NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

INTERVIEW

JOE MAD

On creating monster art
for the game Warframe

WORKSHOPS

**MIX THEMES TO MAKE
UNIQUE CREATURES**

ADD A STRONG STORY
TO YOUR PORTRAITS

**PAINT FANTASY ART
ON AN EPIC SCALE**

IMPROVE YOUR
CHARACTER
DESIGN SKILLS

Create stylised figure concepts with
expert tips from **Mauro Belfiore**

FUTURE

ISSUE 220

MATÍAS BERGARA DELVES INTO HIS FASCINATING COMIC STEP BY BLOODY STEP!

Welcome to…

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

Welcome to issue 220 of ImagineFX. This month we have quite the collection of articles for you, from features to workshops.

A good dose of inspiration is always welcome and we have you covered, with an insightful interview with Matías Bergara, the artist behind incredible comics such as Step by Bloody Step and Coda, where he discusses creating fantasy worlds.

If you're more interested in developing your skills then head to the workshop section where Mauro Belfiore shares tips for designing engaging characters, and Aleksa Drageljevic shows you how to paint unique creatures.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to Kim Jung Gi, who passed recently. He was a powerhouse of talent and a lovely human being. The outpourings of goodwill across every channel shows how he impacted the art community as the inspiration he truly was.

Our thoughts go out to his family and friends.

Rob

Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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

32

Artist in Residence
Nuri Durr gives a tour of his studio, filled with art prints, collectibles and beautifully organised gear.

48

Pius Bak's sketchbook
Take a look through the unique characters and work-in-progress cover art by comic creator Pius Bak.

88

Traditional workshop
Patrick J. Jones has produced a wonderful tutorial for oil artists on painting large-scale fantasy scenes.

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Workshops

Traditional Artist

ImagineFX Resources

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

WORKSHOP FILES

Video workshop: Paint a fantasy scene on an epic scale
Watch Patrick J. Jones' video demonstration, accompanying his step-by-step tutorial on p.88.

| FLAT TEXTURED | MAIL OIL | BLENDER SOFT | RHADS-BRUSH_1A |

Download 4 Photoshop brushes for use in your own projects
Aleksa Drageljevic (p.64) provides the custom brushes he uses for creature design.

BRUSH ROUND-UP

PHOTOSHOP

PROCREATE

CLIP STUDIO PAINT

PAINT TOOL SAI

ARTRAGE

SKETCHBOOK PRO
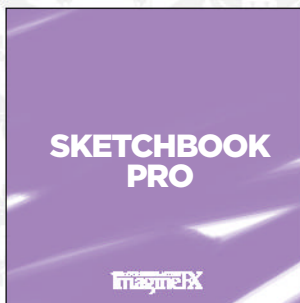
Gain access to a collection of brushes to boost your art
Download our huge collection of brushes from the above software, and get creating!

Next month in…

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

LORD OF THE RINGS

Discover the stunning fantasy art of master illustrator **John Howe**

Also in the issue…

The art of the TV show
Delve into the world of concept art for television.

Fundamental anatomy
Learn to master the basics of drawing the human form.

Artist in residence
Tour the studio of Disney artist Florian Satzinger.

The sketchbook of Alex Vede
Explore the whimsical art of the Spanish illustrator.

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Cover art for issue 175 by Pernille Ørum

FXPosé
THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Calder Moore

LOCATION: Canada **MEDIA:** Cinema 4D, Arnold Renderer, Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/refriedspinach

Calder is a 3D/2D artist who has worked in the digital art industry for ten years. His clients include Wizards of the Coast, Google and the Royal Canadian Mint. He also enjoys creating tutorials for the community.
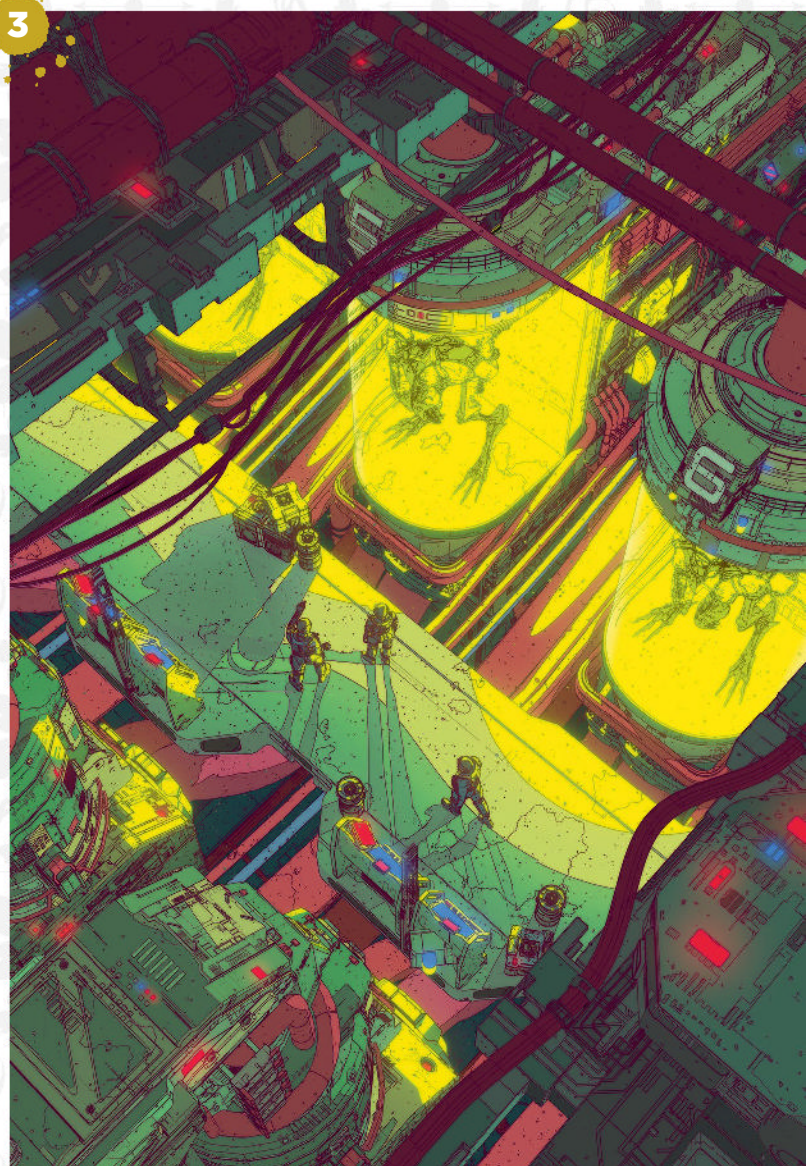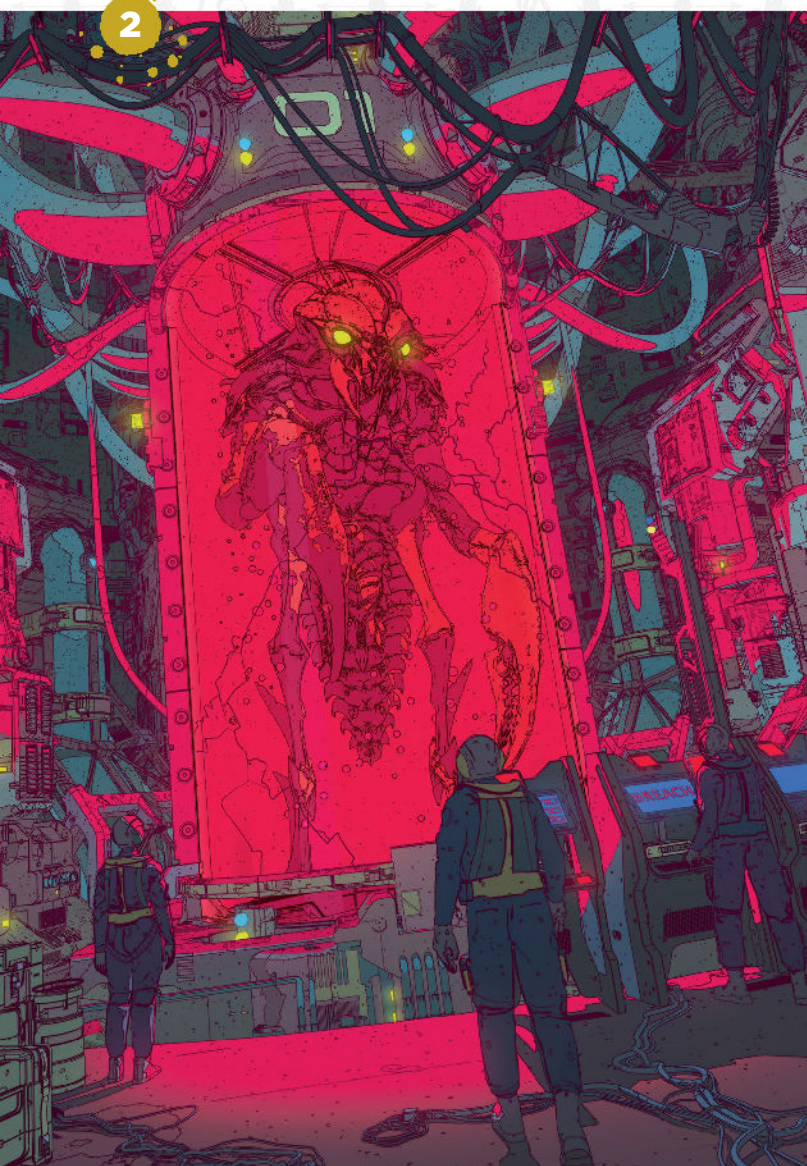
1 SHIPPING DECK
"I have always enjoyed making scenes depicting the daily life of a hard worker, just a regular guy delivering containers with his hovering shipping deck."

2 CONTAINMENT BREACH
"A continuation from the Experiments piece. I want to create a story that stretches across multiple pieces, and hopefully more will follow!"
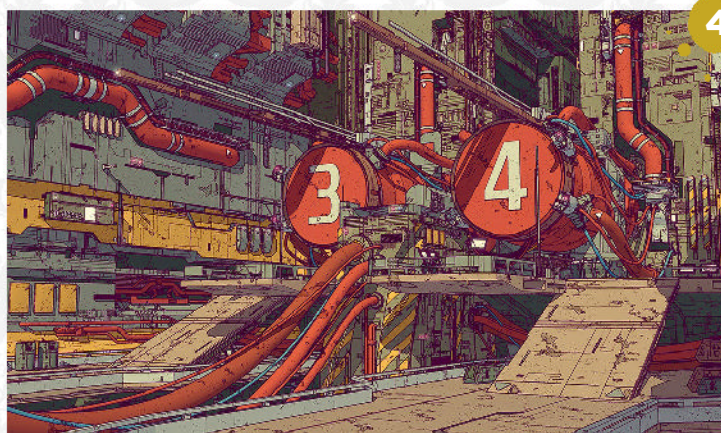
3 THE EXPERIMENTS
"Going with a darker, creepier vibe, this scene ended up being a really tough scene to balance with the glowing lights and vibrant colours."

4 POWER STATION
"This is the first scene I created using the Arnold toon shaders. Diving into those shaders unlocked a huge drive for making stylised art."

FXPosé

Pamela Vhane Gabiola (aka Haranikala)

LOCATION: Philippines **MEDIA:** Clip Studio Paint, Photoshop **WEB:** https://haranikala.com

Haranikala is a Filipino artist who loves creating illustrations depicting her emotions, favourite films, and the weird ideas that pop into her imagination. Hara loves focusing on crispy line art, details and striking colours.

1 CASTLE IN THE SKY
"I was inspired by the scenes, places, and characters in the Ghibli film so I created my version of its movie poster. I love how it went with the colours orange and teal."

2 TRAINS OF GHIBLI
"I was riding the train when I thought of this concept, where I combined all the train scenes from Studio Ghibli films on one canvas."

3 SATELLITE
"This is actually from a song that I really like (Satellite by H.S.) and I decided to make art out of it."

4 CRYING
"This is more of a personal piece where I just randomly created a self-portrait while playing with lines and various shades of green."

FXPosé
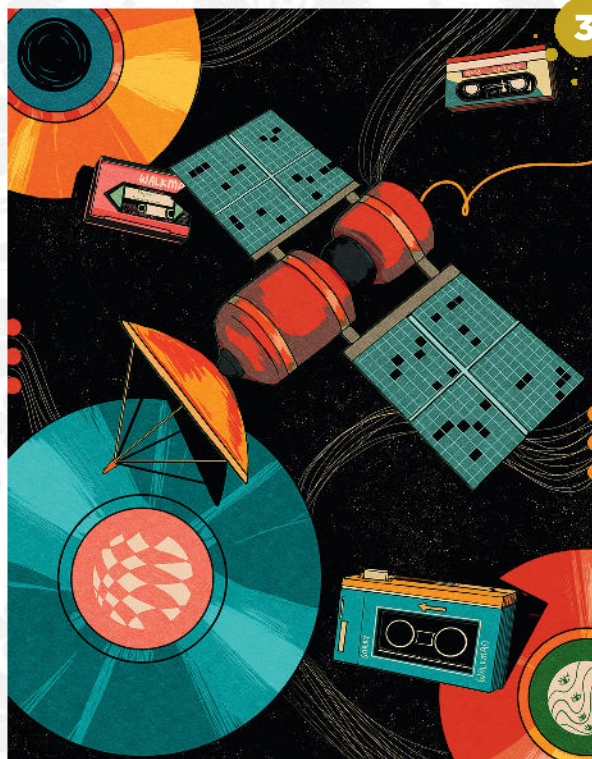
Daria Klushina (aka BlackHalo Art)

LOCATION: Latvia **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Procreate **WEB:** www.artstation.com/dgblackhalo

Daria is a digital artist with a passion for dark fantasy and sci-fi. She has been into art since an early age and started to paint digitally in 2015. Her main influences are Gothic literature, comics, movies, games and music.

1 SOUL EATER
"This is a fantasy portrait of the musician and singer Glenn Danzig as a Dark Vampire Lord."

2 PHANTOM QUEEN
"Inspired by the Irish mythology figure, The Mórrígan: Goddess of Death and Guardian of the Dead."

3 THE HELSINKI VAMPIRES
"I often get my inspiration from rock music, and this time I wanted to portray the Finnish Gothic rock band 'The 69 Eyes' as tough modern vampires."

4 THUNDERSTORM
"This is a personal project, and is heavily inspired by the beautiful art of Magic: The Gathering."

FXPosé

![Fernanda Maya portrait]
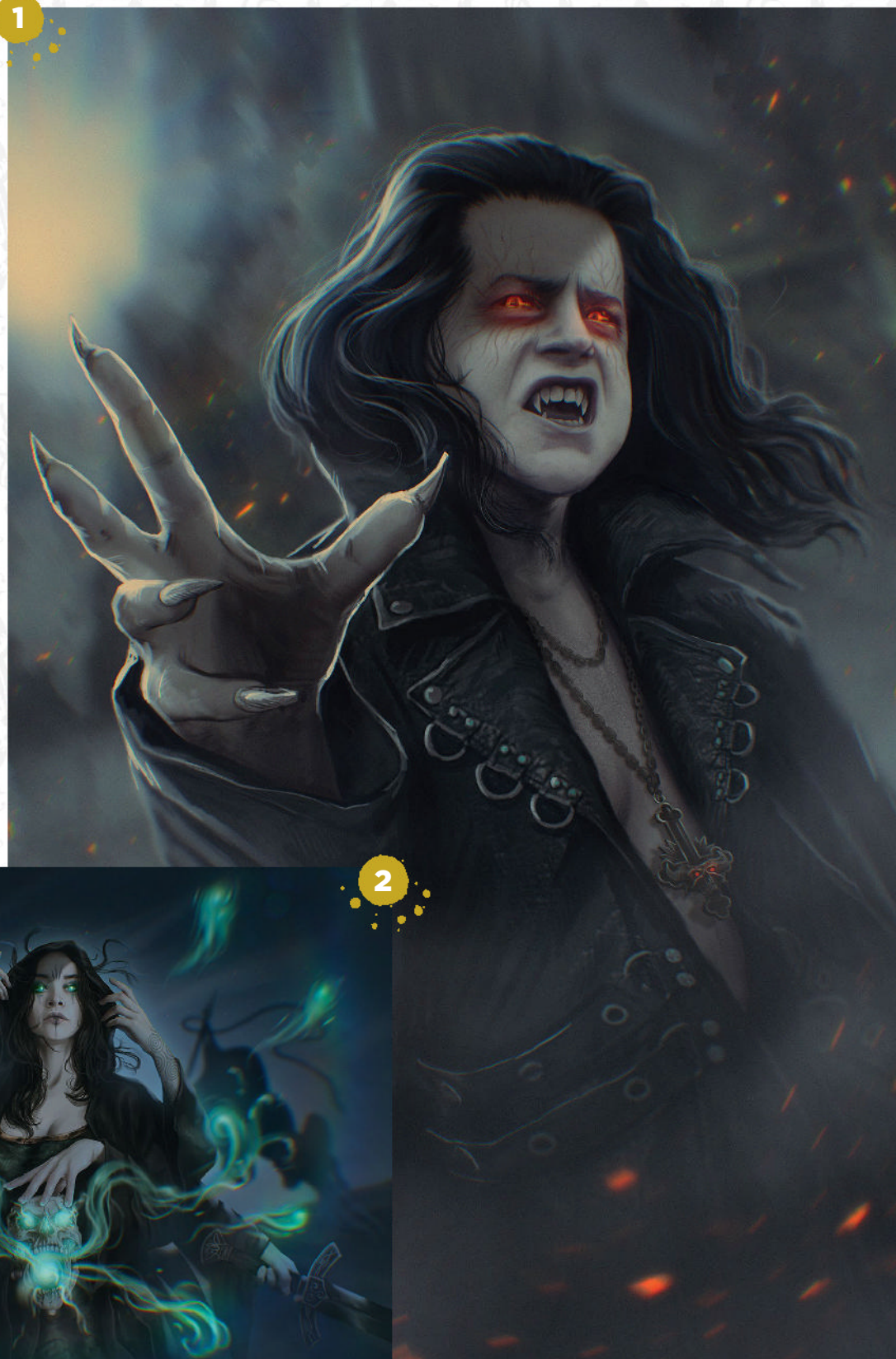
Fernanda Maya

LOCATION: Colombia **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** wassermoth.com

Fernanda is a visual designer who focuses on digital illustration. Her work is inspired by mythology, folklore and esoteric knowledge, making her pieces heavy in symbolism and mysticism.

1 DOLORES
"This piece captures the ritualistic nature behind the process of grieving something or someone, and the need to keep composure while the world is upside down."

2 OZYMANDIAS
"The need of many to leave something behind as a legacy often turns into a matter of the ego and a conflict to the soul."

3 MIRAGE
"Reality is the illusion of control. This piece depicts multiple spiritual influences represented in symbolic abstractions, turning them into a soul's journey."

4 TEMPERANCE
"An illustration that was inspired by the 'Temperance' tarot card."

FXPosé

Jiuwell Sunzhou

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Gravity Sketch, Blender, Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/jiuwellmonkey

Jiuwell is a concept designer specialising in crafting characters, vehicles and visual development. She enjoys exploring different media to evolve her visual storytelling and draws inspiration from fashion and architecture.
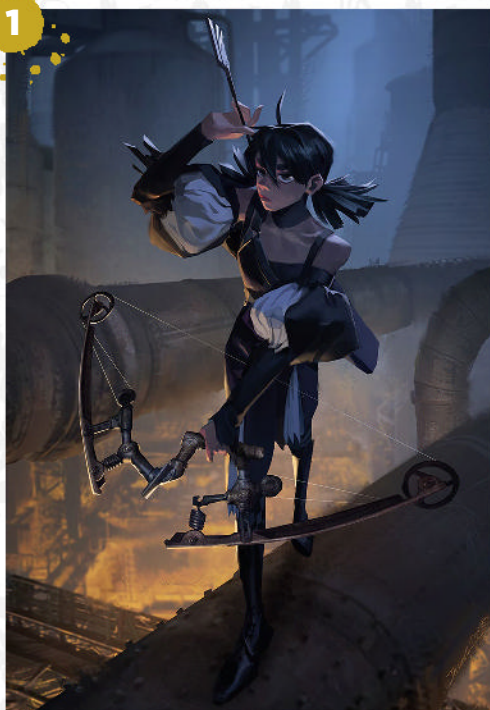
1 MOON AND ARROW
"The main character Alice from my personal project Alice in Wasteland. The scene shows her during a sneak attack against the queen of Wasteland."

2 YOKAI PARADE
"This is an illustration inspired by the Japanese folklore of Hyakki Yagyō, which translates to a night parade of one hundred demons."

3 MONSTER SCRAMBLER
"Hatter, a secondary character in Alice in Wasteland. The scene shows him completing a mission on his motorcycle in an abandoned factory."

4 KITE MAKER
"This is a mini character design of a larger kite project. It was inspiring to research about the process of kite making and the craftsmanship behind it."

Elric: King of Imrryr

YEAR CREATED: 2022
MEDIA: Photoshop, Marvelous Designer, Blender, DAZ Studio, ZBrush

+ + + + + + + + + + + + + + + +

"The idea for this project was to create a new visual identity for an iconic character that is Elric of Melniboné. I wanted to go away from the classical fantasy style, and went for a more cinematographic approach. I took inspiration from historical costumes and natural elements in order to create a new and unique design. Going for a more realistic look, I worked with a heavy 3D base in order to achieve a design that would work on a real actor. I wanted to find a nice balance between aesthetic and purpose."
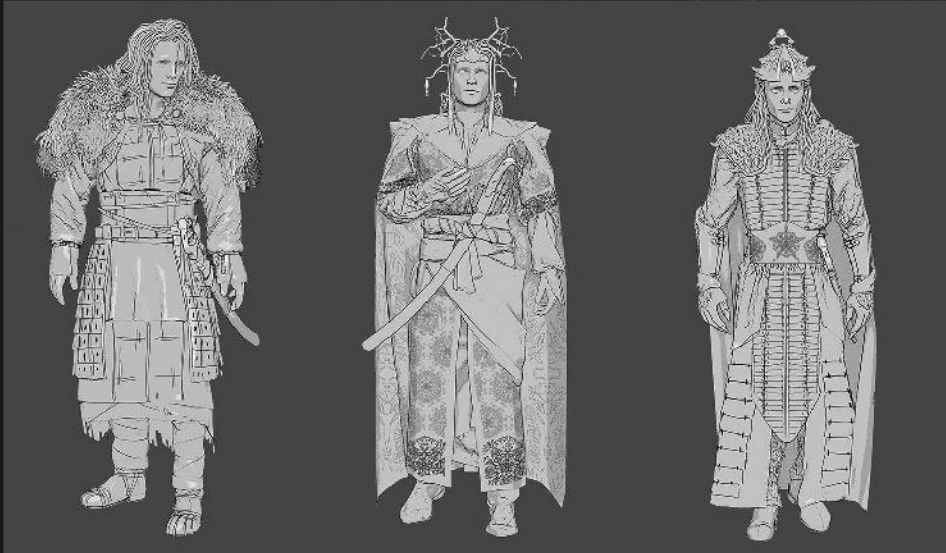
Artist PROFILE

Laurine Tournois
LOCATION: France

Since Laurine was young she has always wanted to be at the head of big creative projects. As for why this industry in particular... well, it never occurred to her to go anywhere else, so it has been the plan since she was five years old!
www.therookies.co/entries/16871

"I love monsters: vampires, werewolves all that stuff. So, I was all about it, right from the get-go," reveals Joe.
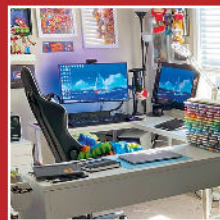
"I do kind of picture everything – poses, attacks – as still frames in a comic. What would this character look like on the cover? How fast does she move?" Joe says of his design process.

