

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

WORKSHOP

15 CHARACTER DESIGN TIPS

How to capture simple shape principles in your paintings

ARTIST INSIGHT

WHY CARA OFFERS HOPE AGAINST AI THREATS

DRAW AN UNUSUAL AIRCRAFT INTERIOR

ENHANCE YOUR ART WITH 3D TECHNIQUES

DISCOVER MAGICAL

GAME ART

Explore a fresh take on Greek myths with artwork from indie RPG **Hades II**, plus Q&A with art lead Jen Zee!

HOW BUNGIE CREATED
DESTINY 2: THE FINAL SHAPE

HALO ARTIST **BEN MAURO** ON DEVELOPING ART FOR AAA FRANCHISES

FUTURE
ISSUE 242

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Welcome to... NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX



We have some real video game-themed treats lined up for you this month. If you've come looking for inspiration and a behind-the-scenes look at some of the best projects out there, you won't be disappointed as we take a good look at the art of both Hades II and the latest chapter of Destiny 2, Bungie's epic sci-fi project.

There are certain artists who inspire everyone, from students and enthusiasts to their own peers, as well as fans of the projects they've worked on. Ben Mauro is one such artist, and we sat down with him to find out more about his work, from video games such as Halo Infinite to developing his own graphic novel series. We all enjoy discovering other people's work and their workplaces, so why not have a wander around the studio of Uko Smith, before checking out our top choices from the latest ImagineFX Art Challenge.

If you're looking to improve your art or learn some new skills, we have you covered, whether you're out for traditional insights, digital pointers, or looking to add a little 3D into your workflow.

Rob

Editor

Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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ImagineFX

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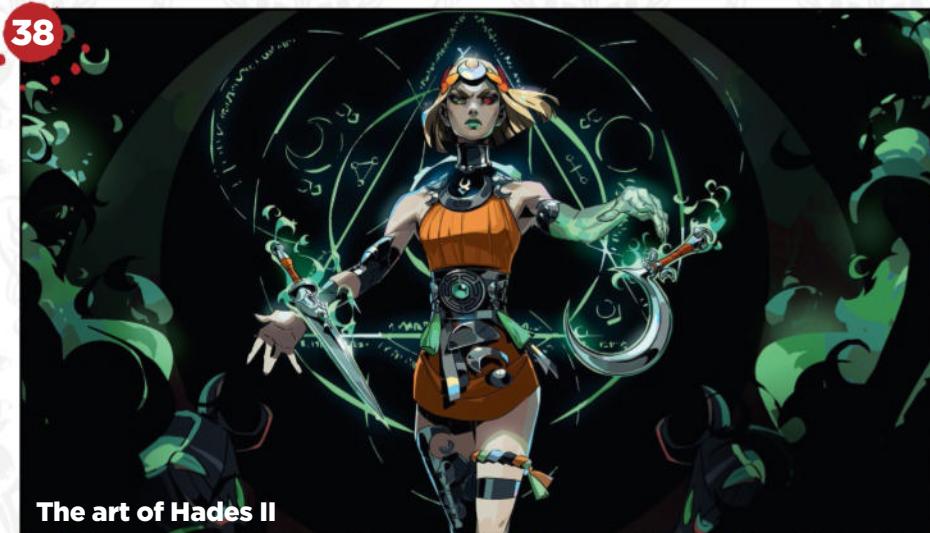
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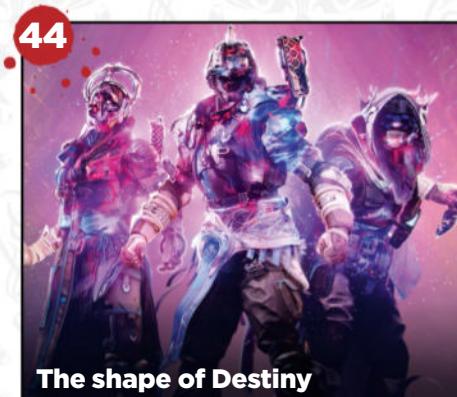
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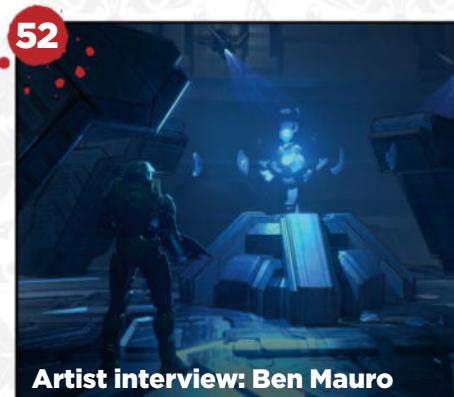
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The shape of Destiny



