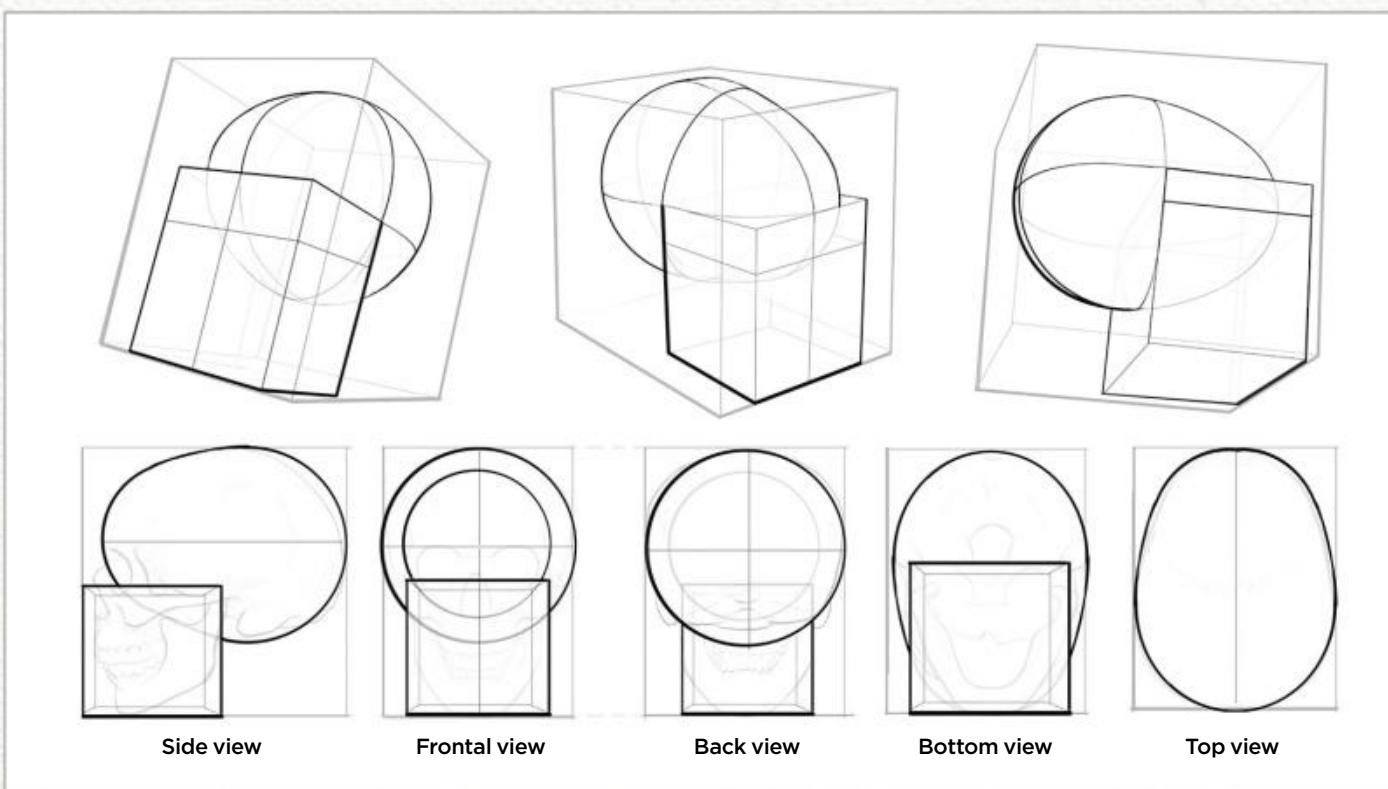
3 *Fundamental forms*

Once we have mastered the box and can produce the same proportion reliably, the next best step is to apply the fundamental forms; these are the cube, sphere, cylinder and cone.

Try tracing these simple shapes over the orthographic view and see if you can find a consistent collection of shapes that get you close to the shape of the form. For the skull this is relatively easy; as you can see above, the skull can be created with a simple egg (two spheres combined) and box combination.

The advantage of starting with these forms is that they are easy to reproduce quickly and simply. Using a collection of these simple forms gets us close to the basic shape that we need, in any view. Once we have this figured out, try placing these simple forms into the boxes. This will be the foundation that we hang the more complex details of the form on.