Monster imagination

Into battle **James Clarke** speaks with Joe Madureira about his work on the new werewolf-inspired Warframe design in collaboration with Digital Extremes

No matter what media format – be it movies, comics or games – the image of the werewolf endures through boundless reinvention. It's the werewolf that serves as a point of inspiration for a new suit of armour within the Warframe gaming world.

In the summer of 2022, at TennoCon, the studio Digital Extremes unveiled a new collaboration with Airship Syndicate – led by creative director Joe Madureira and president Ryan Stefanelli, and known for their collective work on the critically acclaimed Darksiders franchise and Ruined King: A League of Legends Story. The project was introduced to Warframe players during TennoLive and gave viewers a brief insight into the world they are creating.

ImagineFX recently had a conversation with Joe Madureira about the collaboration with Digital Extremes in designing a new playable warframe – a suit of weaponised, biomechanical armour – with a werewolf-inspired design.

FAN-REQUESTED

With a long-standing background in comic books, working on titles such as Deadpool, Battle Chasers and Wolverine, **Joe Madureira** has also taken his talent into the world of gaming. He begins our conversation by explaining, "We announced recently that we are partnered with Digital ➡➡

> ❝ Any excuse to have monsters in a game is what I love to work on… I'll draw monsters over anything else ❞

Images Eric Vedder (Digital Extremes) and Joe Mad (Airship Syndicate)

"It's rare that you bang something out immediately in one sitting. It just doesn't happen," says Joe.

Warframe is a free-to-play, third-person shooter and has over 50 million players.

➤ Extremes on our new project at Airship, and we thought: 'You know, a cool way to announce our partnership ahead of that, because we have so many fans of the studio and of Warframe, would be if I contributed a design to one of the new frames. And that excited me right off the bat, especially since they said, 'Well, there's this werewolf frame that's everyone's been asking for over the years.' In games, a lot of people know me for Darksiders. For this one, I thought: 'Let me try to channel some Darksiders energy. So that definitely was something I tried."

Joe is keen to note how collaborative the work with Digital

66 When you're designing anything for games, the gameplay really comes first 99

Extremes is, remarking on the ongoing creative conversation with the studio: "I would throw out some sketches and then Eric Vedder (lead concept artist) at Digital Extremes would throw back some stuff. We then mapped it to possible gameplay that it might feature. That changed the design about a dozen times."

He continues: "We have a team of artists who keep everything rolling, as it's too much work for even a dozen

"We have an amazing concept team," states Joe, "and I'm doing a lot more art direction than actually drawing."

people. The game is very established, so whatever design you make has to fall into a role and their vision for it and the gameplay. You do a little exploring and then pull the threads together. That's something Eric Vedder did a great job of at Digital Extremes."

FEARSOME, YET FUNCTIONAL

Joe emphasises a critical point when he says, "Whenever you're designing anything for games, the gameplay really comes first, right? It doesn't really matter what you put all over a character design. It looks cool, but if it's not useful, then it just doesn't work. So, once we got a list of all the gameplay features, the theme locked down, how the Wolf Frame would move, the fact that it was a female frame – all of that stuff kind of came together and informed the final design. I was just excited to be a part of it. Even having a single character running around in there is cool."

Joe then makes a point about the spirit of collaboration with Digital Extremes. "I do thrive off the energy of other people and it turns out that I don't always have the greatest ideas. Other people have cooler ideas and so collaborating and hearing other people's excitement about stuff, I kind of need it. It motivates me and keeps me excited."
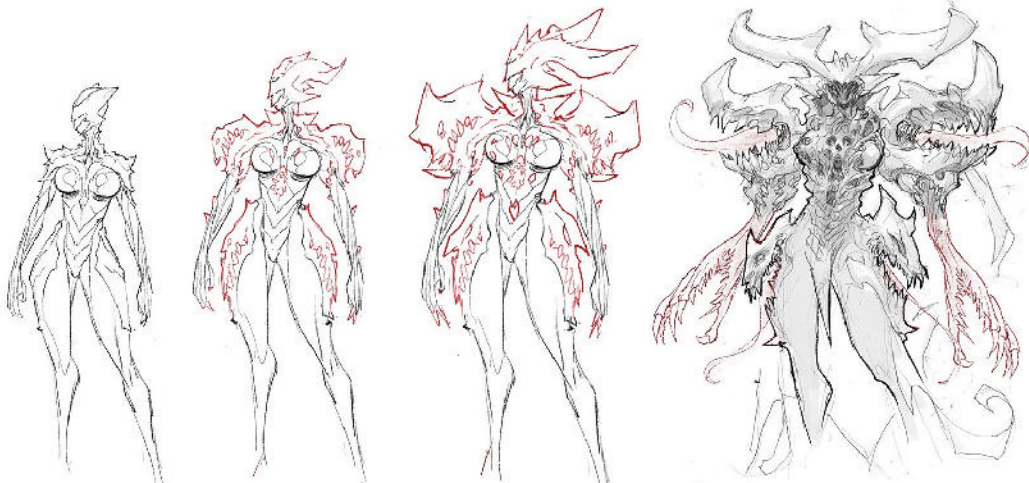
If you wish to apply to a specific studio, Joe Mad emphasises the importance of really getting to know their aesthetic.
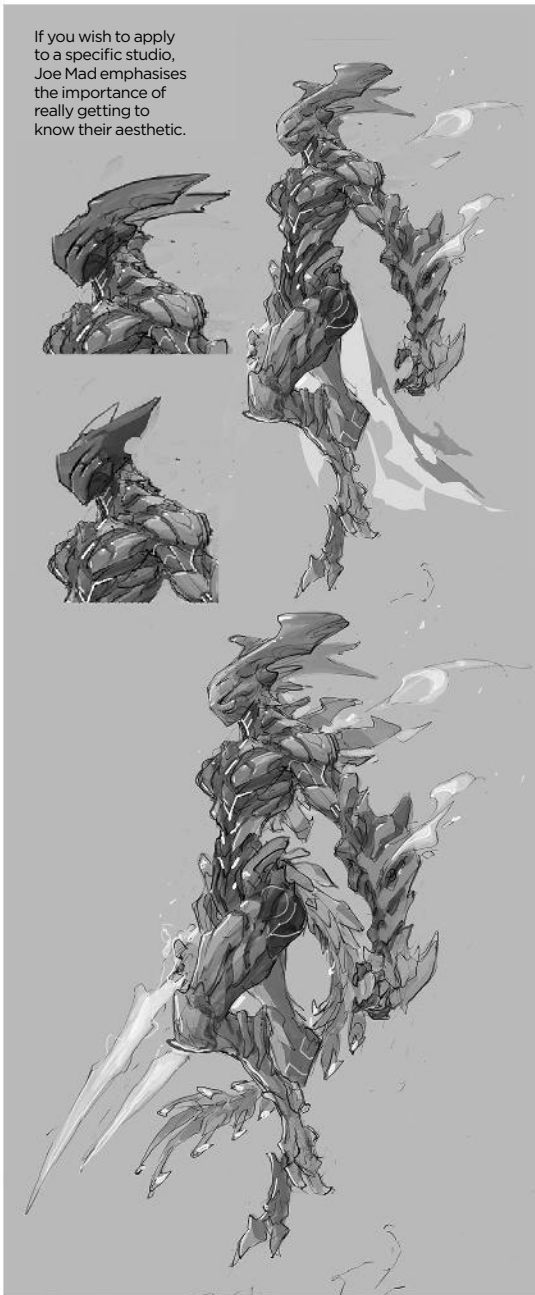
With his long-standing reputation in the world of comic books, Joe offers a valuable sense of the creative dynamic and interplay between working in comics and working in the gaming world: "I think for me in comics, designing characters for 2D is different on every single page, and it's because I will update the design on the fly sometimes rather than worrying about consistency. In games though, you've got to nail it down: you've *got* to know how it's going to affect animation and how complex it is. Can you have 20 of these on the screen? Is it going to perform?"

Joe emphasises that in the game-design work he is involved with, "there are just so many concerns. You learn them after a while, but it was something that I definitely did not have to worry about in comics where I could draw anything as long as it looked good from a given angle. But, for me personally, on the flip-side, comics paved the way for me to get into the games industry. I was already talking to people [in game development] who knew my work from comics and that was what they wanted. I've always worked on very stylised projects, and usually they're projects where my style is guiding the direction of it. That all happened just because I immediately started working with fans of my work, and

"I still approach a lot of the character designs the same way I normally would: you know, big shapes," reveals Joe.

they didn't want to change it. It had a huge impact, so I still approach a lot of the character designs the same way I normally would. But, stuff that looks cool in print in a small comic book actually helps with making something look cool on screen when they're far away."

TRADITIONAL VS DIGITAL
Joe notes that a quick response to a character design is vital and that he always asks: What's the first read? What's the second read? to help prioritise the visual elements.

Of his work, Joe offers an insight into his toolkit and process: "I'm old-school and I still love sketching on ➡

➤ paper with an HB pencil and an eraser, and I just scribble the heck out of stuff just to find the shapes and the general vibe. I feel like working digitally for me (using Photoshop and Cintiq) for the very initial process, there's almost too much temptation to create layers and to commit, I guess. On paper, it's more free. I think it's just because it's what I'm used to.

"Once I get something that I'm roughly happy with – where I'm not really concerned about proportions or anything like that, because I can fix that stuff digitally – I'll scan it in and then, in Photoshop, I'll flip things around, scale them and add stuff on. And I don't know why I can't do it digitally, but I feel like finding that initial base, I just need to do it on paper. I think it's just having too much room to play by being able to undo

"Learning about anatomy, figure drawing and animation is huge: I can't stress that enough," advises Joe.

"I love panel-to-panel storytelling. I love comics. I still read manga."

When it comes to designing game characters, a core consideration is the gameplay and the functionality of the design.

stuff. On paper you can only erase so many times before you have to commit. *Then* I go and nitpick it digitally. I have had this sort of existential crisis a few times where I don't feel like the stuff I nit-pick for weeks in Photoshop is that much better than the stuff I used to bang out in one sitting for comics. It is technically better in a few ways, but I don't know if it's worth it. I'm not a digital artist. But guys that can do that blow me away.

"Most of the guys I follow these days are digital artists, so it's not that I'm knocking it, I just can't do it. For me, digital is mostly for clean-up and iteration. But the drawing starts the old-school way: with the pencil on paper. I need to embrace the future, but it hasn't happened yet!"

2D TO 3D TRANSFORMATION

Joe then brings the conversation back around to the overarching process that he is involved with in working with Digital Extremes. "What a lot of people don't realise is that you rarely create a concept and just hand it off and go on to the next thing," he explains. "You have to stay with the process and make iterations along the

"You have to be where other artists are, in a community like ArtStation, and just get your stuff out there," advises Joe.

> ❝ Finally seeing my work in 3D with audio and voice acting is pretty exciting ❞

way. So, you might turn in the concept, you see the 3D blockout and you think: 'Oh, the arms should be longer. I didn't realise this looked like that from the back'.

"So, you do some paintovers in Photoshop, the modeller will adjust the 3D asset, and then sometimes it'll get rigged and we'll notice problems with the movement of things. Usually, it gets kicked back to the concept artist a couple of times. Rarely is it like, 'the thing I drew is in the game and it looks exactly like it should.' Finally seeing my work in 3D with audio and voice acting is pretty exciting. It's one of the things I like about working in games. It never gets old."

That sense of passion for the process brings Joe back to the childhood inspirations that continue to fuel his work. "When I was a kid," he explains, "I was always drawing cartoon characters. Then, when I saw the old Ray Harryhausen stop-motion monster movies and the animated The Hobbit cartoon from the 1970s, it blew my mind. Then I discovered Dungeons & Dragons. And so, I think that making the transition to games (like Darksiders), and any excuse to have monsters in a game, is what I love to work on and it's what I still love to draw to this day. I'll draw monsters over anything else.

"It's been about 18 years now that I've been working in games and I'm still not over it! I'm just excited to have been part of it at all. It's important to be a fan of the stuff that you're working on. Not so much as a point of pride, but just of excitement."

A Tribute To
Kim Jung Gi

Homage to a hero The art community pays tribute to the loss of one of their own, a **legend** who influenced and inspired many

South Korean artist Kim Jung Gi passed recently, long before his time, leaving the art community saddened. Outpourings of well wishes to his friends and family demonstrate just how much of an influence he had on those who followed his art and knew him as a man.

Kim Jung Gi was well respected as a creative powerhouse, becoming a legend in the community and inspiring a generation of artists, not just with his talent but his passion for his craft. His work spans and expands genres, having been used for album covers, movies and even official government

visuals, and he holds the Guinness World Record for the longest drawing.

He was a quiet, gentle man, full of smiles and nearly always drawing, using his legendary memory to guide him as an internal reference library. He gained fans and friends across the globe, many of whom have taken to social media to express their feelings to his friends and family, and to mark the passing of an artistic hero.

Rest in peace Kim Jung Gi.

"I can't believe this… we were supposed to see each other only just next week… and now never again. In total shock."
James Jean

"I'm in total disbelief. I'm so sorry for those closest to him. We all will certainly feel the loss of his presence in this world. He so generously shared his incredible gift with all of us these many years and we are all the better for it. RIP master Kim Jung Gi."
J Scott Campbell

"It was a really sad day for me when I found out. I was so looking forward to seeing him next week! Every time I would see him in the conventions he would give me a book and sketch in it! Such a legend, RIP my friend!"
Anthony Francisco

"Rest in peace Master Kim. Thank you so, so much for inspiring us all with your amazing artworks and creations. My deepest condolences to family and friends."
DCWJ

"Man, that's shocking and completely unexpected news to hear. We are however extremely fortunate to have been blessed with the time he was here in sharing his creative brilliance and his warm and lively character with us all. Much love and strength to all of his family and loved ones."
Warren Louw
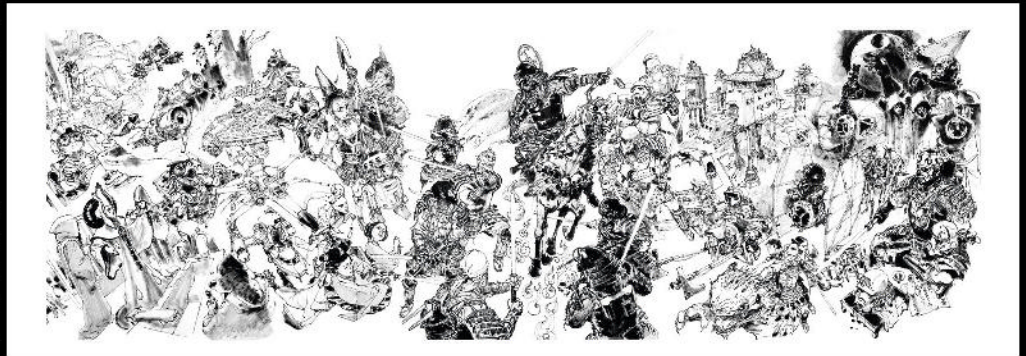
"Deepest sympathies go out to his family… such a horrible tragedy. He was always so kind to me. He was a master of his craft."
Ken Lashley

"Grateful for you sir… thanks for all the magic.
♥♥♥♥ much love to your fam… rest in peace."
Mel Milton

"I'm in shock… you will be missed… such a loss."
Any Park

"Rest in Peace, he brought a lot of inspiration to many."
Miles Johnston

"This is beyond saddening. I'm on the way to New York and was looking forward to seeing him again. He was an incredibly kind and humble person. ♥♥♥ to his family and crew."
Tran Nguyen

"Kim Jung Gi inspired millions of artists. We're not only inspired by the way he was able to draw like magic, but also by his love and

"I can complete an artwork without a sketch or prior visual exploration. I can draw what I visualise in my head straight onto paper." Kim Jung Gi

"I can draw or express myself spontaneously. Often I experience unexpected design languages during the process." Kim Jung Gi

passion for the art of drawing. He drew because he wanted to draw not because it was his job. Thank you master, for what you gave to the world. I regret not taking more of your workshops."
Stan Prokopenko

"Sad. Shocking. Gone too early. The world will always remember however, legends never die. Sincere condolences to all family and friends ♥ Thank you for everything you've done. May you rest in peace."
Asia Ladowska

"I don't know what to say. This is heartbreaking. So much love to the Grandmaster and his family and friends."
Daniel Landerman

"No words… Rest in peace, Master Kim."
Eliza Ivanova

"RIP legend. You will be forever remembered through your work and impact you have given to us all."
Ash Thorp

"WTF WHYYY this is so sad. Thank you so much for how much you've done for us! Rest In Peace, legend."
Ross Tran

"I can barely write these words, Kim Jung Gi I will miss you immeasurably. We all know about his art but he was my friend, my good friend, and such a very kind, generous and funny man, always happy, always smiling. Devastated RIP Jung Gi my brother."
Karl Kopinski

"I'm in shock, this is the saddest news."
Daniel Zrom

Create magical fantasy scenes

Free trial! Use custom brushes, 3D tools and more on any device to master your creativity

Having the right tool, easily accessible, can be key to keeping the creative process flowing from composition sketches to painting, light adjustments, and finishing details. Here are some tips for creating fantasy art with Clip Studio Paint, using innovative tools to help you speed up and be as accurate as you need.

Perhaps the biggest benefit for users of Clip Studio Paint is how few limitations are put on the artist. Not just in workflow but also on device, as the software is available across multiple different devices, from phones and tablets to Mac and PC desktop computers.

BRUSH POWER

Finding your perfect brush is one of the most important steps of digital painting! Clip Studio Paint has an impressive array of brushes out of the box, some created by the user base. They cover the range from standard digital painting options to wet media brushes that bleed and run. This painting was created using several brushes with different settings for blending and texture.

The base painting is made with rough colours and the gradient tool to quickly add depth, and the details are painted in later with a fine dense brush.

You can create custom brushes, add textures for more traditional aesthetics, or even combine two brushes into one dual brush. Paint with patterns to quickly paint detailed areas like foliage or rippling water. The level of customisation means you can easily

> 66 **Paint with patterns to quickly paint detailed areas like foliage or rippling water** 99

Try testing colour palettes with gradient maps before you start working on the details.

The software's 3D tools provide extra help with perspective and composition.
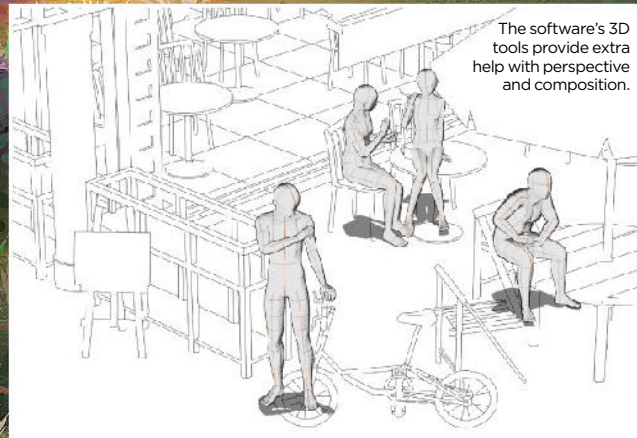
build the brush you need and save it for use in later projects.

Strokes can be further refined using pen pressure, stabilisation settings or even vector layers, where points can be moved or deleted as needed.

FANTASTIC COLOURS

Colour choice and methods of selection are vital for a cohesive artwork. Try testing colour palettes with gradient maps to explore different moods before you start working on the details. You can also use adjustment layers to add more contrast for magical lighting that brings your fantasy scene to life.

Both adjustment maps and gradient maps in Clip Studio Paint are non-destructive layers, so you can tweak settings and colours as much as you need. Clip Studio Paint has you covered with multiple colour

pickers, so you can choose the palette that suits you. If you use reference images a lot, Clip Studio Paint enables you to use the eyedropper from outside the software, making it easy to utilise pictures on your desktop or other software.

THE EXTRA DIMENSION

3D tools are extra helpful for visualising complex scenes for fantasy or concept art. You can add structures with perfect perspective, or pose 3D characters to nail your composition. These characters can be adapted to your needs to create all kinds of body shapes for humans or other fantasy species, with controls for morphing the model, adding muscle or fat, then posing manually, using a preset or taking advantage of AI to pose match a person from an existing photo! 3D scenes can be viewed from the camera or in quad view to help test your composition and arrange assets where you need them to be.

For more information about Clip Studio Paint, and to try it out free for up to three months, head to https://www.clipstudio.net/en/

You can see more of Vaskange's art at www.instagram.com/vaskange

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Sometimes I take on self-imposed challenges. Here I limited myself to using just four shades of green to capture that original Game Boy look and feel.

Nuri Durr

Go figure This US artist tell us that dusting his studio's many shelves is actually his full-time job

A couple of years ago my studio was a small, cramped room with wood panelling. While it served me well for about five years, it was so tiny that I could never do much in the way of decorating. I had to keep most of the toys, figures and art that I received from my friends boxed up in a closet until I had the space to properly display everything. So when I moved to a bigger home I did just that. My current workspace is now a much larger downstairs room.

There's a lot to love about this space. It's long enough that I can designate half the room to work and the other half to play. It can accommodate my ridiculous amount of art, toys and books that I've collected over the years. South-east facing windows means there's a fair amount of natural light coming in ➤➤

I got this print from Chris Lee (@**thebeastisback**). It sits at the top of my workspace as a daily reminder to get work done.

A few pixel art paintings from some of my favourite games.

This is the printer that I relied on when I first began selling prints of my artwork. It's an old Epson Stylus R3000. These days I use CatPrint to fulfil most of my printing needs, but it's nice to know that I can still rely on this printer if necessary.

I got this cart from Michael's and the custom Copic Marker refill toppers on Etsy a few years ago. They were designed to fit into it perfectly.

> ❝ **South-east facing windows means there's a fair amount of natural light coming in** ❞

I'm asked about this thing a lot. It's a custom marker holder from Stamp-n-Storage. It's designed to hold all 358 Copic marker colours. I've collected both the markers and refills slowly over the years and at this point I have nearly all of them.

These are some of the prints and original art that I've collected from friends over the years. You might even recognise the work of a few people here.

Chain Chomps make for surprisingly good throw pillows.

Commissioned by Lost In Cult for its book A Handheld History, which details the history of handheld gaming.

A Copic marker piece done for Gallery1988's Crazy 4 Cult show back in 2020.

This is a canvas lamp and additions to my desk setup. It's a ring light with a phone clamp in the center. It has multiple lighting and brightness settings, and is ideal for streaming and recording videos with my phone.

⤜ during the day, which is when I get most of my work done. I can finally grow some low-maintenance plants. Floating shelves enable me to make the best of this space as well as keep most of the collectibles away from my two-year old son. However, he only seems interested in the Gumby figures that are within his reach. Thankfully, I don't have a cat otherwise this setup might be a nightmare.

INSPIRING WORKSPACE

For the past eight years I've worked entirely from home. Since I spend a good chunk of my day in the same room, I feel my workspace should be both inspiring and relaxing to be in. That goes for my two young children as well, since they both like to hang out down here with me while I work sometimes.