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Artist interview: Ben Mauro



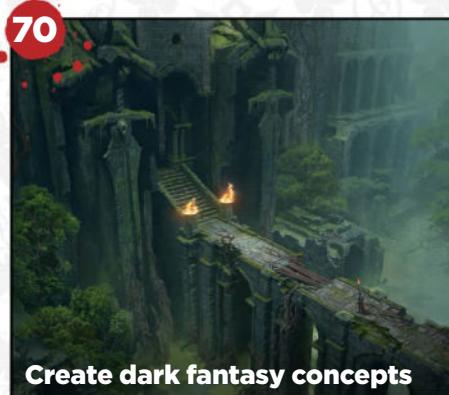
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Artist in Residence: Uko Smith



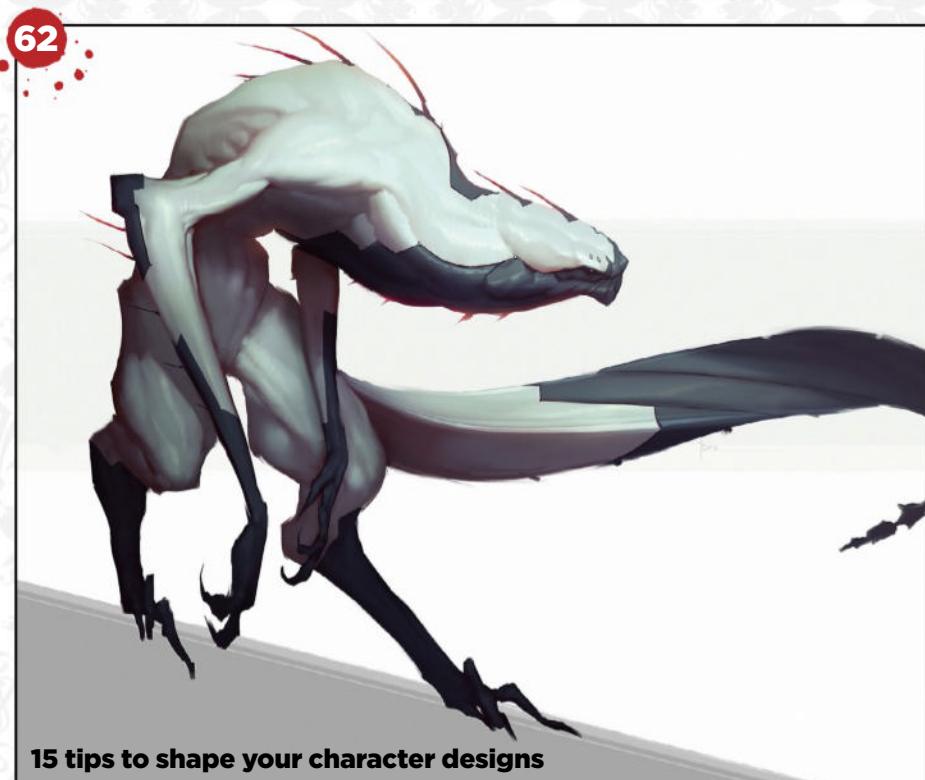
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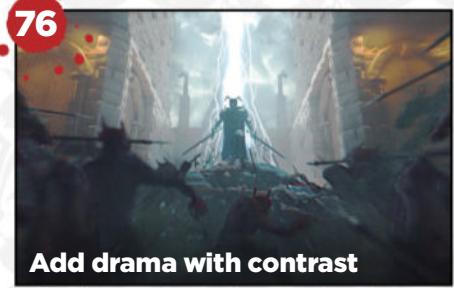
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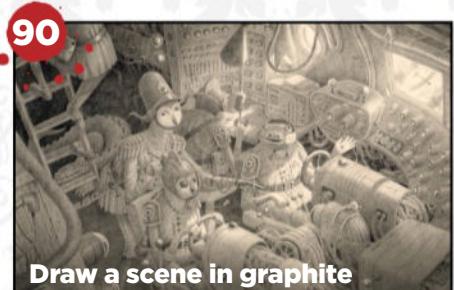
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The finest traditional art, sent in by you!