Side view   Frontal view   Back view   Bottom view   Top view
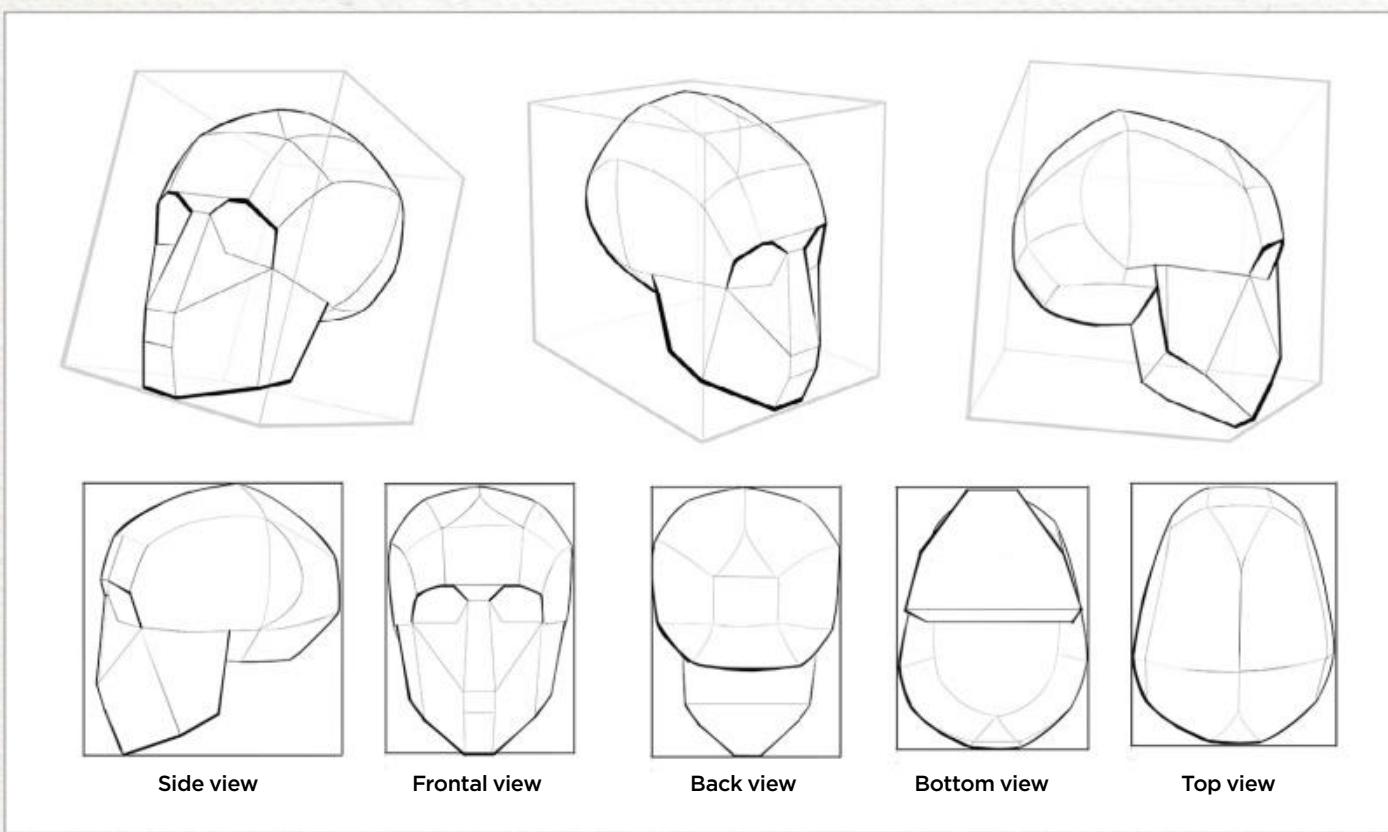
4 *Simple planes*

Once we get comfortable with the simple forms and want to add some more specific forms to our drawing, it is helpful to begin to think of the concept of planes.

These are flattened, faceted surfaces and every form can be interpreted through them. There are many resources available on what exactly these planes are for the human form, and you can see my idea of the simple planes of the skull above.

If you have access to a skeleton model, the best way to study these planes is to simply feel it in your hands. Note where the form changes abruptly, this will be where these plane changes occur. Always start with the simplest planes you can identify first and build complexity gradually.

Just like before, try to figure out these planes on orthographic views first, then hang them on the basic forms. Studying the form in this simple to complex way makes planes easier to memorise.
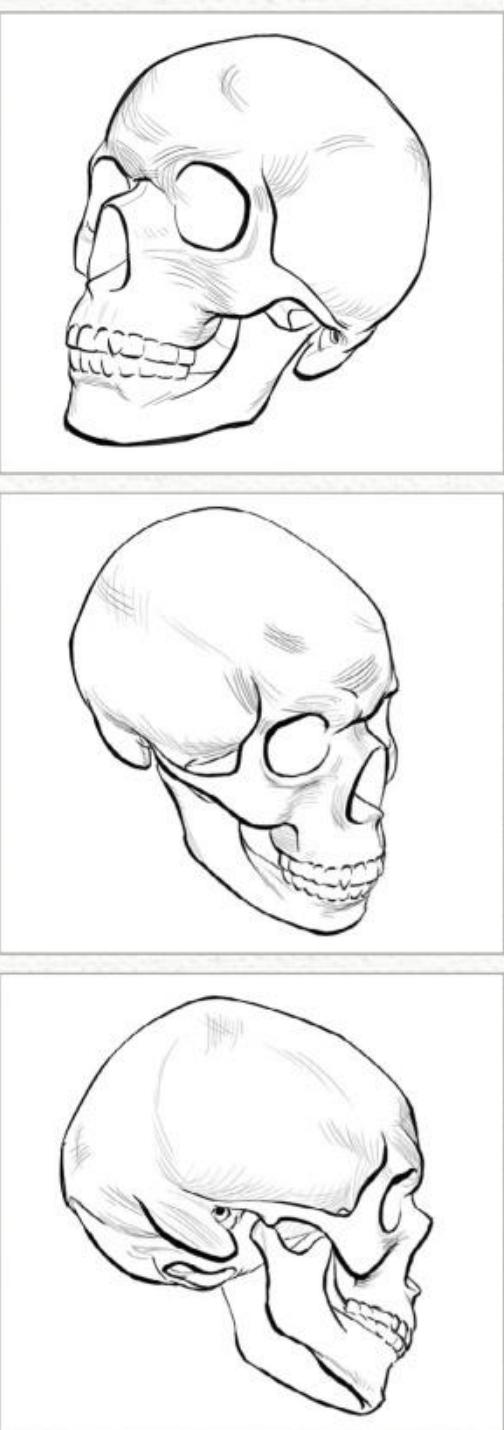
5 *Smaller and smaller planes*