Everything must have a place and be within arm's reach in order for me to keep a seamless workflow going. So there's no clutter in the area where I get things done. The shelves are absolutely cluttered though, because they're intended to be fun to look at. Just big piles of things from my childhood. I was born in the late ⤜

This corner of the room is mostly dedicated to the NES. Like TMNT, Mario and Nintendo as a whole had a major impact on me growing up. As a kid I would pause the game and attempt to draw the sprites on screen. To this day, Nintendo characters remain my artistic comfort zone.
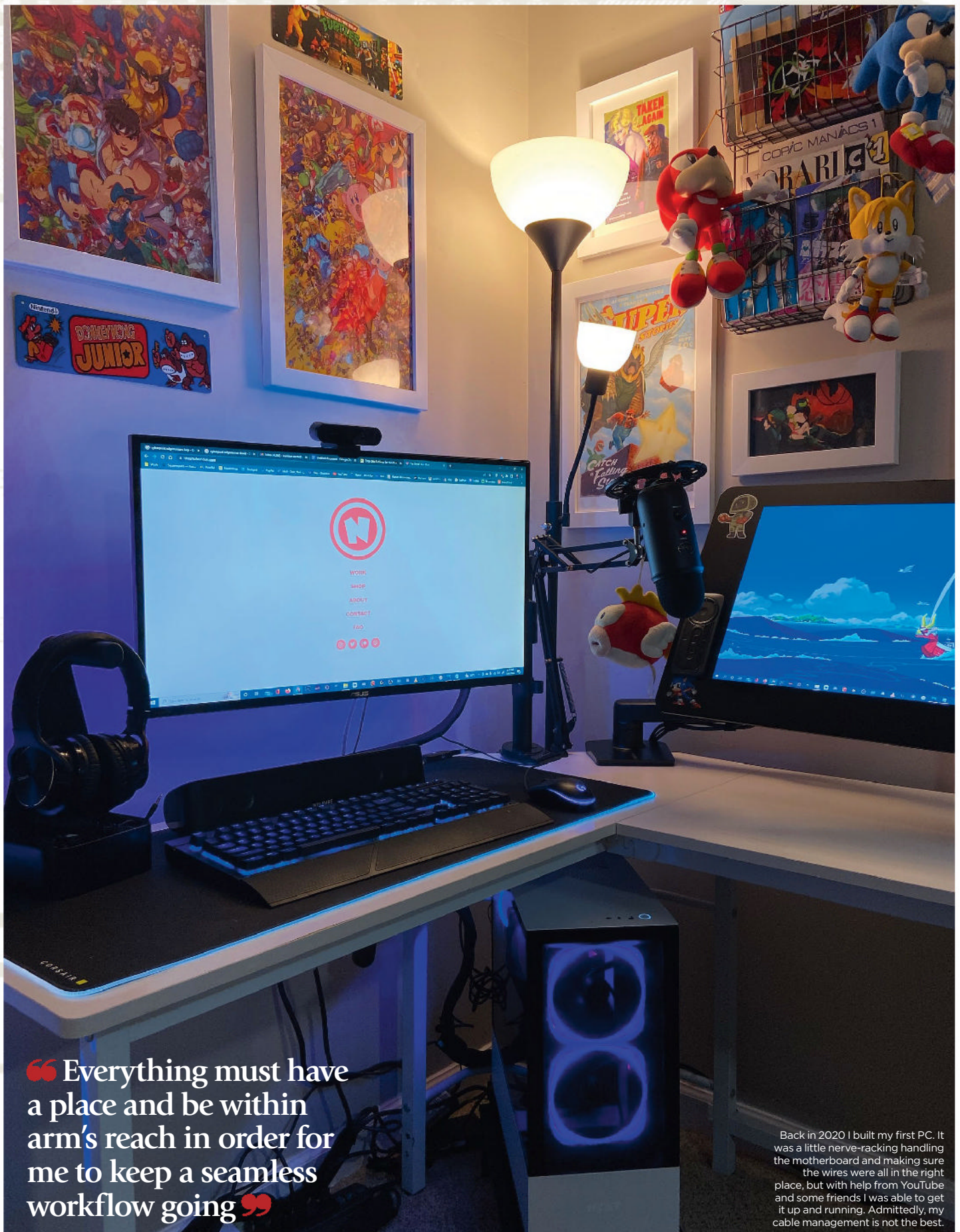
Everything must have a place and be within arm's reach in order for me to keep a seamless workflow going 🙶🙷

Back in 2020 I built my first PC. It was a little nerve-racking handling the motherboard and making sure the wires were all in the right place, but with help from YouTube and some friends I was able to get it up and running. Admittedly, my cable management is not the best.
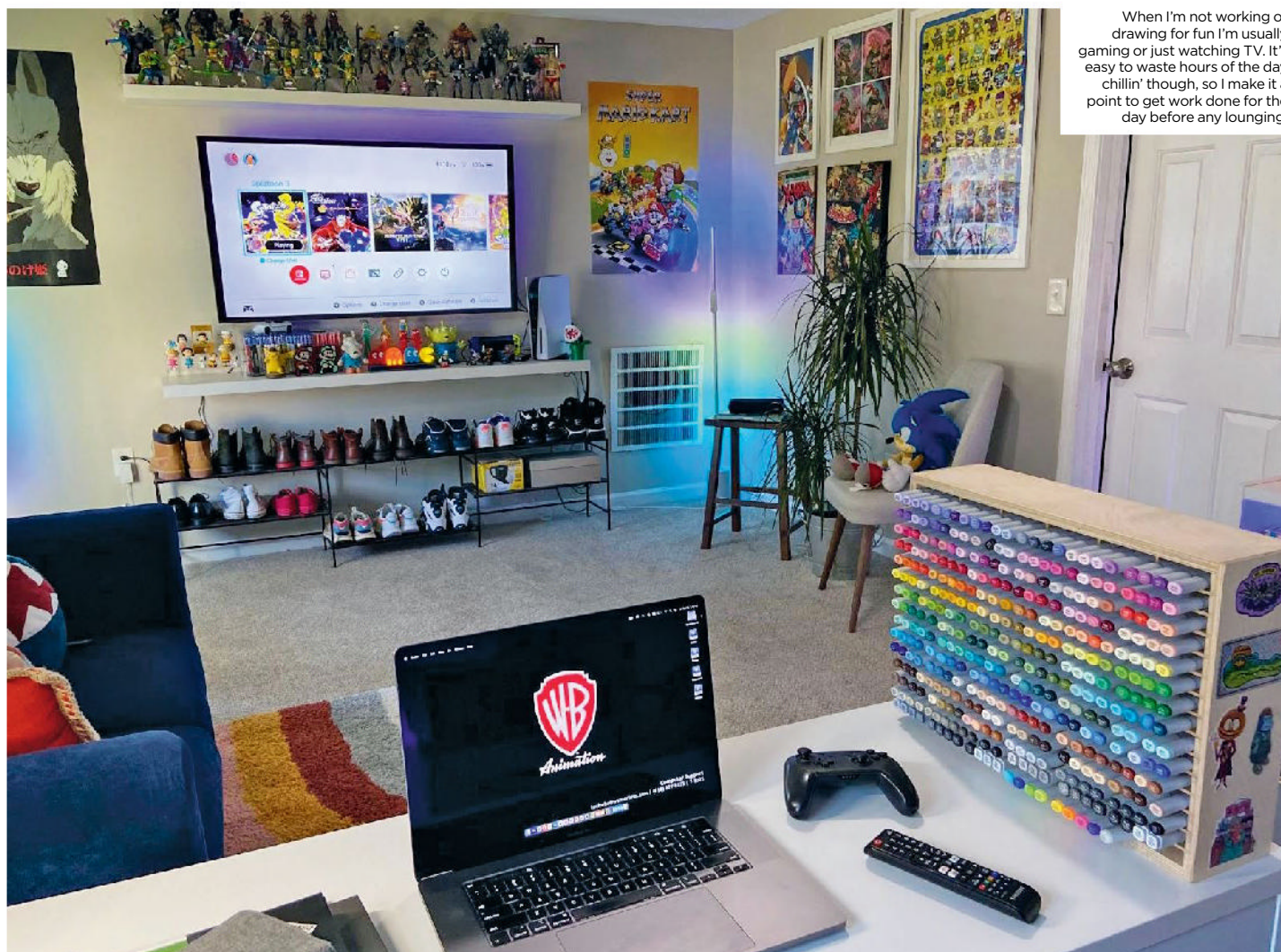
� 80s and this is evident in not just the stuff I surround myself with, but my art as well.

HANDY REFERENCE

Entire shelves are dedicated to the things that have had the biggest impact on me growing up. The toys also work as great reference tools in my work, so they do have some practical application at least.

A question I get asked a lot is how often do I dust my shelves with so many things piled on to them. The answer is… not nearly as much as I probably should. Maybe once every quarter or when I'm doing some rearranging to make room for new toys. I've seen some people opt for the glass case setup, but that's never been my thing. So I'm willing to deal with a bit of dust every now and then.

When not dusting or playing games on the couch I'm sitting at my desk, which is actually two separate desks: an L-shaped desk where all of my

I wouldn't be the person I am had I never been exposed to the TMNT. I'm a big fan of all things Turtles, and I own more merch from this franchise than anything else in my studio. So when NECA started its line of figures I got a little carried away!

> ❝ I like to use Copic markers, which have been my go-to medium for almost 10 years ❞

electronics are mounted, and a long desk next to it where all my traditional art tools are located. It's almost like a little cockpit. So no matter what I'm doing, all I need to do is swivel around in my chair.

For most of my professional work I work from either my Wacom Cintiq or iPad. For everything else I like to use Copic markers, which have been my go-to medium for almost 10 years. I like the feel and the problem solving that comes with working with traditional media. It keeps the creative process exciting for me!

Nuri is an Atlanta-based character designer and illustrator working at Warner Bros. Animation. He's drawn for Marvel Comics, DC Comics, Sony, Copic and more. You can see his work at www.theartofnuridurr.com.

A random assortment of toys and figures alongside some retro pixel art paintings and shadow boxes.

A series of smaller Copic drawings that I scanned in and combined into one large print. When preparing traditional drawings for print, I'll touch them up digitally where I feel it's necessary.

I like traditional art, so most of the framed art on my walls is original art from friends and artists who I admire. It's always cool to see how others approach working with Copic markers.

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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES

Issue 219
December 2022
Explore the mystical world of Magic: The Gathering with our exclusive artist interviews, insight, and step-by-step breakdown. Plus, learn how to build a dynamic composition, and use AI tools for developing new ideas.

Issue 218
November 2022
Learn how to create striking portraits, stunning landscapes and gorgeous Art Nouveau work in our tutorials. Plus, discover the beautiful art of 'solarpunk', and read our insightful interview with pro fantasy artist Dave Greco.

Issue 217
October 2022
Create incredible sci-fi scenes and watercolour portraits, learn top tips from the pros on how to get hired by an art studio, expert advice on levelling up your creative process, and go behind the scenes on YA comic 'Hollow'.

Issue 216
September 2022
Learn the basics of Procreate and discover how to paint a futuristic robot. Plus, expert tips on character design, delve into the magical concepts of Fantastic Beasts, and explore the new, fascinating world of AI art tools.

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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Magical insights

I'm writing to say what a pleasure the last issue was. There were a few highlights for me as a newer artist, but the standout was the Magic: The Gathering article. I loved reading the interviews and discovering how different artists feel about their work and influences. I was quite surprised by some of the responses and I'm definitely now more interested in learning more about some of my heroes and what makes them tick. Thank you.

Gideon, via email

Rob replies *Hi Gideon, thanks so much for getting in touch. We're always excited to talk to artists, and understanding a little about what inspires them and drives their own craft is fascinating. Keep your eyes peeled in future issues, because we have some incredible artists due to hit the pages and I think you'll like them just as much. Good luck with your artistic journey.*

Is AI not so bad?

I read your last issue and it's made me rethink my concerns about art created

DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE? Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 219 at **ifxm.ag/ single-ifx**.

Reader Gideon enjoyed finding out how the artwork for the latest Magic: The Gathering deck was created.

by AI. I have worried about the future of the industry and its community, and agreed with so many people – some of whom have appeared on your letters pages before. I didn't want jobs to be taken or skills to be devalued by the increase in AI-led art.

That said, I read the tutorial on using AI as part of a greater workflow and I loved it. It showed me that a good artist can take AI and use it as a tool to be more efficient and produce more creative output. This can only be a good thing. I still have worries, but they're much reduced.

Please keep covering how new technology can be good for artists as well as pose risks.

Sarah H, via email

Rob replies *Hi Sarah, great to read your message and I'm so glad you've had a bit of a rethink. Your worries aren't unfounded, but I do think artists will find ways to use new tech – AI or otherwise – to their advantage. Time is money after all, so anything that can help artists use their time better must be good, so long as they retain creative control.*

There are obviously a few issues to consider with AI art, ranging from copyright to artistic integrity, but there are absolutely some opportunities for creatives too, so we will be keeping an eye on the scene for sure.

Weird and wonderful

I'm just writing in to say thanks for the Sketchbook section last issue. I love the mix of oddness and beauty done by Somnath Pal. Great work and just the kind of thing I love.

Lydia, via email

Rob replies *Hi Lydia. Thanks for writing. I'm glad you like it. We are big fans as well, so lovely to be able to showcase his work in the pages of ImagineFX. Check Sketchbook this issue too, which is equally awesome!*

Issue 219's tutorial by Rachel Bradley on harnessing the power of AI left a positive impression on reader Sarah.

COLLABORATIVE PAINTING WITH AI

UNITED WE STAND

Magali Villeneuve

FRESH PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention

Patrick J. Jones **@patrickjjonesillustrator**
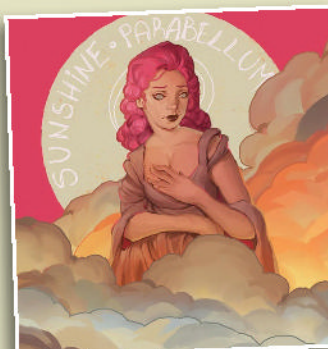
Lorna **@thee_steppenwolf**

Sarah **@anebulouspurpose**

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

THE ART OF
MATÍAS BERGARA

Dominic Carter talks to the artist behind Coda and Step By Bloody Step about how he brings amazing fantasy worlds to life
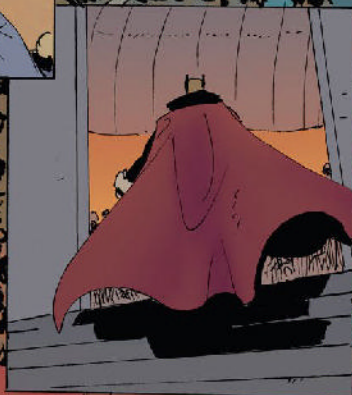
STEP BY BLOODY STEP
This unique comic is a completely textless story about an armoured giant protecting a helpless child.

Interview

We caught up with Matías Bergara, the illustrator of seminal comics including Coda and Step By Bloody Step, to learn more about his inspiring story, and how he remains uniquely focused on his artistic goals and refining his style.

Tell us about your background as an artist. How did you get started?
I started kind of later than most of my colleagues, the reason being that I studied a Literature course in college and went on to start a small animation/video game company with friends immediately after finishing my studies. I had always been drawing, but never considered it could become my main source of income or profession. I barely knew anyone who did. At some point I decided to become an artist and author and leave the company, partly because I got to make new friends who were doing comics and it seemed like something I could do at that point. I was 27 when I finally started trying to get my first commercial jobs as a comics artist and illustrator. It's been ten years since.

Which artists have inspired you most, and why?
Too many to count, but I have great affection for Hergé because I read Tintin books constantly as a kid and they provided me with a very strong sense of clear visual narrative in comics. In my adulthood I discovered Victorian-era illustrators and commercial artists like Edmund Dulac and Arthur Rackham who blew my mind and influenced a lot of my painting technique. I love Christophe Blain's body of work. I am a huge fan of cartooning and carefree expression.

You're based in Uruguay. What's the comics scene like over there?
It's a thriving scene, but very small. It's a small country and people have very rich reading habits, but not necessarily aimed towards comics. Most authors self-publish in modest numbers of copies and seek work and other opportunities elsewhere at the same

WONDER WOMAN
Matías says he is tempted to do an entire Wonder Woman comic strip in this style inspired by Greek mythology and pottery.

time. There was a sort of 'comics renaissance' during the early 2000s with lots of new talent and gathering attention from the media with locally produced books and zines. The government funds the production of comics directly via yearly contests and project pitches as well.

You create illustrations for comics and video games. Do you have a favourite of the two?
I prefer comics by a great margin. Video game art is usually an asset in a long chain of graphical needs and resources and it's part of an entire team's work. I prefer to work on my own and as narratively as possible (this is also why I favour comics over other editorial types of work in illustration).

How has your art developed over the years, and what would you say has driven those changes?
I've learned to simplify things, refine the hierarchy and balance of my images and panels, and to colour my own work accordingly. Many parts of my visual arsenal come from the tools

> **I love mixing very intricate and complex images with splashes of simplicity**

LONG JOURNEYS AHEAD
Matías worked with Matheus Lopes to bring Step By Bloody Step by Simon Spurrier to life.

ALIEN ENCOUNTERS
Matías is open to commissions, including this dynamic ink and wash illustration of Ripley and Newt confronting a Xenomorph.

I use. I started using brushes to draw some years ago and it changed the way I do it. I've also found that I have a tendency for mixing a bit of cartooning into almost anything I do regardless of how grounded or 'serious' the story might be, and it does enrich my work a lot. I love mixing very intricate and complex images with splashes of simplicity and emptiness. I also work very fast nowadays and almost do no pencilling for my pages, save for some very simple structural lines here and there. Most of the ideas are drawn in real time during my inking process.

Tell us about your day-to-day life as an illustrator.
Experience allows you to 'cut corners' and go directly into the images that spark into your mind when you're first reading a script. You know what does not work and what does – visually, narratively – from many years and hundreds or thousands of pages done

in the past and all the mistakes you committed. It's a slow process of fine-tuning your understanding of your own skill set and preferences as an artist. In my case I spent many years trying to close the gap between the kind of drawings I did for fun and carelessly, and the drawings I did for work and following other people's needs. I think I've got it figured out now – or at least the illusion of it.

Coda is one of the projects you're most well-known for. Can you tell us a bit about that?
It was a book that was pitched to other artists before me. Me and [writer Simon Spurrier] did not know each other or worked together before that, and it was our editor Eric who got us both in touch to collaborate on Coda, which at that point was a very exciting and expansive treatment of an epic, very special fantasy story. I fell in love with it immediately and knew ➡➡

MAKING CONNECTIONS
Matías shares his insights on looking for work from big-name publishers

The best thing I did to reach editors and collaborators was to make my best work available by putting it all on my social media accounts for anyone to see. It's free and people are now so used to browsing them constantly in search of new talent, ideas, inspiration or solutions to creative problems. I've landed tons of work through direct messages on these sites – sent to me first by other people who found my work there and wanted to get in touch. Personal illustrations or commissioned work I've done and posted everywhere have given editors and authors an idea of what could be done by me in a certain context, or working with a given character. Keep your accounts as open galleries for your portfolio and populate them with a few things made by you that really represent the best you can do and your preferences in style.

THE WORLD OF CODA
Fantasy and the post-apocalypse genres collide in Matías's artwork for Coda, also written by Simon Spurrier.
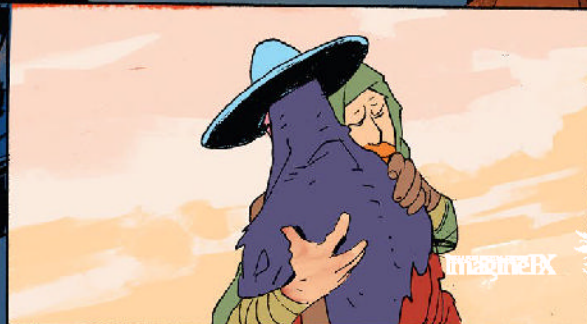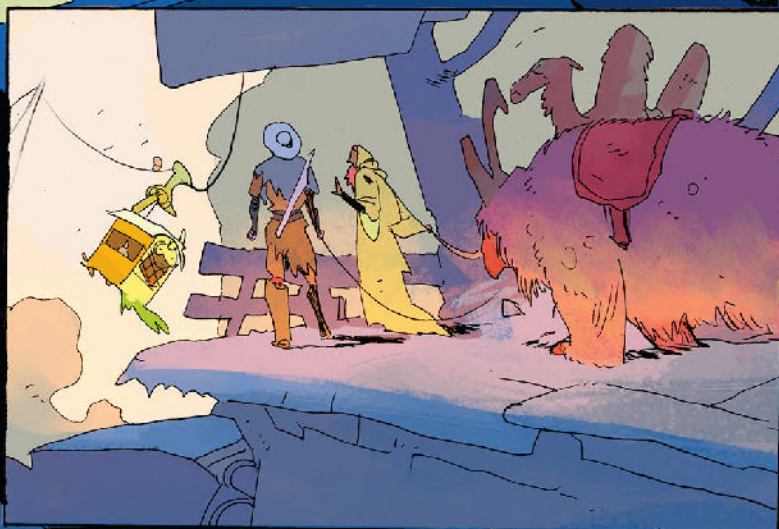
➥ precisely how to draw and colour it from the get-go. Basically it's a graphic novel following the path of Hum, a mysterious bard who roams a world that used to be full of magic, but lost all of it during a catastrophic event years before the story starts. The remnants and ruins of magic are scattered everywhere and there are bands and towns of survivors fighting for the dominance of this new magicless reality. Of course there is a lot more to the story than just this but you can imagine the possibilities for invention it gave me. It's fantasy! You can do absolutely whatever you want, and the team at Boom! gave me total creative freedom. It ended up being my favourite creation of my entire career.

The text-free comic Step By Bloody Step, which you also worked on with Si Spurrier and Matheus Lopes, was released earlier this year. Can you tell us a bit about it?

Me and Simon got cancelled on a Green Lantern book that we were pitching at DC during a big wave of cancellations that took place when the pandemic hit and stores were closed. He pitched me the idea of this weird silent story he had in his mind for a long time, of a kid and a giant armoured guardian walking non-stop towards something unknown and traversing a fantastical planet together. Simon wrote the entire story first and then I started drawing it with Mat Lopes on colours.

It was a huge challenge because I've never done a completely silent story before and I forced myself to avoid using SFX, lines of motion or symbols, or other non-verbal tricks

LOST LOVE
Coda tells the story of an antisocial ex-bard named Hum on a mission to save the soul of his wife.

FANTASY LANDS
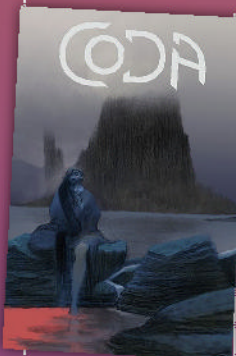Hum's only companion on his crusade across the Weird Wasteland is a foul-tempered mutant unicorn.

TRUDGING ALONG
Step By Bloody Step is Matías's third collaboration with Eisner Award-winning writer Simon Spurrier.

typical of comics. This forced me to be super clear and focused and find out new formulas to solve narrative and storytelling problems in each panel. I wanted to populate everything with details and alien things but it was clear very early on that this approach would put too much noise and distraction in front of what were the core emotions of the story, and I had to work out a delicate balance of these things.

I'm beyond thrilled with the results and the amazing reception that the book has had, being such a different thing from what's out there. People actually loved it!

You've worked on titles for big names including Neil Gaiman's Odd and the Frost Giants. What was it like to work on a title like that?

In this case there was actually no communication of any kind – I was hired to illustrate a Spanish edition of the book. I know he liked it a lot and so did I!