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GET YOUR RESOURCES

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

- 1 Go to the website**
Type this into your browser's address bar.
<https://ifxm.ag/hades2>
- 2 Click the download link**
Find your files ready for download.
- 3 Download what you need...**
Save the files or watch the videos.

Next month



Next month in...

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DINOSAUR CONCEPT ART

We interview visionary film and video game artist **Gaëlle Seguillon**

Sketches from a concept master

Dune concept artist George Hull lets us take a look inside his epic sketchbook

Planning your path to the top

Get practical advice on how to rise up the ranks in the game art industry

Inside a movie artist's studio

Philippe Gaulier shows us the space where he works for Marvel and more

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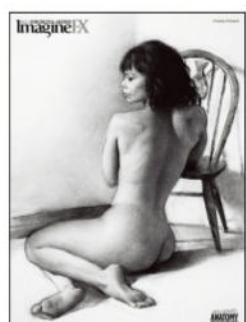
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Antti Hakosaari

LOCATION: Finland MEDIA: Clip Studio Paint, Photoshop

WEB: www.artstation.com/haco

Antti is a freelance illustrator who works on book covers and tabletop games, and likes to create his own stories and characters in his spare time. These images are from a story he has been working on.



1 KEEPING WATCH

"Here I just wanted to draw a soothing portrait of a character in his element."

2 HIDEOUT

"In this secret hideout, a horned lady and her goblin friends are playing cards. Who will win?"

3 SURPRISE ATTACK

"This piece depicts a fight scene where a group of misfits attack a fisherman minding his own business."

4 HAGGLE

"My goal here was to illustrate a scene where the characters have a nice dynamic. It also shows the seductive persuasion of the girl and the inherent distrust of the goblins."



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10

ImagineFX





Corey Rivera

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.artstation.com/criver24

Corey is a character designer and illustrator working in the tabletop and video game industry. His art gravitates towards the fantasy and sci-fi genres, and often takes on a look of stylised realism.

1 BULGRAVE, THE CONSUMMATE

"Bulgrave is one of my deified wolves. He represents wisdom through experience."

1



2



2 ASTRID

"She is a woman with a prosthetic limb in the shape of a tree. Her feelings are expressed by the type of flowers that bloom from it."