One thing you may notice is that with only these simple (major) planes represented, our drawings are left with a harsh, robotic appearance. You may be wondering how to bridge the gap from this to the more organic look of a finished skull (seen above). Well, the organic form is actually made up of even smaller, more complex (minor) planes, understood in exactly the same way.

Building a full and comprehensive understanding of all of these minor planes will take a considerable amount of time and practice. The best way to study them is to have a physical reference that you can rotate and observe as you create drawings – studying it as a reference when you get stuck.

Little by little, this way of drawing will build your memory of the bones and grant you full mastery over it. Practise until you can visualise each and every angle. ✦

First Impressions

✳ *Fred Gambino* ✳

Concept artist Fred Gambino reveals his artistic inspirations

Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?
I grew up in Derbyshire. In my twenties I moved north, to the edge of the Peak District National Park where I developed a love for the outdoors, walking and cycling, which continues to this day. I get a lot of inspiration from the open spaces and big skies.

What, outside of art, has most influenced your artwork through the years?
Reading and watching movies. I'm most moved by storytelling which, fundamentally, I think is what drives all art.

Is there a painting that you saw in your formative years that changed everything? What was it?
I did a graphic design course at college, even though I always wanted to be an illustrator. In my third year I went to see an exhibition of Chris Foss paintings in Leicester and I think that crystallised my ambition. At that time the games industry didn't exist and the term concept artist had yet to be coined. The publishing industry was the biggest patron of science fiction and fantasy art and my artistic heroes were people like

ORNITHOPTERS
An ornithopter design which coincidently has a similar insect design aesthetic to the movie Dune. Painted before the film was released.

John Harris, Jim Burns and Chris Moore, so naturally that's the direction I went.

Tell us about your first paid commission, and does it stand as a representation of your talent?
After I left college I took a part-time job delivering groceries and painted the rest of the time. One of my lecturers knew the art director at Pan Books, so I took my portfolio

> ❝ **I'm moved by storytelling which, fundamentally, I think is what drives all art** ❞

ASIMOV FOUNDATION SAGA – TRANTOR
Two paintings divided into six covers for the Isaac Asimov Foundation saga.

down to London. It took a few trips, but he was very encouraging and finally gave me my first book cover. It was a war story, featuring a sword-wielding soldier coming out of the jungle. I haven't laid eyes on it in decades, but I would be very surprised if I thought it was any good! I am mainly self-taught and at the time I hadn't managed to teach myself very much, but I did get some commissions and an

agent, so was able to take the first steps down the road of my illustration career.

What's the last piece you finished, and how do the two differ?
As a cover artist I worked in acrylics, using an airbrush. A painstaking, laborious way of working that I never want to repeat. With the onset of digital I sold all my painting equipment. It's been a long time since I painted a commission traditionally, but recently I have gone back to painting for my own amusement – working in oils, where I am striving for a looser, more painterly style. The subject is the same but the look is totally different. The most recent is a Dune-inspired ornithopter, painted before I saw the movie. It turns out, purely coincidentally, that my design and the movies share a similar aesthetic.

What advice would you give to your younger self to aid you on the way?
Keep working and when an opportunity presents itself, grab it with both hands and run as far as you can with it – which is pretty much what I did.

What character or scene that you've painted do you most identify with?
I don't think there is a single one I could point to. The ones I enjoy the most are big environments, even if they happen to be on alien planets or set amongst star-strewn nebulae.

What's your next step in art or life?
I'm still a jobbing concept artist and illustrator, and I have also been working on my own IP, the Dark Shepherd story, writing it as a novel, a trilogy actually. There have been recent developments and I'm keeping my fingers crossed that I will be able to share some news about it before too long.

Fred Gambino works as a concept artist and illustrator for film, TV and games. You can check out his incredible sci-fi illustrations at www.fredgambino.co.uk