> **❝ It was a huge challenge…
> I've never done a completely
> silent story before ❞**

Have you ever thought about writing your own comics?

I never have. My mind ends up crafting a story in images and not in words, and I'm so used to working as an 'interpreter' of written stories/scripts that I don't feel the urge to write it myself. Yet. My creative urges always end up being visual. I admire and envy other artists who can either draw, write, make music, etc. I'm 100 per cent focused on making images. A French editor who was interviewing me some years ago found it curious that I had no interest in writing and called me a "pure-blood artist, a dying race". Let's hope we're not.

What do you wish people knew about the comics illustration industry in general that isn't common knowledge?

That it's about so much more than just superhero stuff. Comics today are so, so diverse in terms of styles, stories and the creators and readers who populate the environment. You can build a strong career and find a good portion of the public by drawing things and telling stories in your own way rather than following someone else's successful path. Also, a lot of people don't know this, but people like me

IMPROVISED INKING
Matías loves this page from Coda issue 2, because most of it was improvised and drawn directly onto the page.

Matías Bergara

POISON IVY
One of the many comic-book themed commissions Matías has illustrated.

who still do most of the work on paper are very few nowadays.

Of all the work you have created, what are you most proud of and why?
Coda sparked something special in me and it connected so nicely with a large bunch of people who love many things like animation, manga, fantasy novels and euro comics. It's a personal favourite. I spent nearly a year and a half working on it nonstop on a gruelling schedule and somehow it turned out exactly like what I had in mind, which is something we rarely get to experience as artists. I can open the book on any random page and find it fascinating, like if someone else had done it. I'm usually very hard on my own work and harshly critical of it, so this means Coda is really special.

What is next for you? Do you have any exciting projects coming up, or are there areas you'd like to explore?
I'm going directly into another fantasy-themed graphic novel of epic proportions with my buddy Simon writing , but I can't give any more details yet. We're thrilled.

What advice would you give to aspiring comic book artists?
Be patient and constant. Growing in this field takes literally years and it's not a bad thing. You're going to be learning the whole way. There's a reason why experience is so valued in creators of any kind – not just raw talent. Go towards the things that make your head wonder as much as you can.

EPIC-SCALE STORYTELLING
Matías was named Artist of the Year in 2019 by Entertainment Weekly for his work on Coda. He walks us through a particularly special page

I like this particular splash page – the final page of issue 2 of Coda – because it's a good synthesis of what made my style really work in this story: epic scale, craziness, imagination and a bit of silliness. This whole thing – a mutant giant pulling an entire town rolling on colossal and countless wheels, with airships and tanks all around and numerous other machineries – I got to illustrate by using the same method I did in all of Coda: just making it up directly on the page as I went. 90 per cent of what you see on the book wasn't pre-designed somewhere else and most of that was just improvised during inking. This process was a bit worrying for my team at first, they had to trust me. Luckily everything went great.

Sketchbook

Pius Bak

The comics illustrator with a diverse portfolio showcases some sketches, from unique character designs to in-progress cover art

Artist
PROFILE

Pius Bak
LOCATION: Lithuania

Pius is a freelance illustrator working on comics titles with publishers like Dark Horse, BOOM! Studios and IDW, creating illustrations for fiction books and music album covers.
www.instagram.com/piusbak

SKETCH OF A GIRL
"I just really love drawing faces, and this is one of those drawings I created just for fun on my iPad."

SPACE GIRL
"I believe I was watching The Jetsons at the time of drawing this."

WALKING AWAY
"Another sketch I created for fun. Curious fashion on this one."

BLOB
"This was one of the sketches I created while exploring different compositions for a personal illustration. I always try to make many of these little sketches before moving on to a more detailed drawing."

NIGHT TERROR

"This is a work-in-progress shot of a song cover illustration I created for Lithuanian music artist Donny Montell. Even when working on non-comics work I use the same workflow: first I make a detailed pencil drawing, then I ink on top of it and add the colours at the end. This is the inking stage of the process."

IDEAS FOR SLIGHTLY EXAGGERATED #3 COVER

"When working on the Slightly Exaggerated comic, the client gave me the freedom to explore different ideas for the book's cover. These were a few of those ideas and we ended up using the first one for the final illustration."

> **The client gave me the freedom to explore different ideas for the comic book's cover**
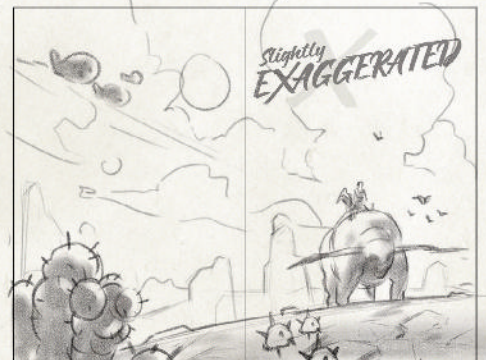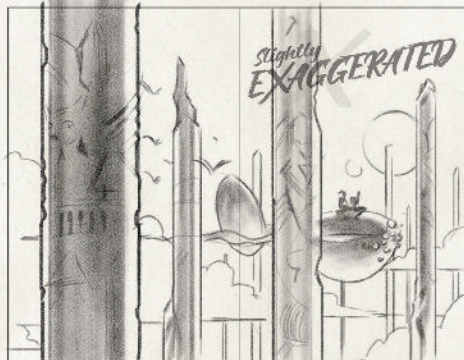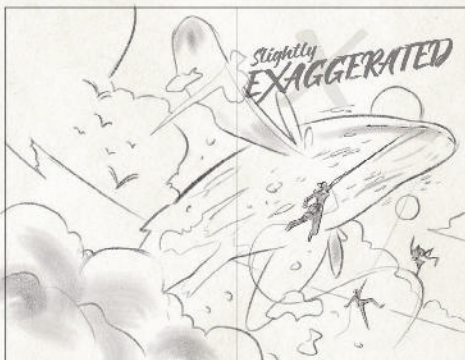
> " A series of ideas that I presented to a client for their music album cover "

DECOMPOSITION
"This is another of those illustrations that was born from mindlessly sketching on my iPad, I really like this one."

A BOY IN A ROOM
"A series of different composition ideas that I presented to a client for their music album cover. I wanted to show some colour in these because the client had a specific colour palette in mind for the final illustration."

MUSTERS

"I created these characters for a comic called Australi. I try to do at least a quick sketch for the less significant characters in the story, and only when I have a rough idea of how they look I draw them into a comic page."

SKETCH FOR SLIGHTLY EXAGGERATED #2 COVER

"This is a sketch of a composition that I used for the final cover illustration."

QUIET LIFE

"This is a pencils stage for a music album cover. In the end this was animated and used as a moving album cover on YouTube, so the illustration had to work cropped both into a square and YouTube format."
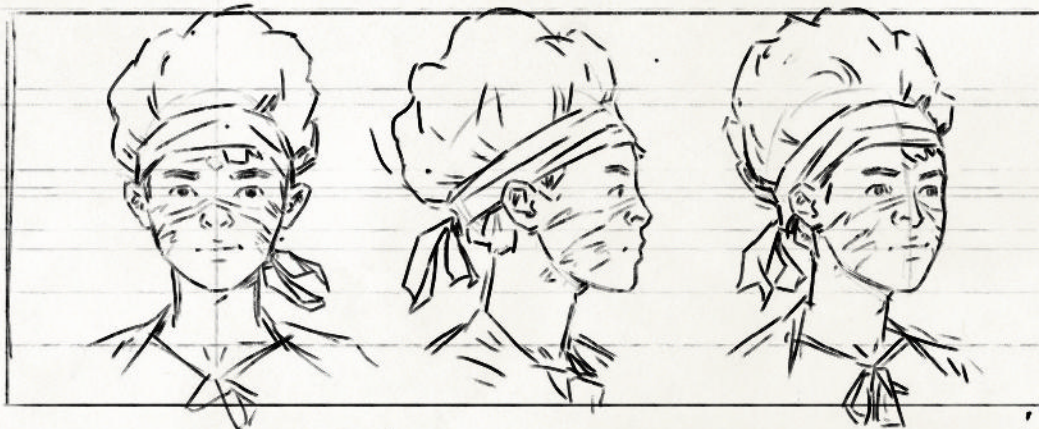
MALOO

"Initial design sketches for the main character in the Australi comic."

Sketchbook

SLIGHTLY EXAGGERATED #2 COVER PROCESS

"This is a pencils stage in the illustration process. Whenever I'm about to start final linework I always change the colour of my pencil drawing to blue, this way I don't confuse the final line art with the pencil drawing layer."
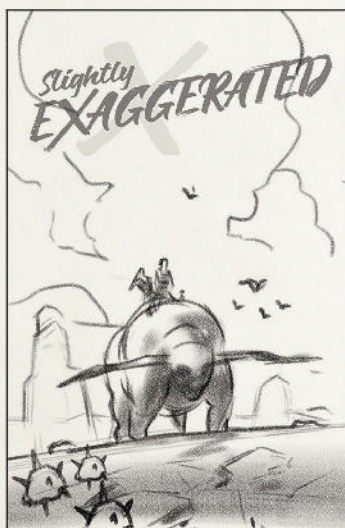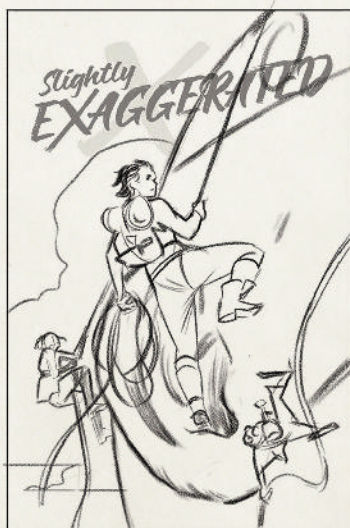
66 **This way I don't confuse the final line art with the pencil layer** 99

IDEAS FOR SLIGHTLY EXAGGERATED BOXSET COVER

"These are a few ideas I had for another Slightly Exaggerated illustration."

PANEL 1

PANEL 1

AUSTRALI SHORES

"With these sketches I was exploring compositions for establishing shots in the Australi comic."

RAINY NIGHT

"Another work-in-progress shot of an illustration. Whenever I'm dealing with objects in perspective, I always create a perspective grid to make the drawing process easier."

VIDEO WORKSHOP

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
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This issue:

Artist insight
LEVEL UP YOUR CHARACTER ART

Mauro Belfiore breaks down his key design principles and important considerations when designing unique, engaging characters

Artist
PROFILE
Mauro Belfiore
LOCATION: Italy

After graduating at IED Roma, and after years of practice exploring 2D art in both traditional and digital ways, Mauro Belfiore now works as an illustrator and concept artist for animation and video games.
artstation.com/oruam

Every artist should reflect on their own personal style, taking the time to consider how to explore or improve it further. Style is something that you build up after exposing yourself to art that you love, understanding the principles and core elements of that art style – those principles are like ingredients you mix to create your own unique recipe, but you have to know your ingredients first, so asking questions and reflecting on them is essential.

I'm going to share with you some of my thoughts about those principles, diving into examples of my work that are reflecting those thoughts. Some of them are more technical, other tips are questioning more the nature of the character exploration itself. That's what you should do when approaching character design. You're in the process of creating something unique; even if it's just a sketch, some of the core elements should resonate instantly.

I hope you can find this helpful, but never forget that you can only achieve results with a lot of practice and dedication. Please enjoy!

1 WHAT'S THE ROLE IN THE STORY?

Let's say you have to sketch a group of characters, for any kind of project. Each character has a role in the story, so thinking about silhouette, proportions and shapes is key as every character should instantly communicate their role. Are they a protective tank? Use big proportions and shapes that go from round to square. Is the character more mysterious and villainous? Than use more sharp and triangular shapes. It is also important to communicate the role using colours, as how we perceive colours can influence the essence of the characters.

2 PLAY WITH PROPORTIONS

Your character can be divided into three major areas: Big, Medium and Small. Don't think only about how big your area should be, but the length as well. With the female character in the centre here, you can divide the full figure into three macro areas: 1. Head 2. Chest/Arms and 3. Legs/Feet. Then you can use the same division system inside the macro areas, creating an appealing contrast in micro areas, which are the details. You can try to find the macro areas I'm talking about in the other two characters here.

❝ You can divide the full figure into three macro areas: head, chest/arms, and legs/feet ❞

3 FLOW AND GESTURE

Avoiding stiff-looking character design is important, and you should also remember to provide enough information for understanding the different design elements. Overlapping forms are also very helpful for giving a more dynamic feeling to the drawing. You can see in this example how I used the overlapping of the legs to give more dynamism to the design, as well as with the bent arm.

4 FLOW LINES AND COMPOSITION

The flow of your design can describe the composition of the storytelling. If you look at this example, you can notice how the major flow lines of this sketch lead towards the small floating orb, the gesture line of the blade, the legs, and the ornament on the top of the helmet. Remember, you're not just sketching a character, you're composing an image.
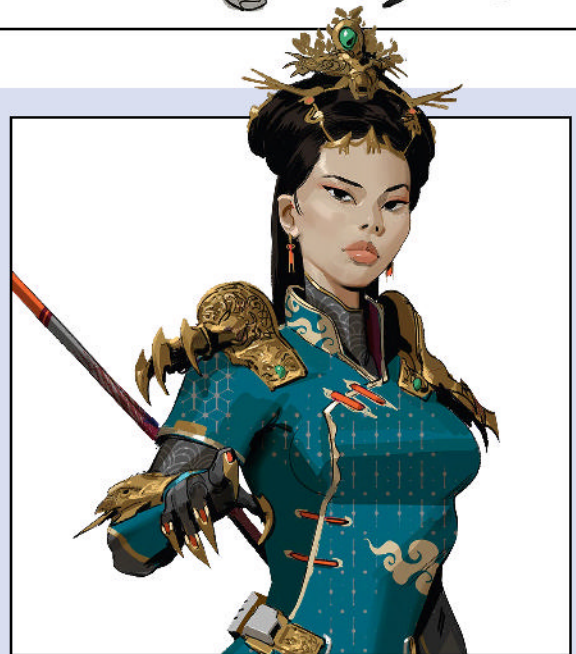
5 COSTUME DESIGN

As a character designer you'll be dressing your own characters most of the time, so costume design is another key feature of your job. Take time to collect and study relevant references. Be respectful and if it's required, aim to be accurate to the culture you're representing – not only with the facial features or skin colour, but even clothing can be used as a key design element when it comes to telling a story set within a specific culture. ➤➤

6 KEY STORY DETAILS

Here I wanted to sketch survivor characters in a story that I was thinking to name "Rainy Days" – they live in a post-apocalyptic world and try to survive. Use details to communicate the story: gas mask and bandages on the character on the left; ears hanging from the necklace on the character in the centre, plus the WWII trench shovel on the back; and lastly the creepy mask and machete on the character on the right, as well all the other military accessories. And of course, they all have rain coats as well as some dirt on the shoes and lower part of the legs.

❝ The acting should be visible and clear; try to explore different emotions ❞
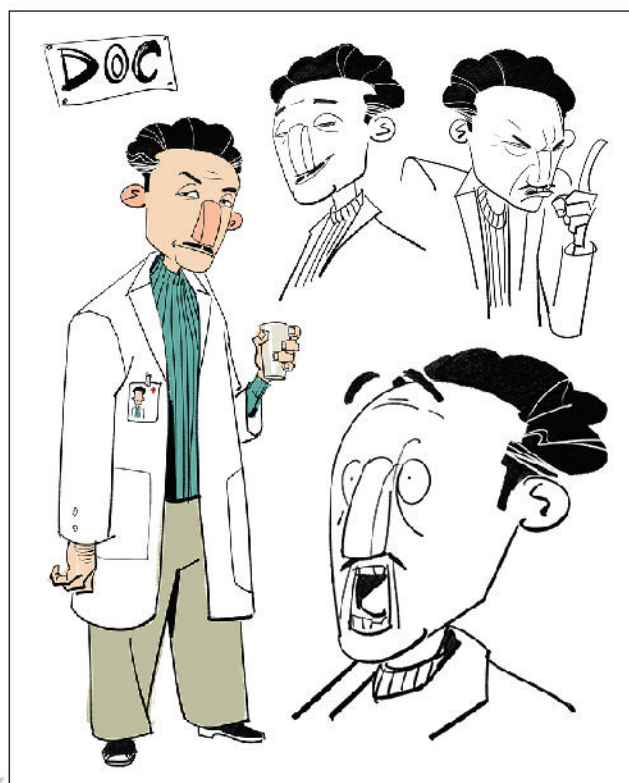
7 EXPRESSIONS

You're the director, and you have to direct the characters you want to sell to the audience. Do expression sketches and have fun with them! The acting should be visible and clear; try to explore different emotions, which will also be helpful for animators who are going to give life to your character.
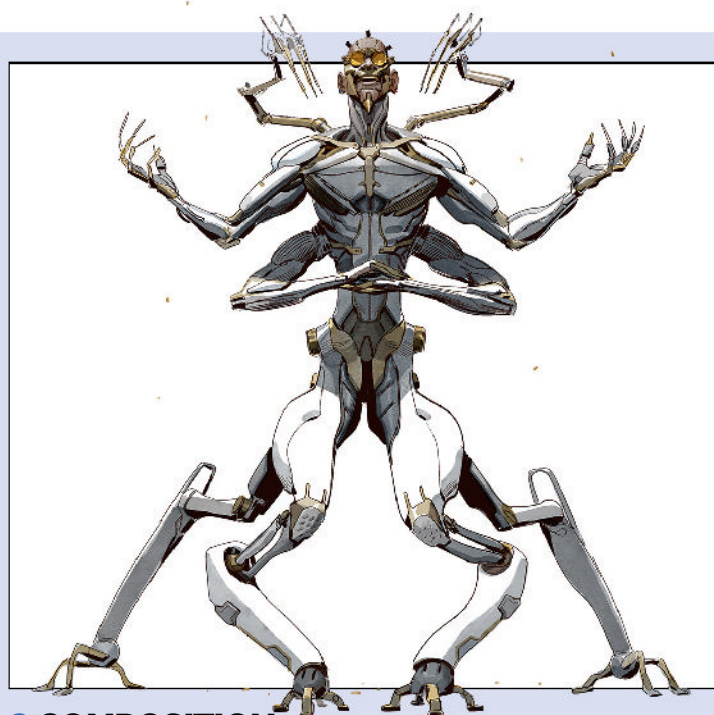
8 COMPOSITION

When sketching this character I wanted to give a powerful and confident attitude, almost sacral or ritual. A cyberpunk scientist who devoted his body to science to push the limits. You can see the major triangle shape from the lower arms on the bottom to the head, or even a star shape if you consider the bionic arms. See how composing and posing your character can help communicate the attitude.
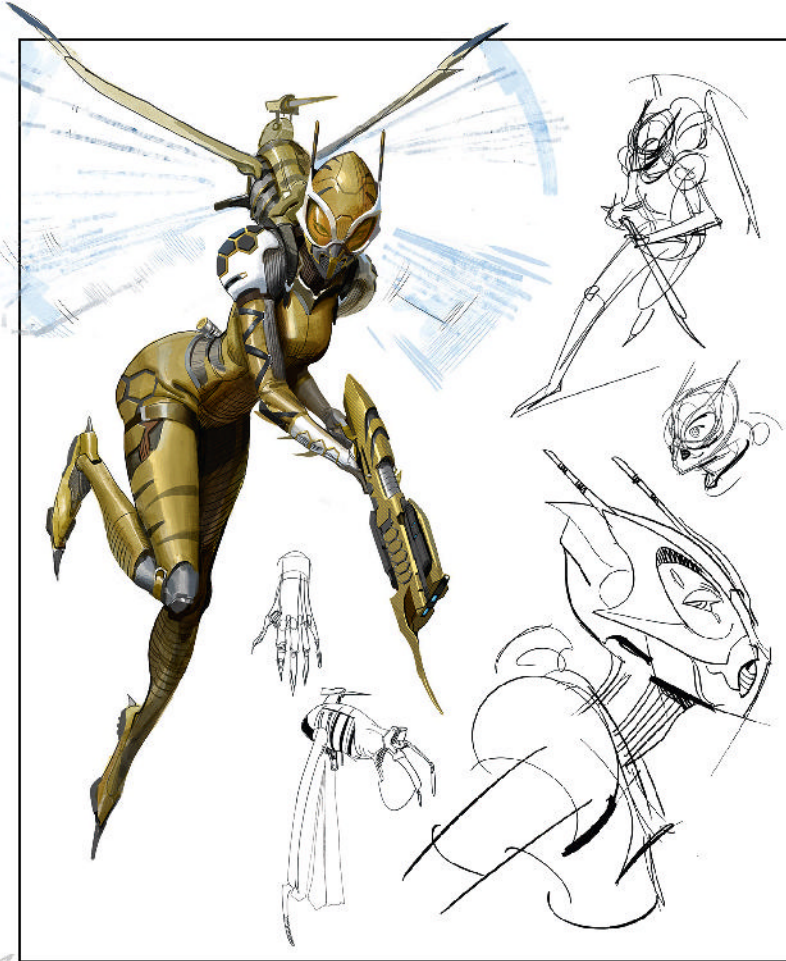
9 UNDERSTAND YOUR CHARACTER

When developing a character, you should know every aspect of the design. If something is not clear, or you need to understand smaller pieces of the character, you should develop some separate quick and loose studies. Like you can see in this example, along with the final design I developed some quick, loose sketches to understand more about the characters I was working on, which all comes together in the final design.
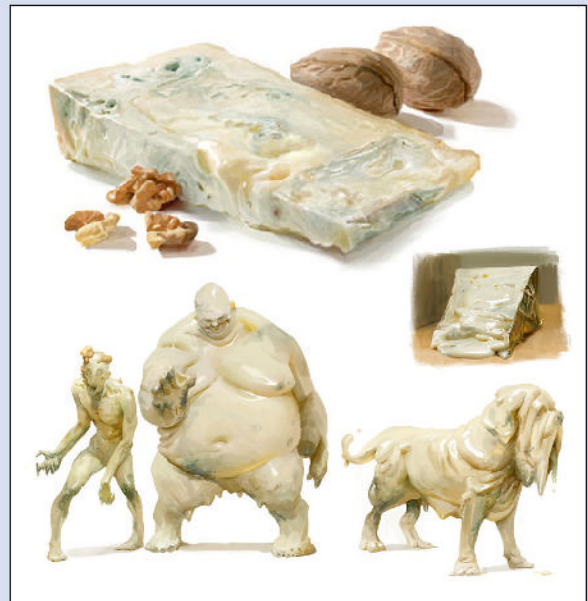
10 THINK OUTSIDE OF THE BOX

Boredom is one of the risks of practising every day, so you need to keep yourself fresh by exploring new ideas. I was studying material rendering once and said to myself, why not do those studies, but at the same time give it a concrete purpose on character or creature design? You can see in this example that I started studying Gorgonzola cheese as a study reference, and then I was asking myself what type of character could I come up with using that material… zombies of course! And there you go, Gorgonzola cheese zombies. Study, but have fun at the same time – think outside of the box!
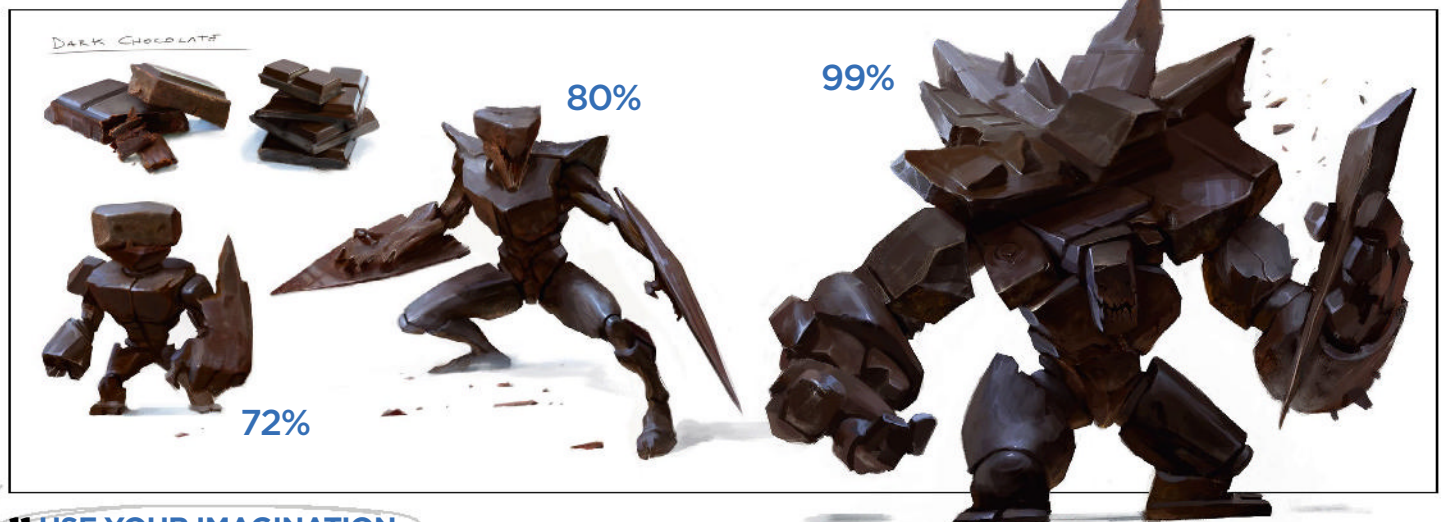
11 USE YOUR IMAGINATION

Imagination is special, it truly is what make us as human beings and artists so special – the curiosity that we have inside that moves us to explore new things. I was doing a rendering study of dark chocolate, and then I said, what about doing a chocolate golem? And what if the purity percentage of dark chocolate represents the choco golem's evolution? From the lower percentage and smaller state of the golem to the highest percentage and biggest, more menacing state of the creature. You will never look at dark chocolate the same way again… ➡➡

12 ETHNICITY

The world is beautiful and varied, and as a character designer you should create believable characters that are representative of the world as we know it. This image is an example, I always try to add variety to my characters to be more inclusive and respectful; we are all human beings and that's the beauty of it. You can see here how I sketched different ethnicities, trying to achieve the core elements of their unique features. If you feel like you cannot represent an ethnicity correctly, then it's time to do more studies!