3 TEARWIN, THE UNSHACKLED

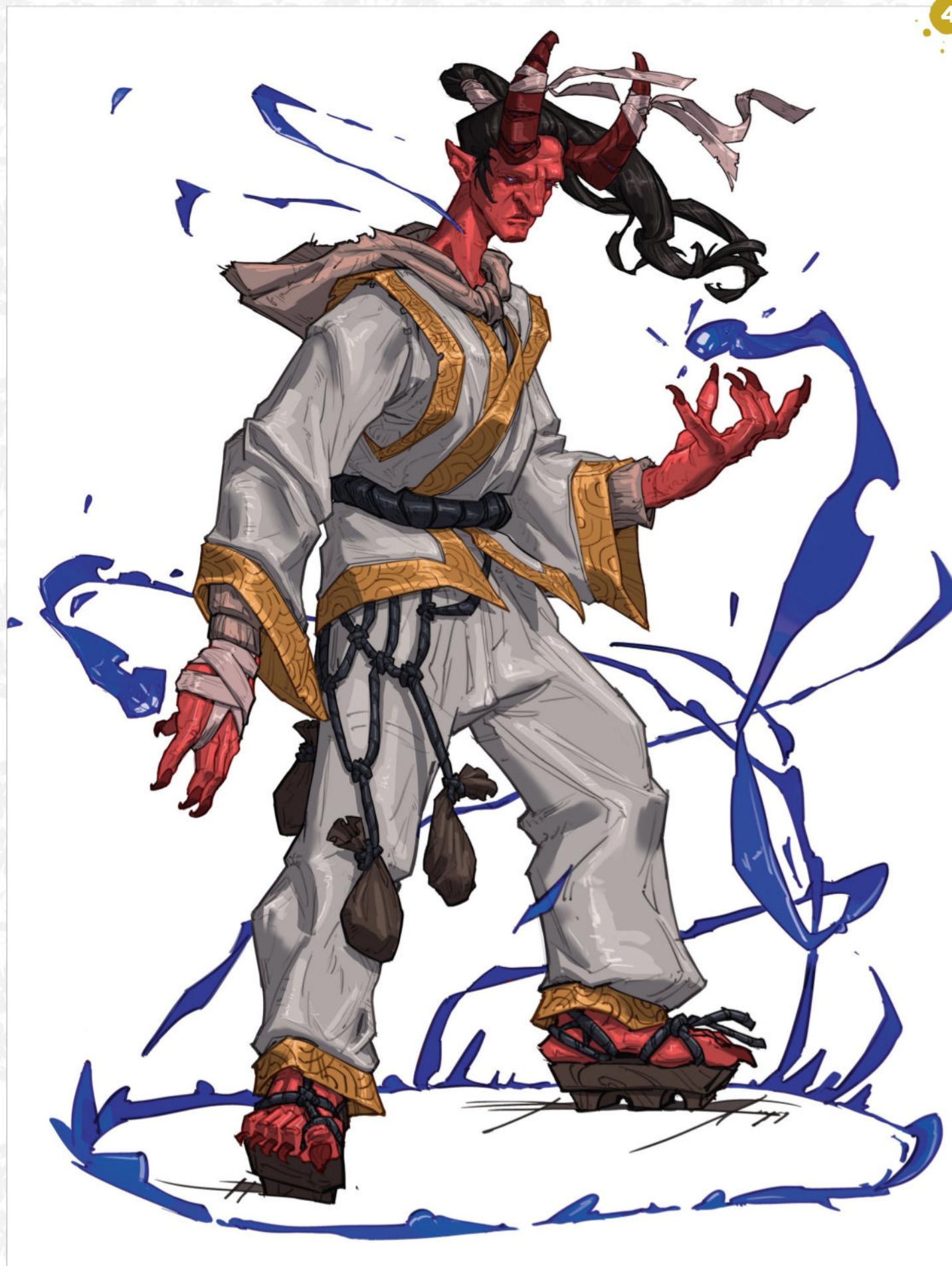
"This is the design of another deified wolf, who represents the dual virtues of freedom and composure."

4 AZEL

"This is the pyromancer Azel. He is a tiefling mage who has mastered control over a rare blue flame."