13 SIMPLIFY VALUES

Values are the most important element, always. They dictate the amount of light and dark contrast in an image, and you must practise a lot to learn how to use them correctly. One tip is to simplify the value areas into three to five areas, usually in a different contrast as Light, Mid and Dark. Every area should have a dominant value, like you can see on the image here. I have picked in a colour swatch which value is dominant in each area of the design. Inside of each macro area you can find different values too, but their presence is relatively small in contrast with the dominant value.

Three major values

1 Light
2 Medium
3 Dark
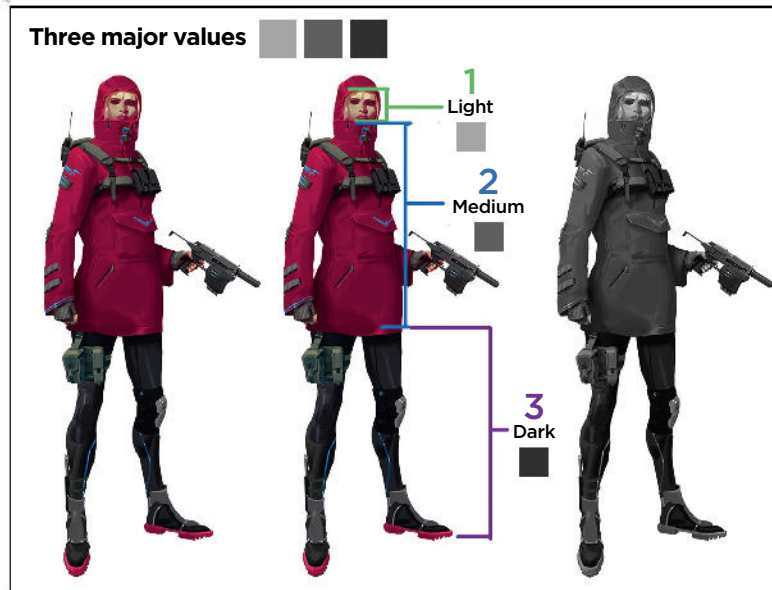
14 BALANCING COLOURS WITH SATURATION

Dealing with colours is not easy; sometimes you feel lost or your colours feel too neutral or muddy, or the opposite, too vivid and saturated. Balancing colours is a skill you have to master, but it requires time and research. One tip here that I can share, and I use frequently, is to first select a limited colour scheme, which is including a range of colours from saturated to desaturated. You can see by the colour swatches in this image how I used three groups of colours that are saturated, mid and desaturated, alternating those colours to achieve harmony in the image. Here I am never using the most saturated colours too close to each other, unless for very small areas, but alternating them with more desaturated or mid colours.

> ❝ Understand where the key light is positioned and how it hits ❞

Saturated ⟷ Desaturated

15 GRAPHIC SHADOW SHAPES

When I'm sketching and want to add more volumes to the character, I always think about the shadow shapes in a more graphic way. The shapes of shadow need to be placed accurately, and my suggestion is to understand first of all where the key light is positioned and how it hits the character on the surface, creating the shadow shapes that communicate the volumes. The shadow shapes can be made by one value or a few. If the shadow shapes are well placed the image will have enough contrast and you don't necessarily need to add more rendering, but if you do you can add some soft blending transition in between the edge of the shadow shape and the local colour or value of that area. ✹

Technique focus
BE PREPARED

Ann Maulina, Indonesian comic book artist, talks the importance of the pre-production phase of an illustration

"This artwork is one of four illustrations I did for the 'Fancy Hat' art series, the main focus of which is the ethnic-fantasy headdress designs.

For me, it's essential to do a proper pre-production phase, such as mood boarding, thumbnailing, concepting, and establishing a colour scheme. A coloured sketch is the final result of all the pre-production I did. It has the design, composition and colours ready, so all I have to do after that is just the rendering. I found it easier to throw colours at the sketching phase so I won't have solid lines to limit my colour-scheme exploration. With a colour sketch ready, I can see where I'll be going with the artwork."

Artist PROFILE
Ann Maulina
LOCATION: Indonesia

Ann Maulina is a comic book artist from Indonesia. She is the author of the Raruurien webcomic, and also drew Horizon Zero Dawn: The Sunhawk.
bit.ly/3T2ITOj

Photoshop
DESIGN UNIQUE CREATURES

Aleksa Drageljevic explains his process when designing fantasy creatures, mixing existing elements with random prompts

Artist **PROFILE**

Aleksa Drageljevic
LOCATION: Serbia

Aleksa is a student of illustration at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, set to graduate in 2023. His main focus is character design.
bit.ly/3dYaMXK

This little creature came about when I was taking part in a drawing challenge with a couple of my friends. To put it briefly, we were drawing dragon-inspired creatures daily, with each day having a specific prompt – for example, this dragon's prompt was 'Flytrap'.

I find prompts and ideas like this very fun, it's unusual to imagine a dragon that also has elements of a flytrap plant. I enjoy working with shapes and always having some distorted, curved or bent aspects to their forms.

Before I start sketching, I try to imagine combinations of the prompts given to me; so in this example I was thinking which parts of the dragon's anatomy should be present, and how to implement plant elements of the flytrap in its design.

In the end, I had the idea to try to combine both the head of the dragon with the shape of the flytrap's leaves. Since the flytrap plants usually have more leaves, and my dragon only had a single mouth, I added some resemblance to the wings to look like leaves. In my final composition I posed it on a small branch holding its head up above, like you would see a flytrap in its natural environment. ➤

How I create...
A 'FLYTRAP DRAGON'

1 First sketch
I started with a pretty rough sketch, trying to get the initial idea down. Since I knew this piece would mostly be painted and had limited time, I didn't go into too much detail. After this I did another cleaner sketch which I used for the final, but this one was enough to convey the overall idea.

2 Paint with colour
I laid down some colours, trying to match the values I wanted. I chose the values based on my setup of lights and shadows. For the painting aspect I limited myself to a mixer brush with a strong texture, basic round brush, and a smudge brush for smoothing out some of the parts.

3 Contrast and texture
I felt that I needed to define a few elements of the creature a bit better, so I upped the contrast and texture in the areas that were supposed to be the main focus. In this case it was the head area. You can see deeper greens in those parts so the contrast catches the eye more quickly.

IN-DEPTH PROCESS

Set up values

Add colours
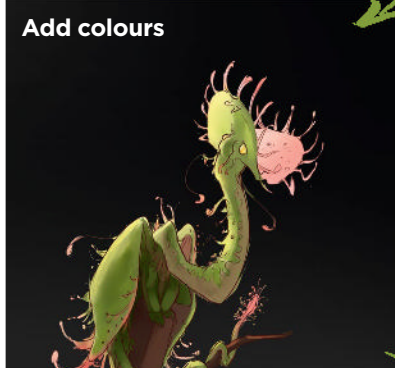
Render
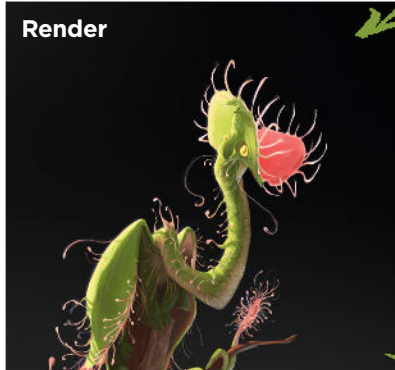
Greyscale of the render

Should have similar values to the initial 'setup' version at the start of the process
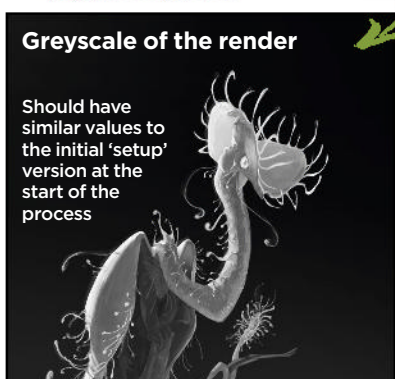
Values

After cleaning up the sketch I started thinking about how the lighting will be set up. I decided on a dark background, meaning I had to make the dragon much lighter so it would stay in focus. The next step was adding colour, after which I frequently check my values (switching to greyscale) so they don't get all mixed up. Your render should have similar values to your initial value setup.
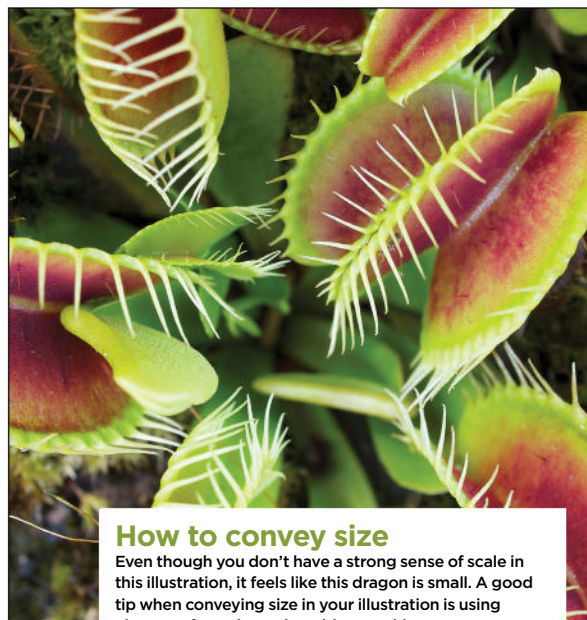
How to convey size

Even though you don't have a strong sense of scale in this illustration, it feels like this dragon is small. A good tip when conveying size in your illustration is using elements from the real world, something you can compare things to, in near proximity of your character. So in this example, even though there aren't many elements, you know that flytrap plants are pretty small, so making the dragon's body even smaller than the leaves makes it look little.

Smaller details

One of the most important things to keep in mind when painting is that you don't have to overdo it. You should think about how people are going see your piece. This one is supposed to be looked at as a whole, so I can leave smaller details like this to a minimum render-wise. That's why most of my painting looks rough when zoomed in.
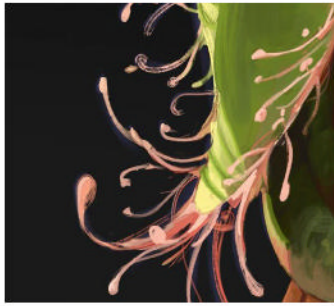
Wing texture

Most of the painting was done with a mixer brush. For this particular wing, I tried to convey a slight texture, a smooth surface, compared to the rest of the body. Since this mixer brush has a strong texture I tried to work around it by choosing colours with similar hue, saturation and values. Also, the brushstrokes follow a similar path.

Pay attention to the lighting setup

When painting, always keep in mind the principles of light. The light is hitting the head from the side, but plants and most organic things are semi-translucent, which means that they will have subsurface scattering. It's like a strong light hitting your fingers or ears from behind and you see a strong red colour, it's because your skin isn't 100 per cent solid. I used a strong, saturated green showing up beneath some parts.

Define the neck

For the neck, I used the same mixer brush, but with higher contrasts and colour values. I also textured it much more chaotically, no strict path of the brushstrokes, trying to convey a more rugged surface. Besides the mixer brush I used a basic Photoshop round brush and the Smudge tool to blend or define a few areas a bit better.

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: FLAT TEXTURED

Rougher texture, mostly for rendering purposes.

MAIL OIL

Textured but with softer edges, used for lineart and rendering.

BLENDER SOFT

Blends harsh value transitions, but has a visible texture.

RHADS-BRUSH_1A

A mixer brush with strong texture, mostly used for rendering.

LIGHTING HARMONY

Concept artist **IL Kim** talks building this amazing desert scene in Unreal Engine

"For this scene I used Unreal Engine to build the desert, then utilised Megascans to create realistic cliffs, rocks and fields. With Unreal Engine I was able to work with my desired scene perspective, which enabled me to focus on the painting process. I value the harmony of the soft-expressed environment lighting and the hard-expressed asset lighting. It's a powerful combination that makes for an interesting composition and naturally draws the eye to a focal point. This step, which involves drawing numerous greyscale or simple colour images, can be realistic, clearer and faster with 3D images in Unreal Engine."
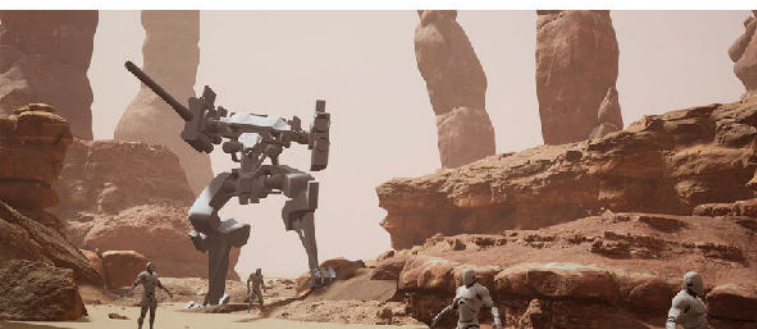
Procreate
STORYTELLING IN CHARACTER DESIGN

In this workshop, **Rafael Sarmento** shows you how to inject your characters with personality and underlying narrative

Artist
PROFILE

Rafael Sarmento
LOCATION: Brazil

Rafa is an illustrator, character designer and cover artist for the entertainment industry. Also, he's a pizza addict. **https://bit.ly/3yt0SV5**

One of the things that inspires me the most about being an illustrator is the possibility of embedding every fibre, every pixel of your artwork with a sense of narrative that's happening right below the surface of the canvas – conveying an underlying story, just as if you're capturing a moment in a storyline that's already in motion. Sure, we can do this with sequential art, like comics, but I do love the story-oriented approach of creating an illustration that's a vertical slice of an ongoing narrative – without the 'before' and the 'after', just a glimpse that will entice our imagination.

What we're doing in this workshop is exactly that: creating a scene with compelling characters that will make us ask questions, and lead us to inspiring places. I feel that asking questions is more interesting than answering them, at least in the context we're dealing with here, so our goal will be to develop a piece that will inspire others to pursue those answers their own way, through their own sensibility lenses.

I'm doing this workshop illustration using Procreate for the iPad Pro, but I'm making sure you can apply any of these fundamental ideas using whatever support you're familiar with. This guide is more about the subjective creative process, not so much the drawing and painting foundations.

So grab your pencils or brushes, our story starts now.

1 Develop the concept
This is where the fun begins! I start sketching possible ideas and compositions that might help me come up with a mini universe, where my characters will inhabit. I want something that feels like alchemy-meets-astronomy, in the form of a sorceress-type character (and her familiar). I find a sketch I like, and move on.

2 Lay down the sketch
Based on the (incredibly loose) first sketch, I start to develop that idea into something less abstract. I know I have this character and some sort of creature as the companion, but here's when I start thinking about the storyline I want to convey through the piece. ➡➡

The Astromancer and the Stupendous BARON GEKKO
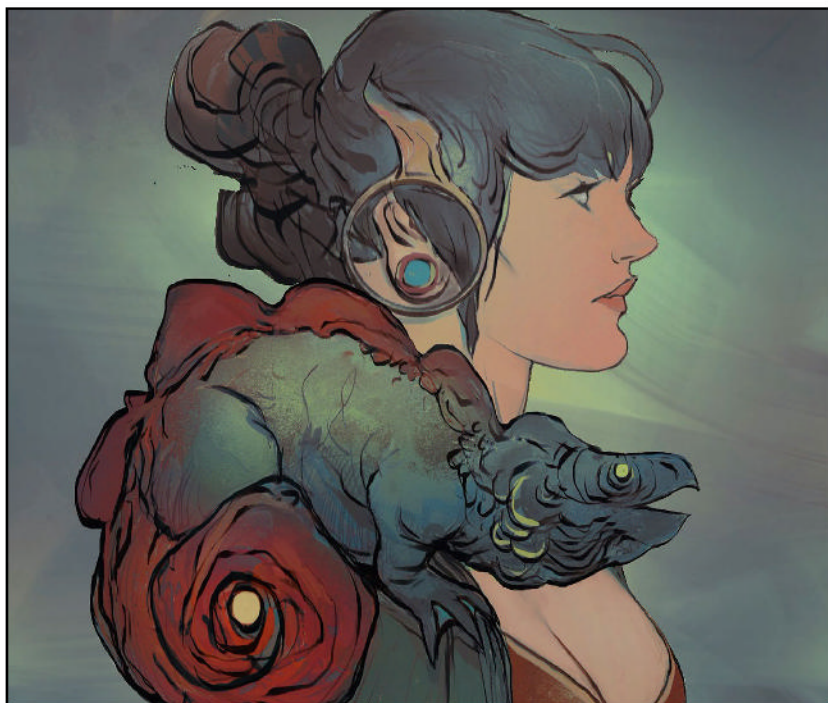
3 Set the mood

Before I even set definitive designs and composition, I usually start laying down some very basic colours. This helps me to better shape the mood I'm looking for, and that will inform my decisions along the way, allowing the idea to breathe and flow freely as I paint. It's a living process for me, always, as this allows me to do whatever the image 'asks' me.
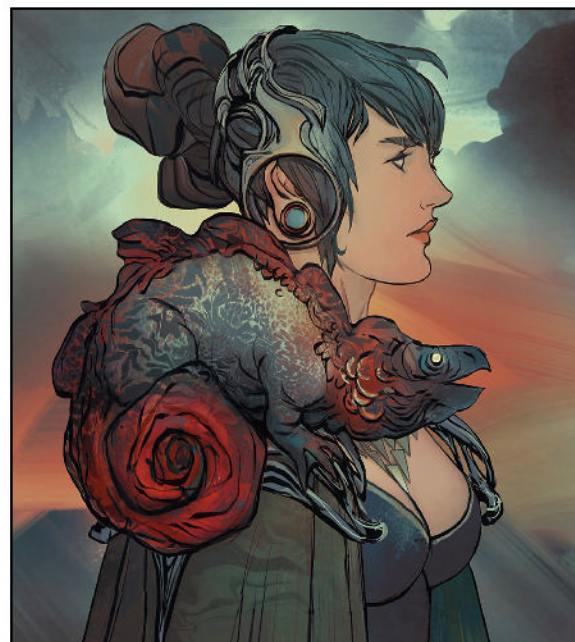
4 Consider the intentions

At this stage, I'm starting to understand what the illustration will be about, based on the constant brainstorming that occurs in parallel to the drawing process. I have an idea what will require some sort of fancy costume design, so I start playing around with the head piece and the shoulder piece, over which the lizard friend rests upon.
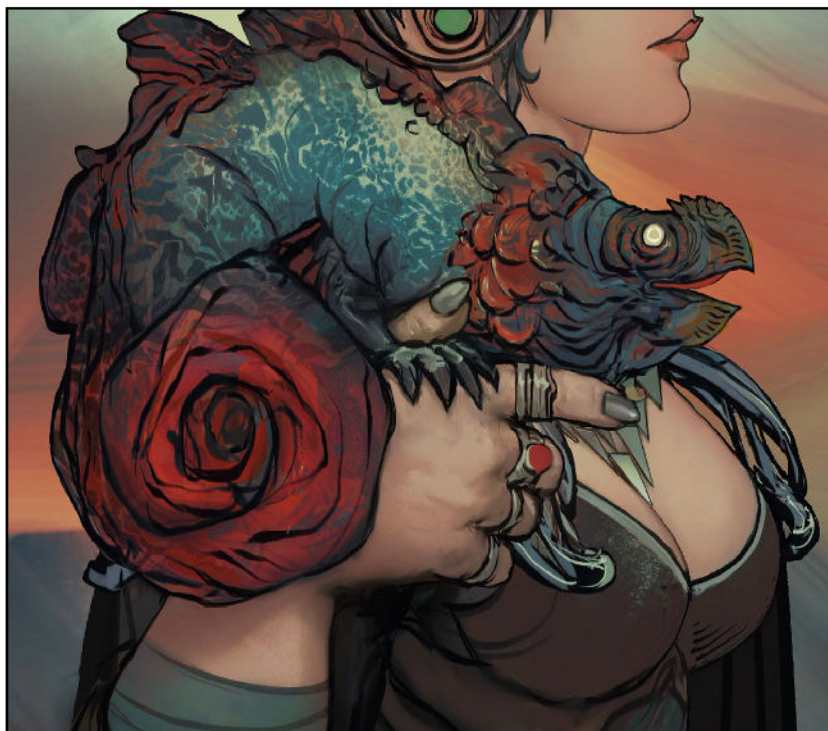
5 Support your friends

At this stage I hadn't precisely finalised what this character will be (maybe a warrior, or a sorceress?) and so with regards to her pose, I had kept my options in the open until now. I think that she might be someone important, but so is her alien reptile friend. So I give the little guy a resting support with her arm, as if he's just as interested in whatever she's looking at.
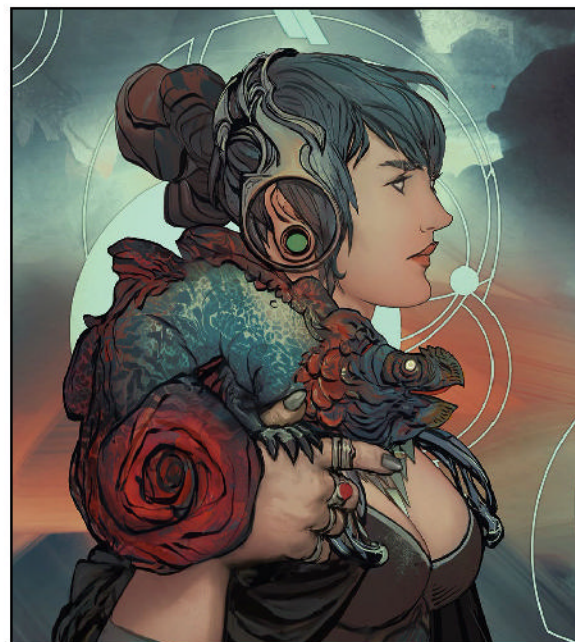
6 Add graphic elements

I'm not sure, at this stage, if I'll add an actual background, so I had to question: what and why? I then think of an element that will bring some spice to the fantasy vs sci-fi mood I'm creating: a deconstructed version of a halo, in a non-figurative way. This will juxtapose the character's silhouette in two ways, by adding an interesting element in the background and also balancing the composition.
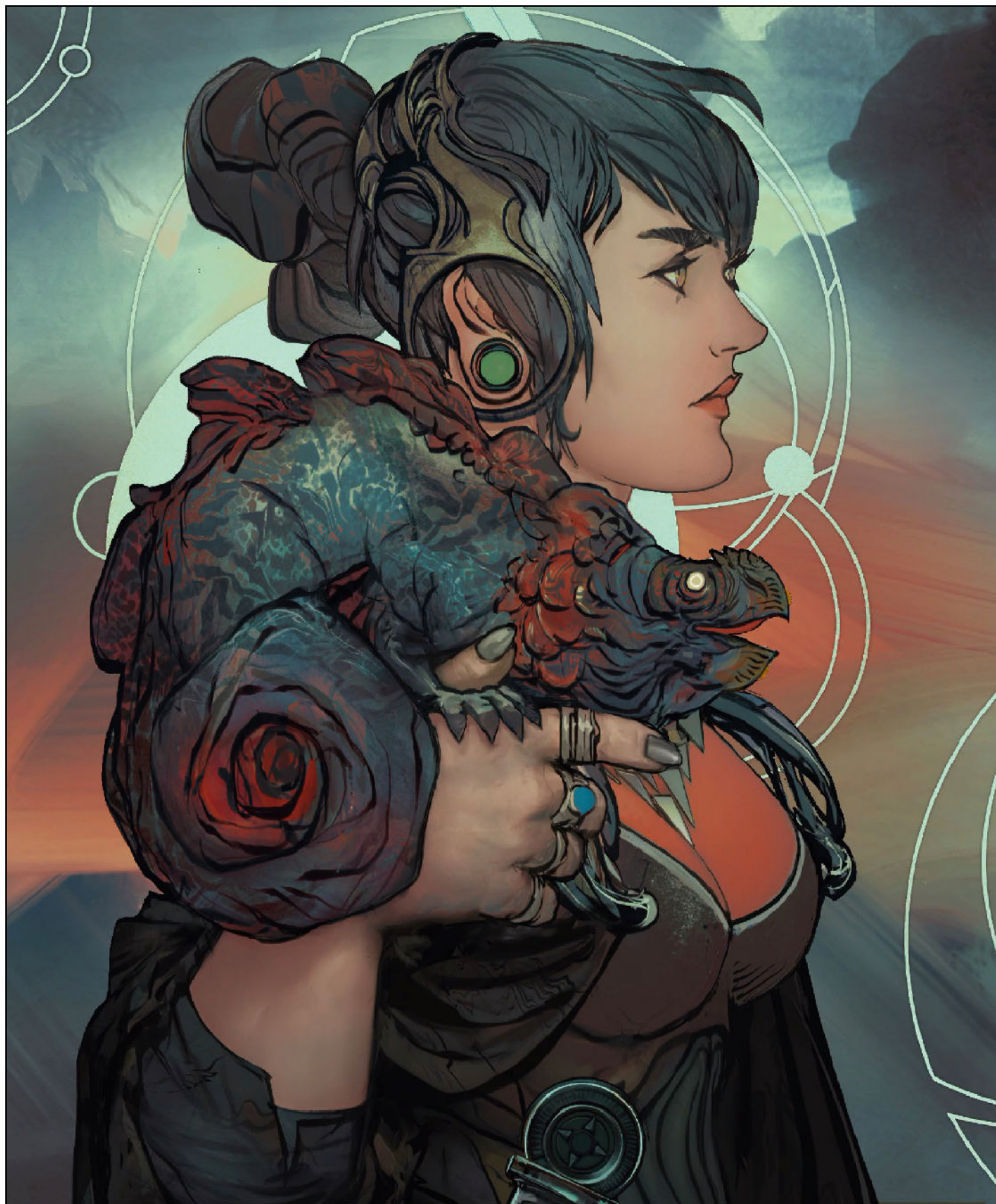
7 Technology or sorcery?

I've figured that she's some sort of sorceress, maybe dealing with fringe science that borders on magic, so my design decisions will now support that scenario. I start adding accessories and costume details that will reflect the nature of this character, even if just through suggestions and visual cues. It's now an otherworldly setting, perhaps a hyper futuristic world where magic and science are indistinguishable.
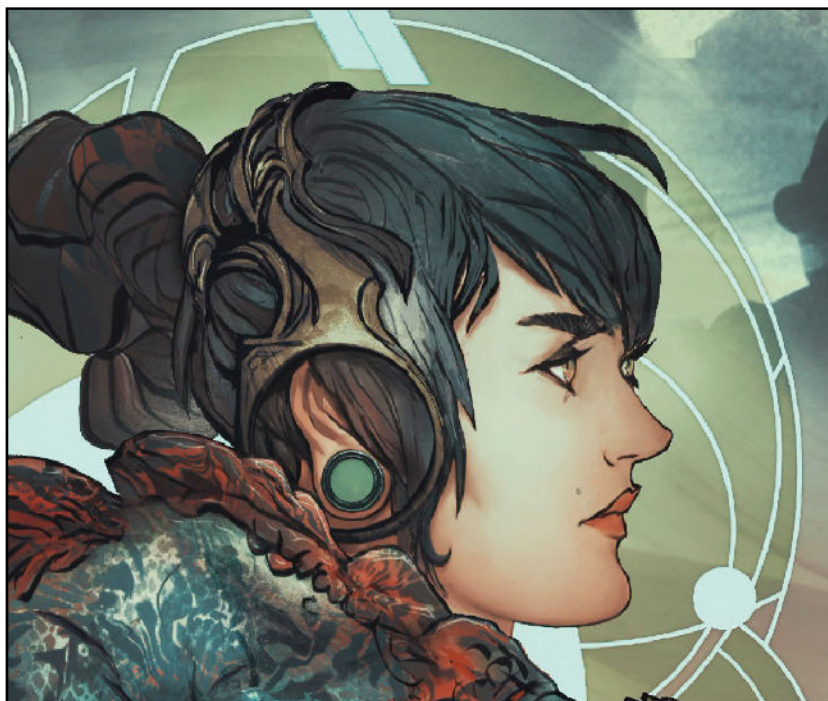
8 Book cover-esque

This is a still image, not a dynamic scene, much like a book cover would be… and then it hits me: how about turning this into some sort of poster or cover? Maybe for the imaginary book where this story is happening? I like this. The 'halo' becomes a subjective element now, taking the development of the concept even further, encasing the characters.

9 Baron what?

The characters now have names! For now, I'll call her Aura and her companion becomes… the stupendous Baron Gekko. Why is he a baron, what is happening? These are some of the questions I want you to make, when you see the illustration and read the little title seal.

10 Solidifying the (visual) backstory

I've figured that Aura should be a special kind of 'supernatural scientist', something that might merge the fantasy atmosphere with the sci-fi undertones I've been tweaking so far. I change her title to "The Astromancer", which in this specific context I'm creating, would be an alchemical scientist and occultist figure that relies on the observation of the universe as a divination method. I add tattoos that resemble maps and charts, maybe related to the technologies she uses for her craft.
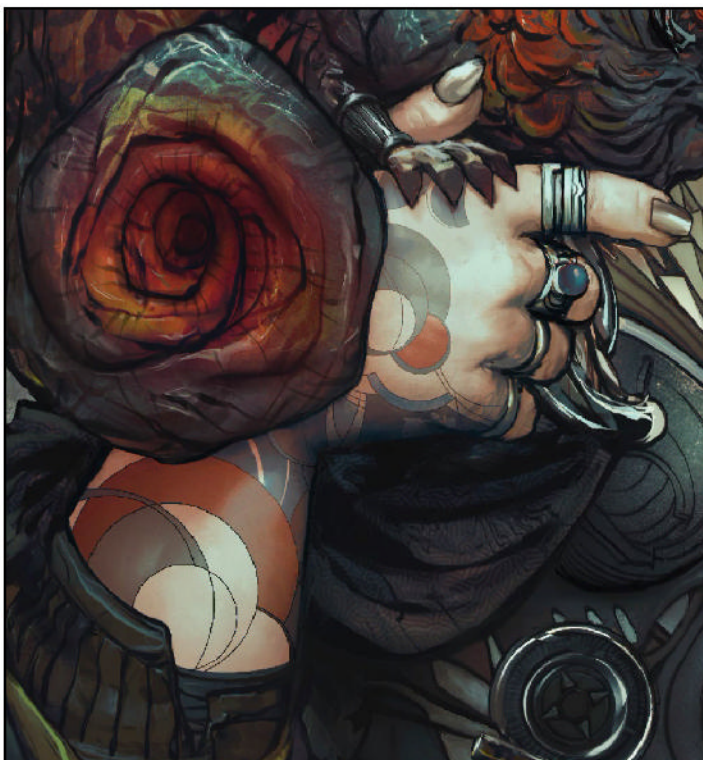
11 What about that background?

I create a rich textural surface that resonates with magic, with the suggestions of woods and all the earthy tones, but then realise it might not fit the sci-fi-esque narrative. So, I scrap the background and start over. These changes are an integral part of my creative process, and help me to achieve (usually) more interesting ideas in the end, than if I just stuck with what I had in the beginning.
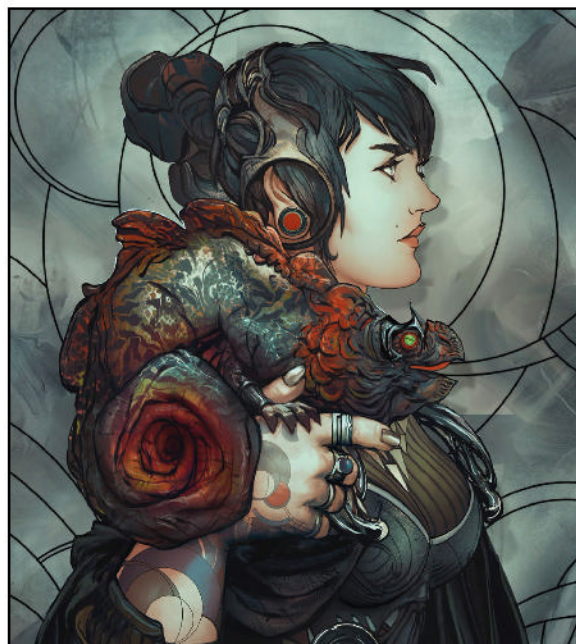
12 Narrative considerations

Thinking about her astro-related tattoos, I realise the background should reflect that, and push this fantasy scene a bit further into the sci-fi direction, changing the balance of the whole concept. I design the rings on a separate layer, and then start to apply and adjust it to the panel or wall behind her, almost like this is the place where her science magic happens.
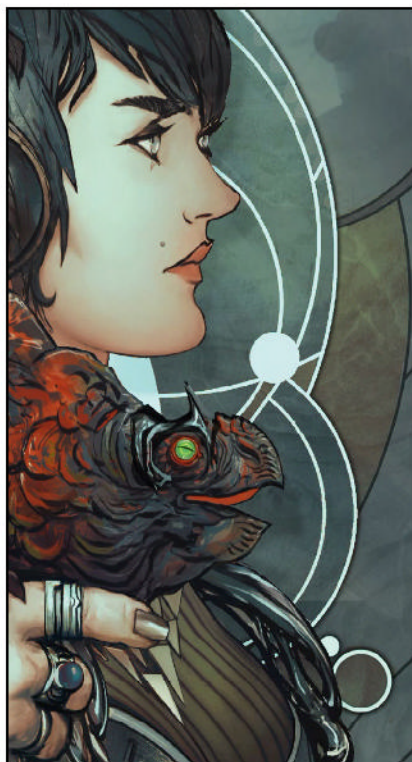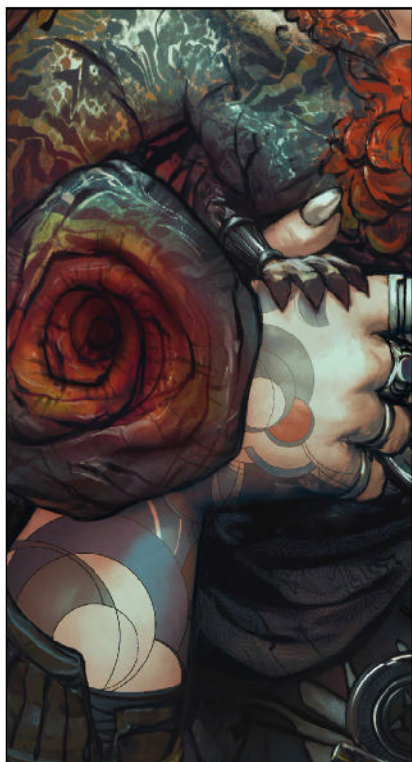
13 Finish up the details

I work on her sleeve tattoos and overall costume, to make them match the astrophysical/mystical wall behind her a little more. Making the 'halo' structure integrated with the wall gives me exactly what I needed, and now all the little details and decisions will be made to reflect the nature of the character even more.

14 Final touches

Now it's a matter of nitpicking the last details, adjusting colours and fine-tuning until the illustration is finished. Knowing when to stop is a completely subjective and personal thing, and with that said, I hope this workshop will help you to achieve your own storytelling-driven illustrations, and inspire others.

ImagineFX
Reviews

ARTIST'S CHOICE

Artist's Choice Award
Art resources with a five-star rating receive the ImagineFX Artist's Choice award!

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

6 PRODUCTS ON TEST

HARDWARE

78 iPhone 14 Pro Max
What does this high-end new upgrade from Apple have to offer the creative?

79 Seagate Spider-Man FireCuda HDD
If you're a Marvel fan and in the market for a new hard drive, this may well be for you.

COMICS

80 Batman: Fortress
A new six-issue Batman adventure… is it worth your time?

80 Eight Billion Genies
Get immersed into the chaotic world in which every single person gets one wish.
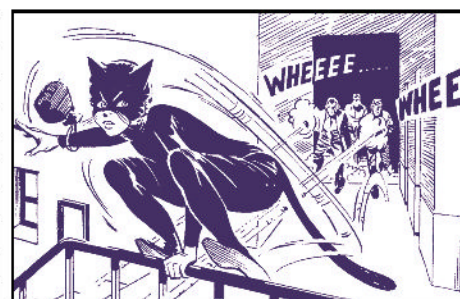
81 The Best Of Cat Girl
A collection of original stories (plus one new) starring the catsuit-wearing heroine.

81 Rocketeer: The Great Race
An action-packed, 40th anniversary celebration of the high-flying Rocketeer.

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

Everything from the screen to the camera, its interface, battery life, and performance all do a great job. An excellent package – albeit an expensive one.

All iPhone images © Apple

iPhone 14 Pro Max

TOP-TIER Are updates like Apple's Dynamic Island and improvements to the camera enough to make the 14 Pro Max the creative's next iPhone?

Price £1,199/$1,099 **Company** Apple **Web** www.apple.com

The first question we asked ourselves when reviewing the iPhone 14 Pro Max was, what does it have that the iPhone 13 Pro Max doesn't? Especially given the fact both phones look so similar.

With its predecessor already among the best smartphones of 2022, it would take quite something to outdo it. The most obvious upgrade in the 14 Pro Max is that Dynamic Island, a novel take on the punch hole and pill-shaped selfie camera cutout we've seen in Android phones for a few years. Then there's the new, improved camera system, with its bigger sensors and higher resolution that should make the 14 Pro and Pro Max the best iPhones for photography. And in daily use you'll also notice the new 14 Pro Max's Always-on Display – how can you not, the screen never turns off!

But can it make for a good phone and creative tool, for painting and drawing on the move? We take a look

at its design, performance, features and upgrades to form our verdict

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Anyone who was hoping for a major design change in the new iPhones is out of luck. From the back, the iPhone 13 Pro Max and 14 Pro Max look virtually identical. Both feature three stovetop-styled cameras, both enjoy a frosted glass lustre, and both have stainless steel metal frames that are very, very polished.

Many were expecting a USB-C connector this time around, bringing the iPhone Pro family in line with the

The new camera specs are a big upgrade. For creatives looking to take reference photos it is at the top of the pile.

The Dynamic Island makes a feature of a problem, but doesn't completely overcome the visual disruption.

iPad Pro and virtually every other smartphone, laptop and smart device launched in 2022. But no. Apple is attached to its Lightning connector, and it isn't budging yet. In true iPhone style, there's no headphone jack either.

It's the front of the phone where things start to look a little bit different. We've spent years getting used to the iPhone notch, where the selfie camera and Face ID sensors live. These have been shrunk and now live in a pill-shaped cutout in the top centre of the screen. In true Apple fashion, a design problem – components cutting out a portion of the screen – is turned into an opportunity to make a visual
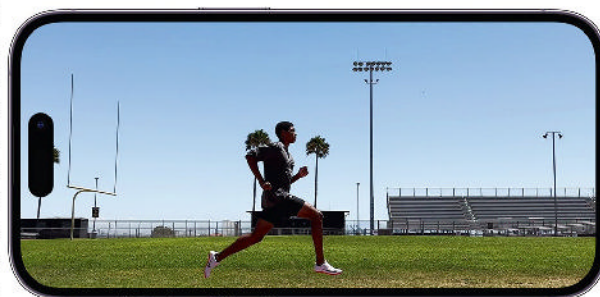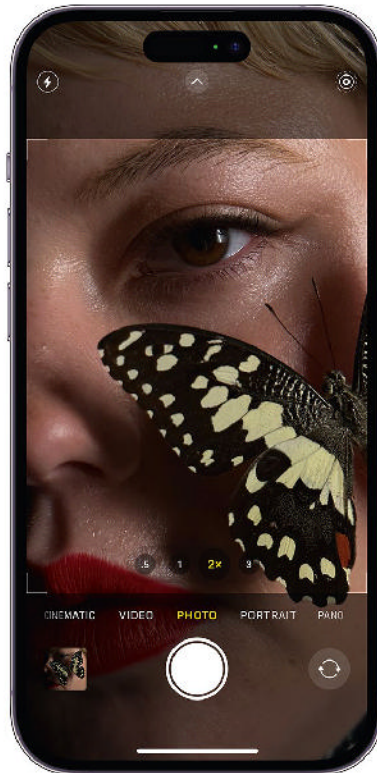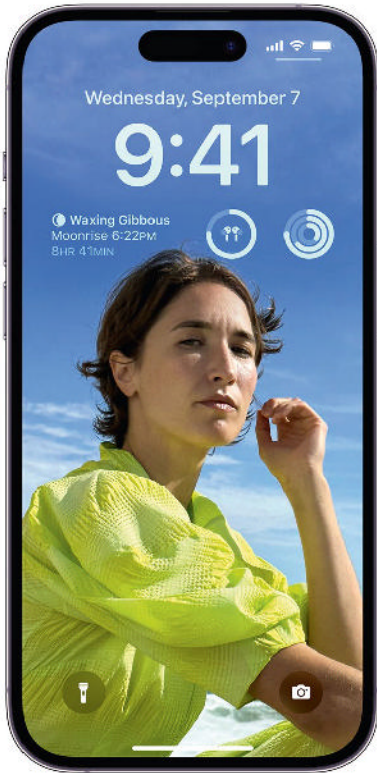
While the cameras have been updated, the camera app remains familiar and intuitive.

flourish, and so, the Dynamic Island was born.

The front panel of glass on the 14 Pro Max is a Ceramic Shield, but don't be fooled. If you have the phone face down on even a smooth table, you can expect micro scratches, so we'd urge you to get a screen protector.

CAPTURE THE WORLD

On a day-to-day level, the camera upgrade is probably the most enticing aspect of the new 14 Pro Max, with the resolution climbing from 12MP in the 13

days out of it. That said, it isn't the best-in-class battery champ the 13 Pro Max was on launch.

The iPhone 14 Pro and Pro Max are powered by Apple's A16 Bionic chips, which deliver great performance, and with up to 1TB of storage, the phones should pack plenty of space for music, paintings and photos.

What Apple's done for 2022 is create yet another excellent phone in its portfolio of excellent phones. Is it perfect? Not quite. No matter how it's dressed up with flourishes and

❝ The larger sensor size means the 14 Pro Max is pretty handy for taking reference photos for your art ❞

Pro Max to 48MP. The 14 Pro Max still takes 12MP photos, but captures full-resolution, 48MP RAW files for photography enthusiasts to play with. Apple's also loaded the 14 Pro Max with a wider-than-usual, 24mm angle of view. This, with a larger sensor size, means it is pretty handy for taking reference photos for your art.

The iPhone 13 Pro Max was the phone to beat when it came to battery life, but the 14 Pro Max fails to outperform it. It comfortably lasts a full day, and if you tinker with some settings, you could probably eke two

Dynamic Island branding, the pill-shaped cutout at the top of the screen is a visual interruption. We would have also loved to see Apple go the USB-C route, and include a superior zoom and selfie camera.

Despite those few drawbacks, the iPhone 14 Pro Max is still one of the best smartphones of the year, and arguably, the best camera phone around, and runs creative tools smoothly and efficiently.

It's a worthy option for a creative's shortlist and should remain viable for the foreseeable future.

DETAILS

Specs/features
■ Capacity: 128GB, 256GB, 512GB, 1TB
■ Ceramic Shield front, textured matt glass back and stainless steel design
■ Super Retina XDR display
■ 6.7-inch (diagonal) all-screen OLED display
■ 2,796 x 1,290-pixel resolution at 460 ppi
■ 2,000,000:1 contrast ratio (typical)
■ True Tone
■ HDR display
■ ProMotion technology with adaptive refresh rates up to 120Hz
■ A16 Bionic chip
■ Video playback: up to 29 hours
■ Audio playback: up to 95 hours
■ 4K video recording at 24fps, 25fps, 30fps or 60fps
■ 1080p HD video recording at 25fps, 30fps or 60fps
■ 720p HD video recording at 30fps
■ Camera: 48MP Main: 24mm, ƒ/1.78 aperture, 12MP Ultra Wide: 13mm, ƒ/2.2 aperture and 120° field of view

Rating
★★★★⯪

FireCuda also has drives celebrating Hulk, Boba Fett, The Mandalorian and more.

Seagate Spider-Man FireCuda HDD

Price £115/$140
Company Seagate
Web www.seagate.com

Seeing the pictures of this drive made me – momentarily – lose sight of my normal objective, detachment. I mean, I'm not even that huge a Marvel fan. But come on... this Spider-Man themed drive looks seriously cool.

First, the basics. Like any other external hard drive, this device allows you to store 2TB of media, files and games to free up space on your computer or game console. This drive is super-light, at just 167g, and compact at 14.5 x 80 x 122.5mm. As well as the drive itself, you also get a USB 3.2 Gen 1 Cable, along with some stickers and a quick start guide.

The best results came from our CrystalDiskMark test, which measured a read speed of 136.44 MB/s and a write speed of 136.12 MB/s. If your main interest is in scheduling regular backups, transfer speeds may not be so important to you.

It remains a fact, though, that this special-edition hard drive costs significantly more than others. And while it does the job perfectly well, there's not really much that makes it stand out technically. So it really comes down to whether the Spider-Man styling really floats your boat. If so, knock yourself out, and enjoy this nifty HDD.

RATING ★★★★☆

© DC Comics

Robertson's visuals end up feeling like a very weird fit for such a relatively straightforward blockbuster-style Batman tale.
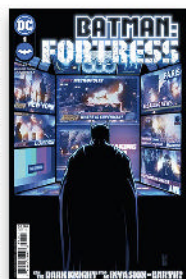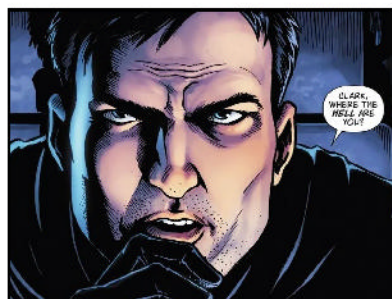
Batman: Fortress

ANGRY ALIENS An intriguing yet haphazardly told narrative that needs to work on its tone to be truly engaging

Issues 1-3 **Writer** Gary Whitta **Artist** Darick Robertson **Publisher** DC Comics

So many Bat-related comics are being released at the moment that any new contenders need something attention-grabbing to stand out from the crowd. In the case of six-issue miniseries Batman: Fortress, it's the presence of writer Gary Whitta (best known as the original screenwriter on Rogue One), but even that can't make up for all the flaws in this messy adventure.

The story begins with a worldwide blackout caused by the arrival of a mysterious alien spacecraft. With Superman missing for reasons unknown, an assault by the Justice League goes badly wrong, leaving Batman as the only hope against a potential alien invasion.

Whitta's screenwriting background serves him well in terms of crafting set-pieces, with issue one's cold open being a stand-out. The pace is kept high across these first three issues, the dialogue is often enjoyable and well-

Shifting from Frank Miller-style grittiness to lurid sci-fi and flippant humour, the comic's tone is not handled particularly well.

crafted, and the overall mystery of whether or not Superman might be descended from war criminals certainly has potential.

Unfortunately, Whitta's handling of tone is nowhere near as effective, and frequently creates moments of full-on whiplash, shifting at a moment's notice. This happens as early as issue one, where in the space of two pages, Batman goes from brutally beating a criminal who's just murdered a young couple, to exchanging action-movie quips with Alfred in the Batcave.

> **❝ The dialogue is enjoyable… but the handling of tone is nowhere near as effective ❞**

Best known for co-creating pitch-black superhero satire The Boys, artist Darick Robertson does pull off some highlights, especially in the action sequences, but is let down by the broad, slightly grotesque edge to his quieter, character-based scenes.

While it's possible Whitta and Robertson might redeem themselves and finally nail the tone with their concluding three issues, Batman: Fortress is currently landing firmly in the "interesting but ultimately failed experiment" category.

RATING ★★⯪☆☆

Follow a group desperately trying to survive the 'wishpocalypse' in this bonkers miniseries.

Eight Billion Genies

Issues 1-3
Writer Charles Soule
Artist Ryan Browne
Publisher Image Comics

Having a wish magically granted has always been portrayed as a potentially dangerous proposition, and new Image Comics title Eight Billion Genies expands this concept to ask: what if everyone on Earth got a wish at exactly the same time?

This manic eight-issue miniseries follows what happens when the entire population of Earth simultaneously (and for mysterious reasons) all acquire a genie that will grant them each one wish. Chaos of course immediately breaks loose, and a low-rent bar in Detroit ends up an unexpected safe zone in the madness, its inhabitants riding out the escalating insanity as the worldwide consequences of wishing get bigger and bigger.

Writer Charles Soule and artist Ryan Browne previously collaborated on the anarchic fantasy Curse Words, and they're in familiar territory here, putting human nature under the microscope while also delivering a fun cavalcade of imaginative hyper-strangeness.

From vampires and unicorns to the reincarnation of Jim Morrison and Ernest Hemingway, these first three issues crank the luridness up to impressive levels. While this offbeat comedy won't be for everyone, the remaining five issues are clearly going to head in some adventurously bizarre and mind-bending directions.

RATING ★★★★☆

This collection features original adventures from the 1960s comic Sally, plus a new story.

The Best Of Cat Girl

Format Collection
Writer RAMZEE
**Artists** Giorgio Giorgetti, Elkys Nova
Publisher Rebellion

The tortured heroine was a staple of girls' comics in the 60s and 70s. These were girls who struggled with cruel parents, school bullies and exploitative adults. Among these woeful tales, the masked sleuth emerged, giving readers a taste of freedom usually only permitted for boys. One such character was Cathy Carter, who helped her father fight crime by donning a magic suit and calling herself Cat Girl.

Cat Girl mostly fell into obscurity with the decline of girls' comics, but for the first time, five stories have been collated into a new edition. Originally serialised between 1969 and 1971 in Sally, they feel a little twee and old-fashioned – Cathy mostly fights cartoonish gangsters, and it's easy to snicker at how cats are always referred to as pussies – but it's genuinely fun too, thanks to its throwback slang, Swinging Sixties backdrop and beautiful art.

The only real disappointment here is the one new story, 2020's 'Cat Girl Returns'. It introduces Cathy's teenage daughter, who finds her mum's old suit and sparks another cycle of vigilante justice. It's obviously a way to introduce young readers to the character, but sadly it's so weighed down with Gen Z trends that it feels shallow, and it's an unnecessary addition to a collection that's all about retro charm.

RATING ★★★☆☆

As a bonus, each issue also contains an oral history – featuring Dave Stevens' friends, family and fellow artists.
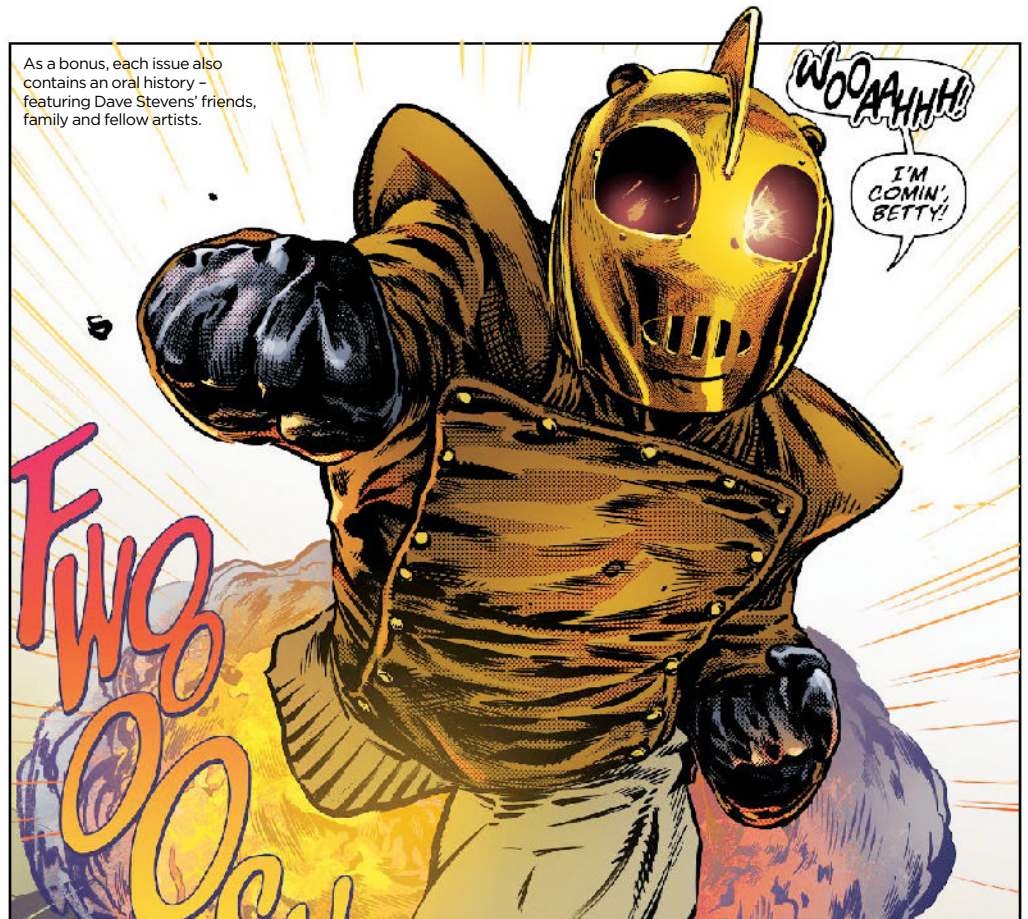
Rocketeer: The Great Race

THE JET SET LIFESTYLE Celebrate the 40th anniversary of this pulp hero with a new, thrilling adventure

Issues 1-4 **Writer** Stephen Mooney **Artist** Stephen Mooney **Publisher** IDW Publishing

The Rocketeer already harked back to the past when it first appeared four decades ago, and this 40th anniversary series is not so much a radical reboot of the late Dave Stevens' 1930s flyboy, but more a subtle update.

Set during the buildup to the Second World War, the four-parter finds the incorrigible Cliff Secord taking on one last challenge: flying an experimental aircraft in a thrilling race from Los Angeles to California. But the competition ends up taking a back seat as he becomes embroiled in a fiendish Nazi plot, and the jetpack itself is only used sparingly – at least

until the rollicking final issue – as Cliff concentrates on his flying skills.

Stephen Mooney's plot is entertaining but slightly rudimentary, while the German caricatures and some of the dialogue would be right at home in a British war comic from the 70s, with the use of terms such as "Englander". Mooney revises some of the sexual politics, with girlfriend Betty (originally inspired by 50s Queen of the Pin-ups Bettie Page) not just there to hang off Cliff's arm – although he inevitably comes to her rescue in the exhilarating denouement.

Though never quite able to emulate the sumptuousness of Stevens' work, Mooney imbues his art with a pleasingly earthy grittiness. While there are hints that this could be Cliff's last adventure, let's hope that isn't the case for either him or Mooney.

❝ Stephen Mooney imbues his art with a pleasingly earthy grittiness ❞

RATING ★★★★☆
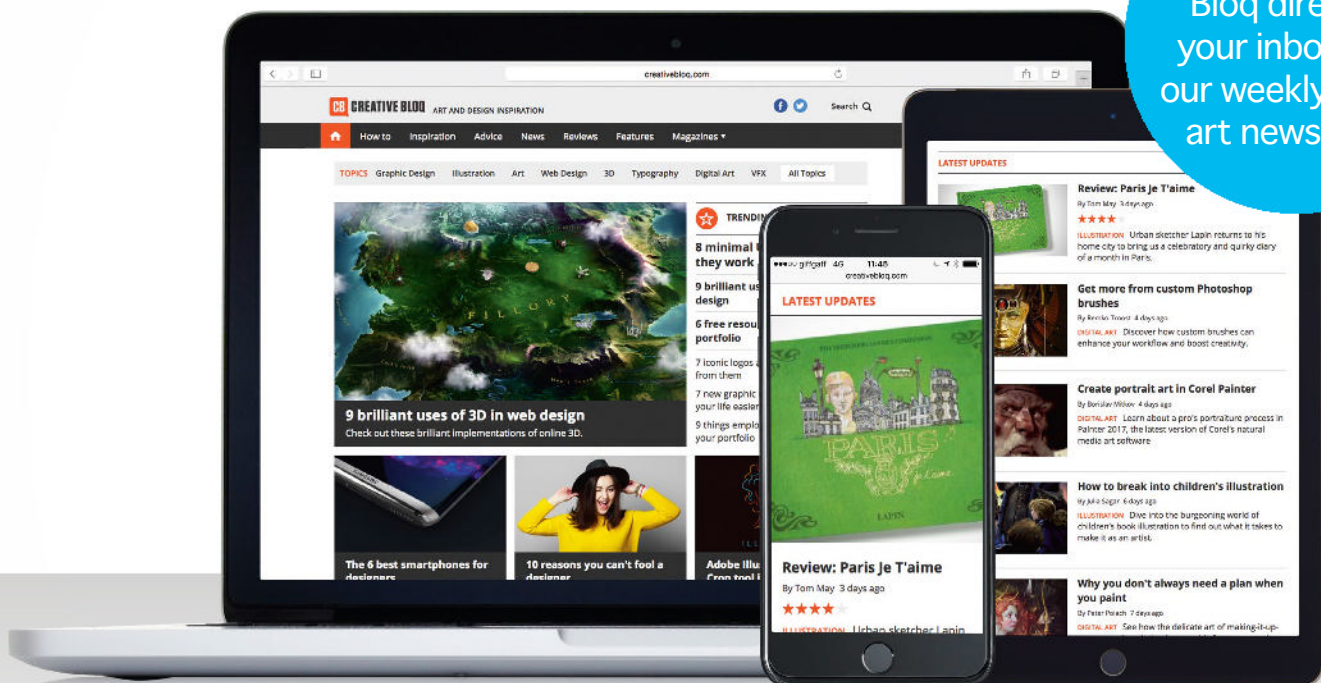
Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists

88

98

84

94

This issue:

FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

Steven Zapata

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Graphite pencil **WEB:** www.stevenzapata.com

Steven is a professional designer and art teacher with over a decade of experience working in video games, theme parks, advertising, and print.

1 AMONGST THE TREES

"This piece was inspired by the gnarled trees I see on my runs through the woods. They're like old friends to me, and I visit each one in turn on my route."
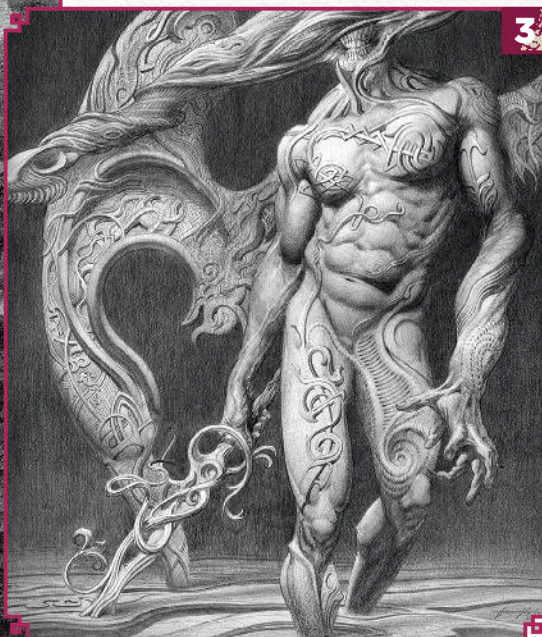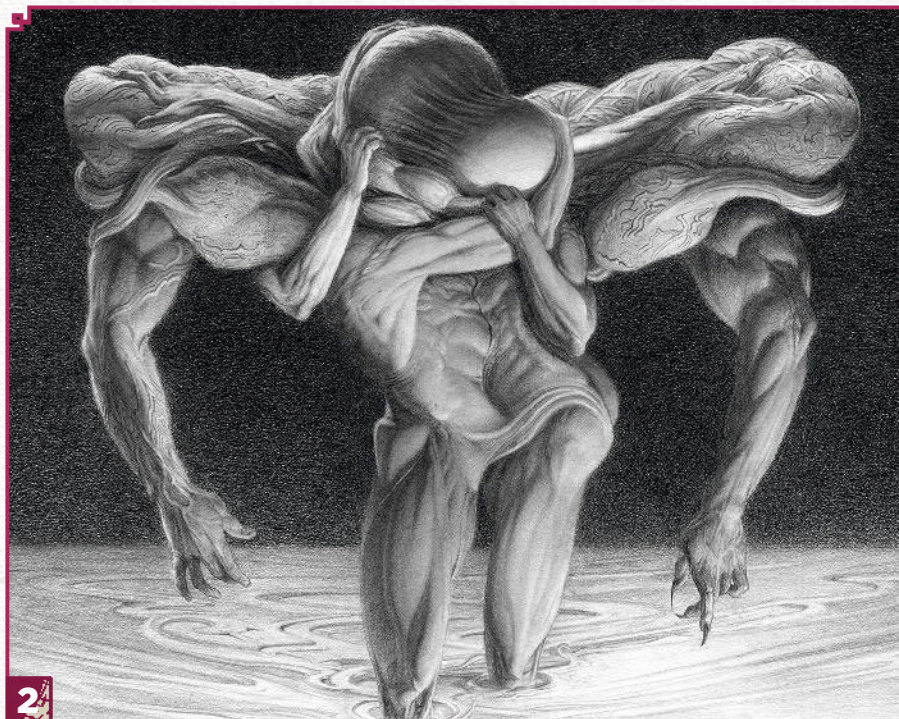
2 BAAL AND ASTARTE

"This image is part of a series depicting demons from John Milton's Paradise Lost. Baal and Astarte are coupled demons who are always mentioned together."

3 THE SWORD OF MICHAEL

"Milton's angels can take any form, so their bodies are a perfect setting for wild transformations. I prefer these abstractions to the common design tropes for holy angels and fallen devils."

Joel Gomez

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Pencil, ink **WEB:** www.joelgomez.net

Joel Gomez is an indie comic creator who is best known as the artist of 'La Muerta', the Mexi-Noir comic book series written by Mike MacLean.

1 LA MUERTA
"Sketch of La Muerta – the leading character of the comic book I've drawn sequential pages for since its inception, which was seven years ago at Coffin Comics."

2 HARBINGER
"A one-hour mixed-media illustration. The purpose of this exercise was to focus on the tonal qualities of the sketch."

3 SANTI
"This artwork depicts the character Santi from the film The Devil's Backbone."

4 **FAUN**
"Mixed-media illustration of the fantasy character Faun from the feature film Pan's Labyrinth."

Oils

PAINT A LARGE-SCALE FANTASY SCENE

PATRICK J. JONES explores creating a museum-worthy painting, demonstrating step by step how he works on a beautiful fantasy scene of epic proportions

Escape from the Valley of the Harpies started with a call from Pat Wilshire, the co-creator of the fantasy art show IX in the USA. Pat told me that a collector in Singapore was creating a fantasy art museum and is interested in whatever works I might have, preferably large works.
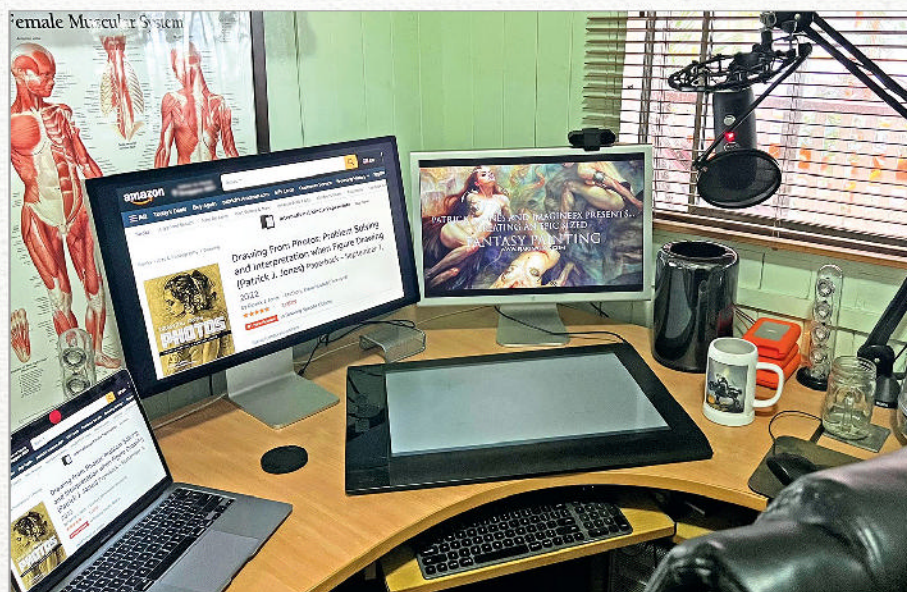
As most of my private paintings are sold on commission or on completion I only had three originals left, one which was 'Solomon's Loss', my very favourite. The collector made me an offer I couldn't refuse, and sadly I said goodbye to one of my beloved children. Solomon's Loss is a fairly large piece at 30 x 40 inches. The collector, a man with a big vision, then inquired about a much larger commission specifically painted for the museum, informing

me that no size was too large. I love painting big, but how big I can work, without renting space outside my home studio, depends on how high my home studio ceiling is – considering the painting will mostly rest on an adjustable crank easel, not on the floor. With the painting already three feet off the floor to start with, I quoted for a size of 72 x 48 inches, as this is a manageable height for me to stand and paint.

With such a large canvas, this means thinking of the painting in two parts for me to be at eye level at any given point.

ANATOMY REFERENCES

In this article I will focus purely on the 'how to paint' steps, with the acknowledgement that I am working with posed life models as I go; my process of working with figure

drawing models is well documented in my books and movies throughout my webstore and YouTube channel.

Although my paintings are completed without art direction during the creative process, I usually give the collector a choice of three ideas at the doodle stage based on their broad request. This takes the pressure off the collector and gives me the freedom to paint the best art possible. The request here is for a barbarian painting including a beautiful princess. With the deal struck and the excitement of what lies in the unknown, I get to doodling some ideas…

Patrick J. Jones is a fantasy artist and teacher. His latest books, 'Oil Painting Masterclass' and 'Drawing from Photos', are available worldwide. www.pjartworks.com

1 Soldiers and harpies

I usually send three thumbnail roughs. The collector likes thumbnail **C** but respectfully requests harpies instead of soldiers. I pause based on my previous life as an illustrator, often pressed into a creative straight-jacket, until I realise it is a beautiful vision. I send a final thumbnail for approval and we are ready to explore further.

2 Avoidable hardship

I paint the colour rough digitally to save time. Although this looks childlike it's the most sophisticated part of the entire process, encompassing the value ranges and colour atmosphere of the finished canvas in a small vision. From here there is no guesswork. In my mindset working without a colour rough is asking for avoidable hardship ahead.

3 Initial sketch

I also send a 'working sketch' for a more realistic view of how the figures will look. Although this is quite tight it's still open for interpretation, as the painting process gains a life of its own and often shows me the way forward. I will tweak the composition and elements as fresh ideas develop in paint.

4 The vast white desert
I take a quick shot with my iPhone for scale. My Parallel Palette is on a camera tripod which I adjust in sync with my easel. I block in an umber wash for a confident start, and the canvas feels smaller now than it did a mere hour ago when it was a vast white desert.

5 Less drag
It's sometimes easier to paint with a rag as it pushes into the canvas weave easier, allowing the next paint layer to go on smoother and with less drag. I use the least toxic mediums to thin my tube paints. I mix 1/3 equal measures of Gamsol, refined walnut oil, plus Galkyd Lite to speed up the drying process.
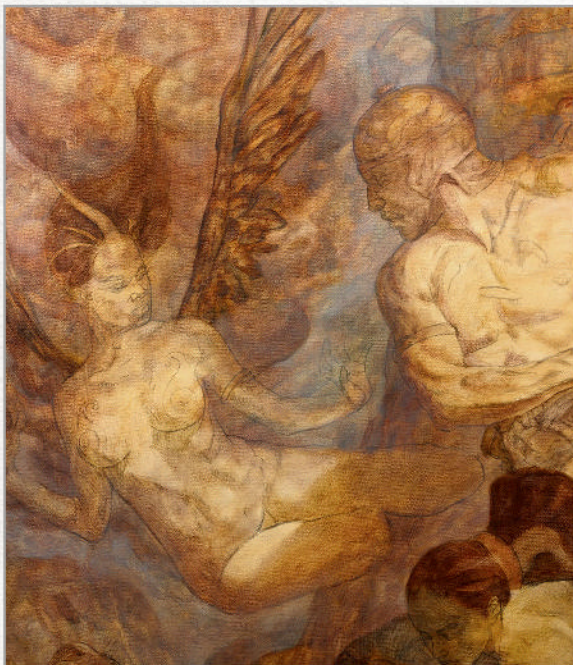
6 The wonderful thing about oils
I continue rubbing the paint on and off with the rag, then flat brush more opaque (less transparent) colours, leaving the pencil sketch still visible underneath the thin paint. When working with oils, you are able to wipe back to the sketch with Gamsol by sealing the sketch beforehand with Liquitex Acrylic Matte Medium.

7 Two action scenes
To manage scale I stay in the top portion and treat it almost as a second scene, although I'm always aware of the holistic nature of the entire painting and step back regularly to access the artwork as a full scene. Here I blend the background with soft brushes then go to work on the figures. ➡

8 The great illusion

This is known as the block-in stage. Although this is a flat surface, note that the hard-edged figures seem closer due to the softer background blends and edges. To push the illusion further I add darker darks and lighter lights to the figures, bringing them even closer in the mind of the viewer.

9 The power of glazing

The following day I brush in some thin tints to take away the chalky feel of the flesh tone. Thin layering of colour is known as glazing and is one of the most powerful aspects of oil painting. Glazing can also be used beautifully in watercolour artworks, but the luxurious depth seen in oils is unique.

10 Under the surface

We can also glaze with thin opaque colours, retaining the anatomical work underneath while improving on top. Some oil paintings can appear hyperreal as we can glaze veins and colour under the surface just like real flesh. I'm analysing the upper section here, but I'm also painting the lower section as each layer dries.
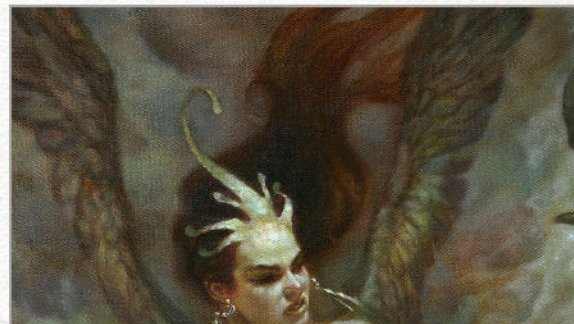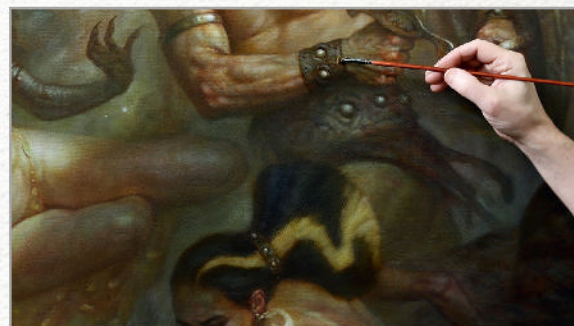
11 What else can you see?

The detail stage can be a deal-breaker, as the painting often grows stiffer due to the continual loss of gesture. I revive gesture where I can, by lengthening the zigzag colour in the maid's hairstyle, and elongating the flow of the flying harpy's hair, always looking for gestural possibilities. What else can you see?

12 One undisturbed vision

I work on the lower section as the upper section dries, and vice versa. Some oil painters working on smaller layered paintings set them aside to dry while they glaze a second painting. This can disturb the flow of the moment, whereas in a large canvas we are always in the flow of one undisturbed vision.

13 The anatomy of style

I teach figure drawing online, as it's key to painting with confidence. Compare this stage to the last to see the beauty of anatomy and how much flow we get utilising figure drawing knowledge with blending brushes. The danger of not learning anatomy is evident in the many paintings that fall apart at this stage.

14 Emotional drama

I glaze flesh tones on top of the modelled figures underneath. I darken the fallen queen's face to denote doom and push the arrogance of the landed harpy as she glares toward the helpless maid. I make sure that every character has a story and link them throughout the painting to create great emotional drama.

15 Final compositional tweaks

I direct the viewer using glazing as a compositional tool, darkening the lower areas and highlighting the flying harpy and the hero. Our eye travels around, returning to the area of most contrast. I add flowing veils not evident in the sketch; a final gestural link between the upper and lower section.

Anatomy quick tips
HOW TO STUDY THE BACK MUSCLES

CHARLIE PICKARD continues his ten-part series of quick tips on anatomy; this month, in the final instalment, he explores a few structural notes on the back

The back of the torso in figure drawing is often viewed as one of, if not the most difficult and complex area of the body to depict and learn. This is not without good reason; the back reveals and hides many of its structures depending on the body fat present in the model, the level of muscular development and even the position of the pose! At times, learning this structure can seem overwhelming to students.

However, if we take a structured approach to learning the many forms that create the back and break down the problem into easy-to-grasp, learnable chunks, we can approach it with confidence.

ANATOMY – PART 10

The first thing that will help us in this endeavour is to understand the reason for this complexity. As with all areas of the human form, the shapes of the back are created by its function. The more complex the function, the more complex the muscles required.

The main functions of the back are twofold. Firstly, it holds us upright. This is one of the special features of the human animal and it requires large, strong muscles.

The second function (and the reason for the complexity), is to allow as much movement of the arm as possible. To allow for this function, we have a free moving scapula. Meaning, unlike other joints in the human body, the scapula

doesn't move within a static joint. It shifts across the ribcage, which is actually the reason for most of the movement of the arm. Try to move your arm without moving this bone and you will immediately understand its necessity. The various movements of this bone across the ribcage accounts for much of the back's complexity. The back is truly a marvel of organic engineering and the following are a few notes on the study of this beautiful form.

*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 *Boney landmarks*

As with all of the body parts that we have looked at so far, any study of the back must begin with a fundamental understanding of the boney landmarks on its surface.

If we start with the landmarks of the pelvis, they will seem fairly familiar, presenting in the same triangle shape seen on the front. The upper back is slightly different from the front view. There is a central landmark in the middle of the back (the 7th cervical vertebra). The two scapula present as two 'L' shapes. As described above, these will move around a fair bit depending on the position of the arms and will call for special attention.

Try finding these landmarks in your own reference images – this is the best way to begin to learn and understand them. ➤➤
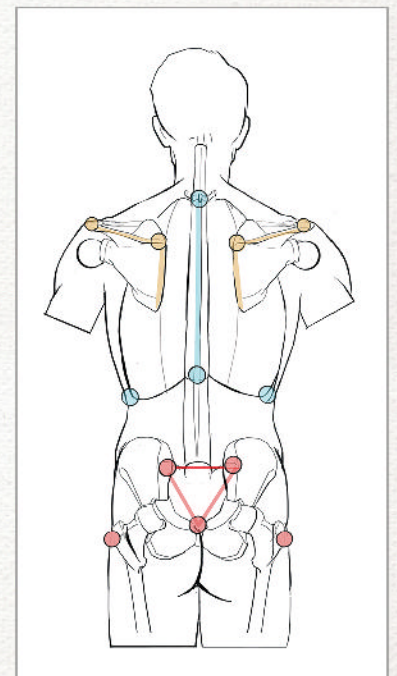
❝ Any study of the back must begin with a fundamental understanding of the boney landmarks on its surface **❞**
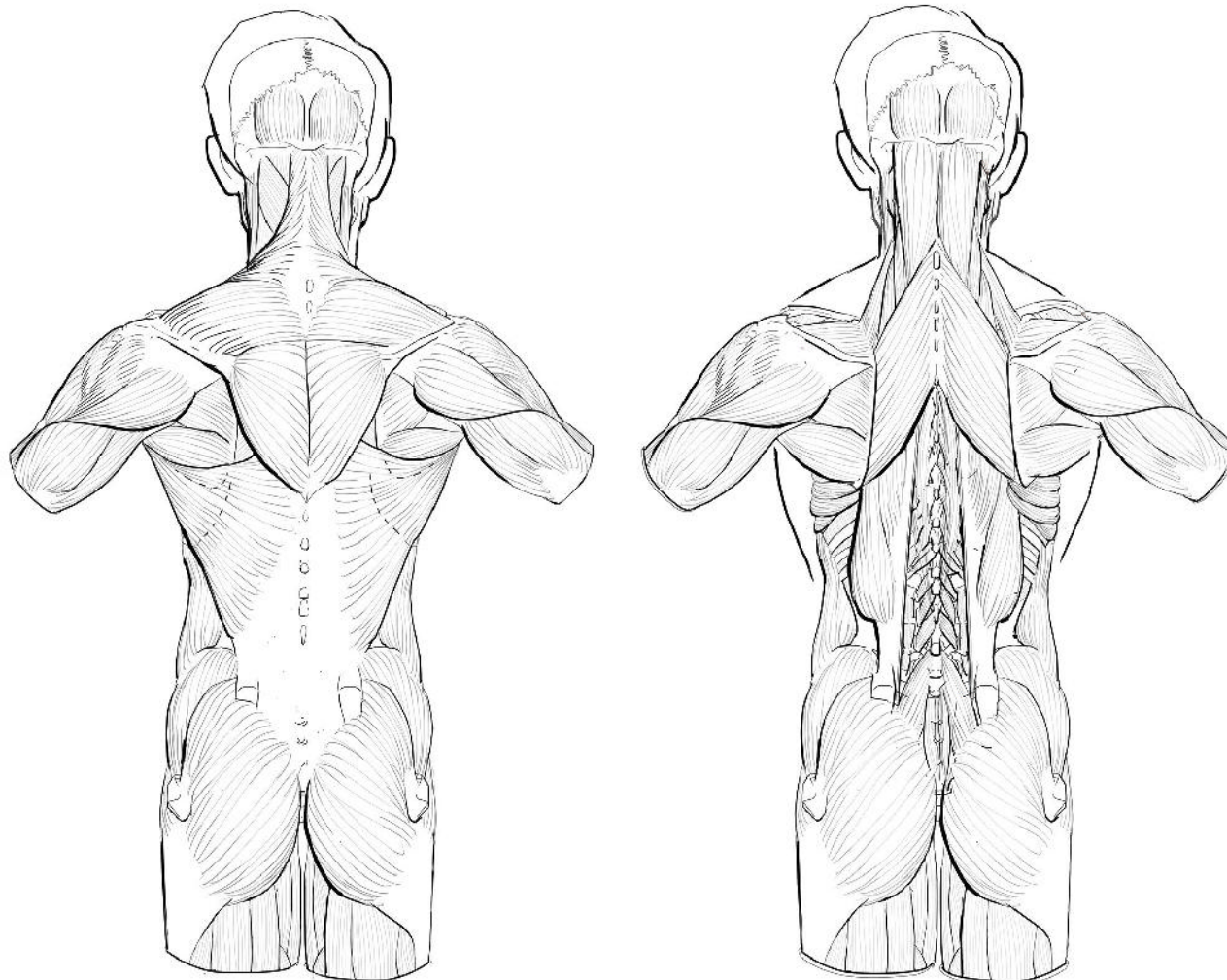
2 Two layers

One necessary aspect to a full understanding of the back is that it is made up of two layers. In fact, the whole body behaves this way (sometimes more than two!) but luckily for us, we can simply concern ourselves with the muscles that affect the surface. On the back, some of these deeper layers come into play in this respect, and so they must come into our study. We can call these two layers of study the superficial and deep layers of the back.

As you can see above, these two layers hold a fair amount of complexity – this may look intimidating, but don't worry! We will simplify the useful information out of these and you will see that they aren't so complicated.
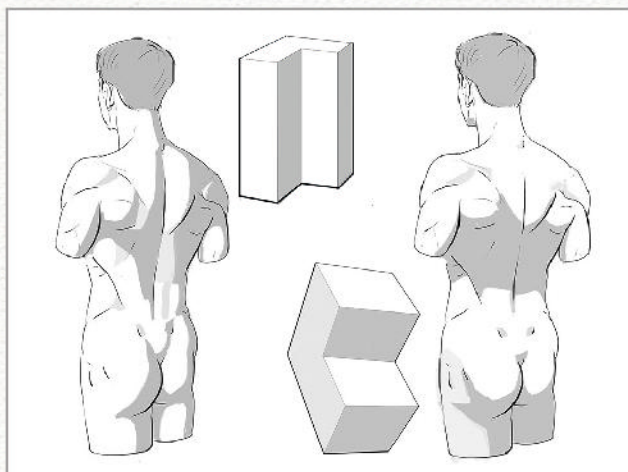
3 Large planes

Before we get into contemplating the various subforms of the back, it is useful for us to consider the whole form as a whole. The first and largest element to consider when we look at simplifying this form is about the major planes of the back.

The back in general consists of two sets of 'stair-like' planes. Both of these sets of planes occur at the same time in the more complex form of the actual back, but it is useful to simplify the form and see these planes in isolation. Seen on the left, I have illustrated the simple form, alongside a simple drawing of the back with a simple light thrown on it to bring out these planes.

The reason for these planar relationships lies in the forms of the bones and these should be studied for themselves. However, for the purposes of this article, remembering this simplification will go a long way to helping you to understand the large modelling of the back. These large planar relationships will always play a large part in the shading of this form. Learn them well!

4 Static forms

In order to simplify the back's subforms, I find it useful to make a distinction between the 'Static' and the 'Dynamic' forms of the back. The Static forms will generally make their presence known regardless of position or body type and can act as our anchors for the form.

I generally split these into three pairs, which are:

The spinal erectors – These two forms are responsible for keeping us upright, so they are incredibly strong. I like to think of them as analogous to a playing card 'spade' symbol.

The shoulder muscles – Two egg-like muscles responsible for rotating the arm inward and pulling the arm backwards. Called the Rear Deltoid and the Teres Major, these muscles lead directly off the bone of the scapula and so are often key forms for identifying its placement.

The ribcage muscles – These two muscles attach to the ribcage and are seen all the way from the front to the back. They are the Serratus, a general thickening of the ribcage coming from the scapula, and the Oblique, the same pillow-like form we spoke about last month on the side of the ribcage.

5 Variable forms

The 'Dynamic' forms of the back will change drastically depending on positioning and body type. As such, you should pay close attention to which ones are presenting in each back you draw.

**I also think of these in terms of three stages:**

The Rhomboid – This 'parallelogram' shaped muscle moves diagonally up from the scapula to the spine. Its shape implies its function; it is responsible for the movement of shrugging.

The Latissimus – This 'cape' like muscle is extremely thin, so generally does not assert its own form but reveals what is beneath. However, it thickens into a 'cylinder' like form to the edges and this can assert itself in various ways.

The Trapezius – I like to think of this form as a starfish-like shape that is holding its lower two legs together.
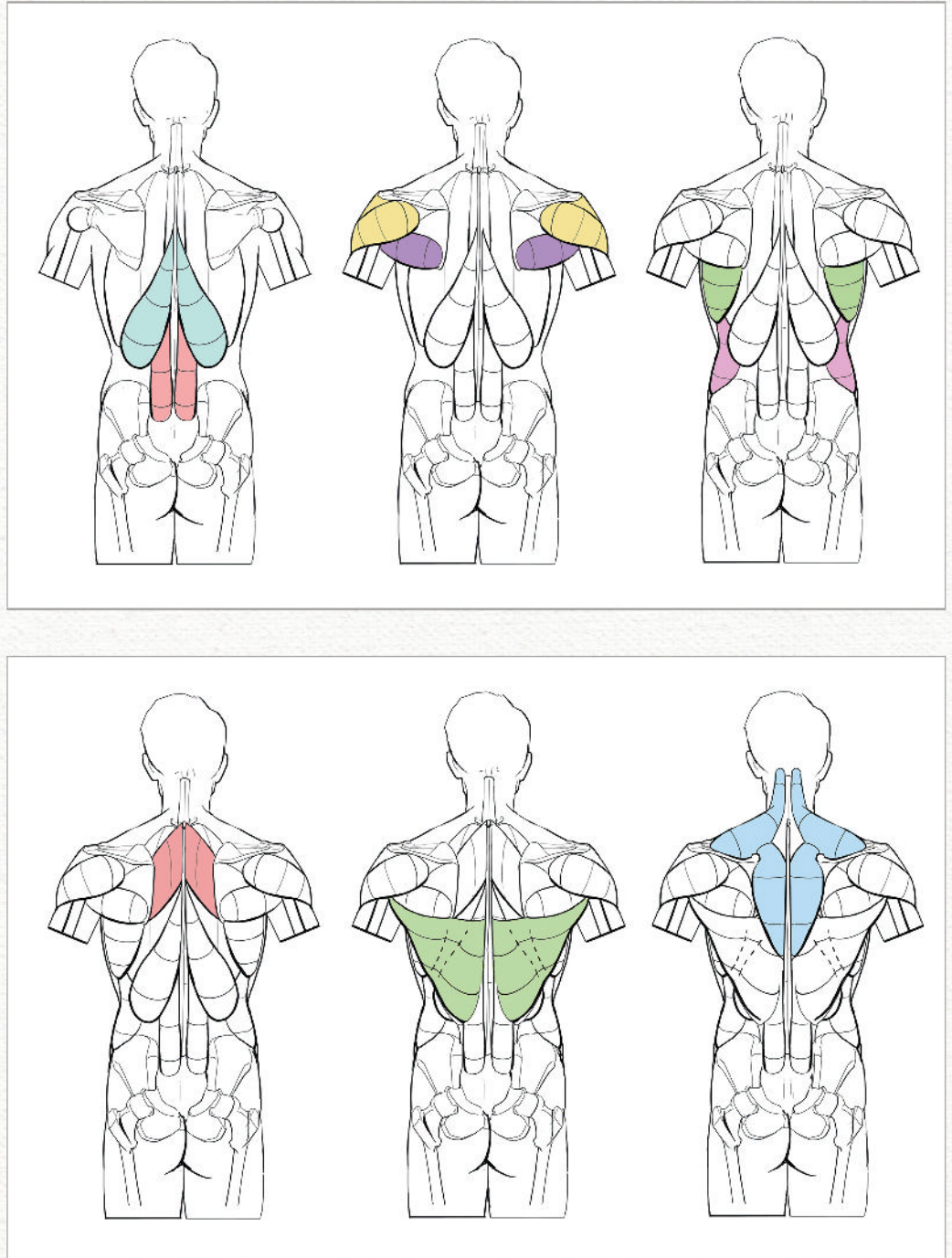
Consisting of five tube-like forms, this muscle is responsible for many different movements – and as each of the five segments can activate independently, it varies a considerable amount. It can also vary in thickness, revealing or covering up the Rhomboid.

If you can memorise these basic forms, you will have gone a long way to understanding the back. Of course, the only real way to absorb these ideas is to practise them again and again. Happy drawing!

❝ The 'Dynamic' forms of the back will change drastically depending on positioning and body type ❞

First Impressions

� *Lucas Graciano* �

The multi award-winning artist talks how he got started

Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?
I grew up in San Diego, California. As a kid, I would ride my skateboard down to the local game shop where they carried fantasy cards done by artists Frank Frazetta and Boris Vallejo. The art on these cards forever made a mark on me. This was just the beginning though. A comic store opened up in town and this is where I'd learn about the San Diego Comic Con, which opened up the art world to me. Out of high school, I found the Watts Atelier of the Arts school, which was in a neighbouring town. This is where I gained the skills to be able to work as a professional.

What, outside of art, has most influenced your artwork?
Books, movies and video games definitely played a big part, just to name a few. Over the last several years I've been able to travel the world, and I think this has helped influence me in all new ways.

BAASTHEROX
This was a 24 x 18, oil on Masonite cover done for the Dragonbond brand.

© Dragonbond

> ❝ Elements like composition and storytelling can always be improved ❞

MURKTIDE REGENT
This was done as card art for Magic: The Gathering. It's 18 x 24 oil on Masonite.

© Wizards of the Coast

What was your first paid commission, and does it stand as a representation of your talent?
If I remember correctly, it was for a World of Warcraft TCG. It still represents what I like about doing the kind of art I do, but would I show it in my portfolio now? …Probably not!

What was the last piece you finished, and how do the two artworks differ?
I've recently finished a few pieces for a Game of Thrones book. I'd like to think there is quite a bit of difference, seeing that my first commission and these are done 15 years apart. Not just in practised application of paint, but maturity in picture making as well. Elements like composition and storytelling can always be improved.

What character or scene that you've painted do you most identify with?
I did a piece several years ago where I painted a group of villagers fleeing an attacking dragon, while their companion-dragon helped protect their escape. I felt like this piece accomplished everything I love about creating art. It told a good story, its scale was epic, the staging was strong, and it was painted to the best of my abilities.

How is your art evolving? What recent experiments have you made?
I do like to experiment with different materials or techniques, within reason. My clients do expect a certain consistency from me so completely changing something isn't a responsible thing to do. I'll add a colour to a palette, or change a surface I'm working on from time to time. Most experimenting will come from compositional elements, maybe trying out a new lighting scenario or camera angle.

How has the industry changed since you've been working in it?
There are more companies commissioning work now than ever. This keep rates competitive which is good for the artist. As a traditional artist, I've seen the demand for original fantasy art go up. The majority of artists in my field paint digitally, which has its benefits, but being able to sell an original oil painting works better for me.

What does the future hold for you?
Maybe down the road, I'll incorporate my love for travel into my work. Perhaps I'll meld the two and spend more time travelling and landscape painting.
Lucas Graciano works as a freelance illustrator doing book covers and card art for brands like Magic: The Gathering. www.lucasgraciano.com
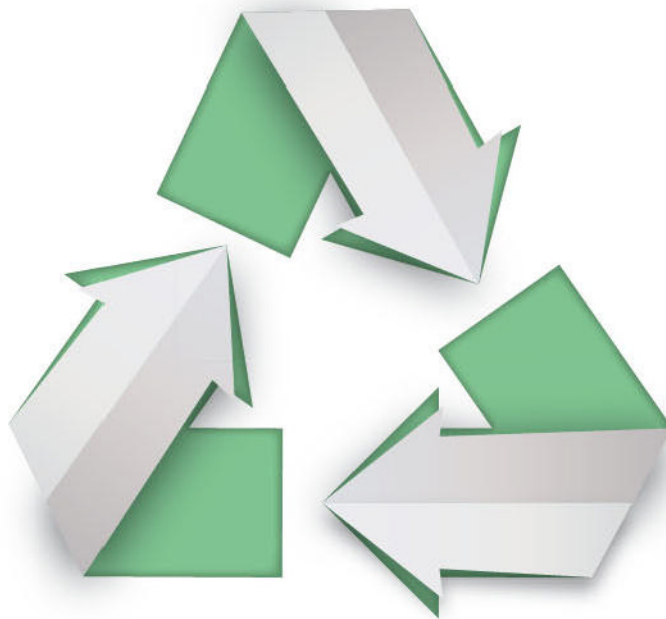
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