3



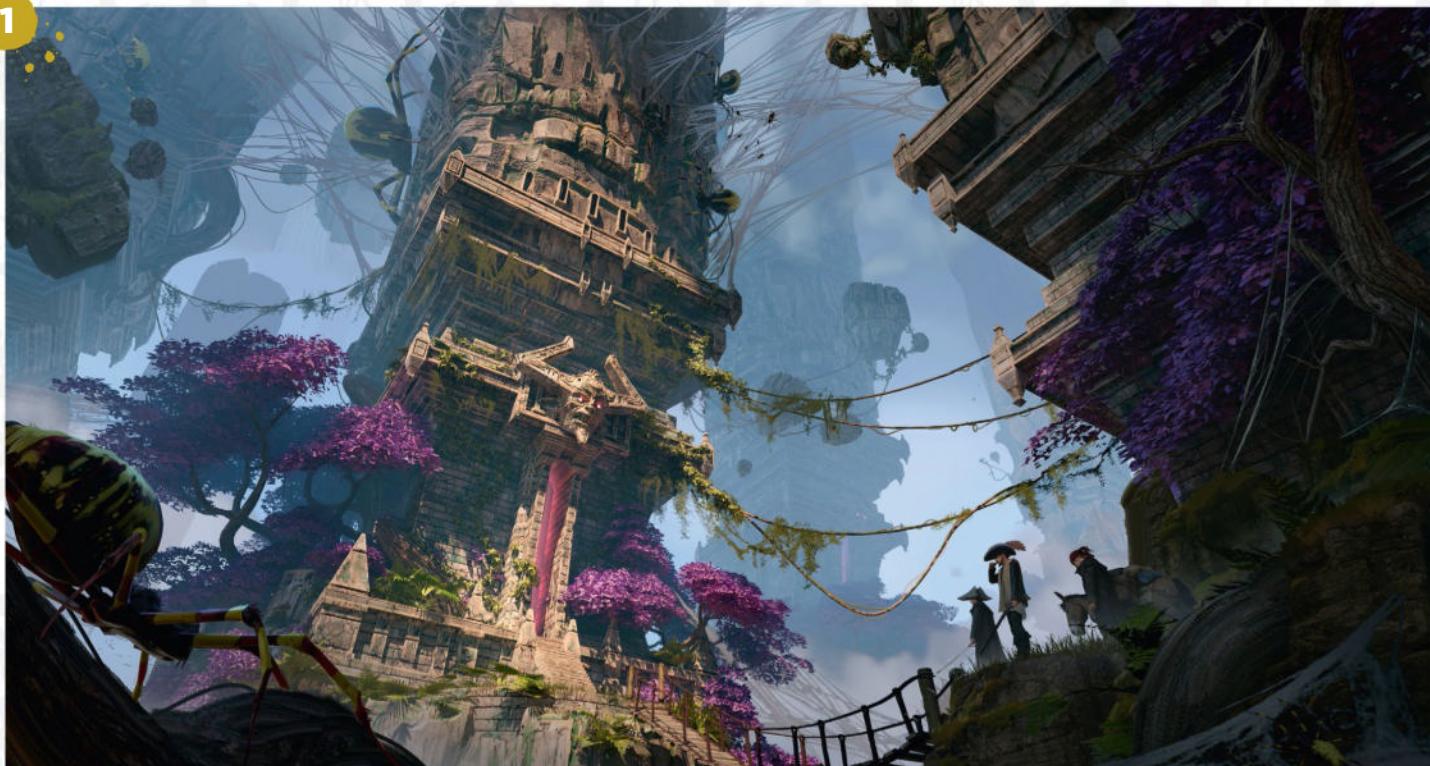
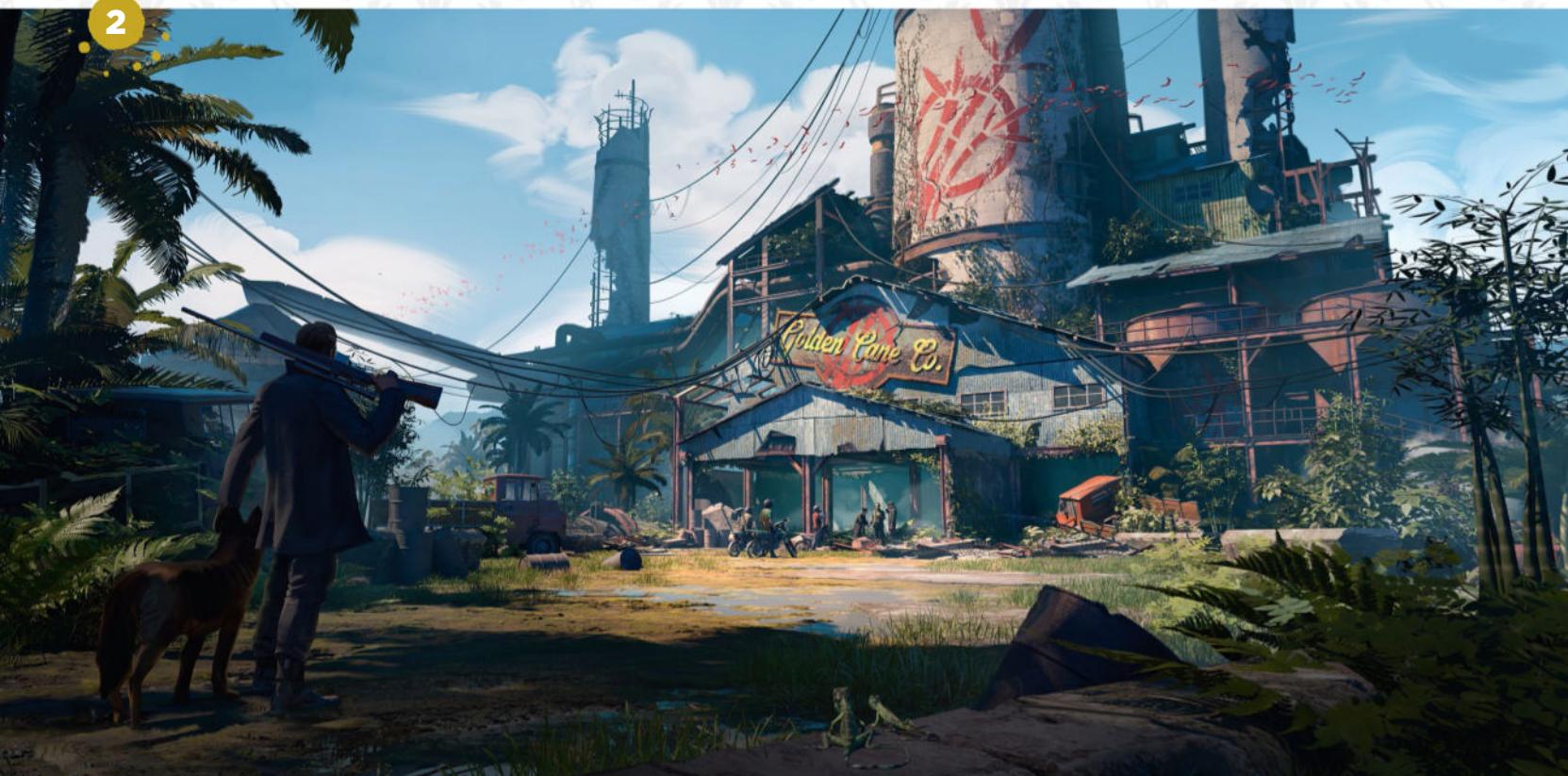




Malik Sigrist

LOCATION: Denmark MEDIA: Photoshop, Blender, Gaea WEB: www.artstation.com/maliksigrist

Malik's love for epic fantasy universes has instilled a sense of adventure and discovery in his work. When creating environments, he likes to take them as far as possible in Blender before painting in Photoshop.

1**2**



1 TEMPLE OF THE ACCURSED

"When you go places that you've never been before, there's always danger hiding in the shadows. That was the feeling I wanted to convey in this piece."

2 GOLDEN CANE CO.

"This piece was inspired by a recent trip I took to Trinidad and Tobago, where I loved seeing these old industrial buildings slowly being taken over by nature. It was a magical sight!"

3 FORT PAX

"Fort Pax is a location from my own worldbuilding project. It started out life as a strategic location for a defensive fort, but later grew to become a thriving trading city."

4 UNCHARTED LANDS

"With Uncharted Lands, I wanted to illustrate the feeling of seeing a new place for the first time, and the excitement and wonder that you get as you approach the destination."



Indigo Jenar

LOCATION: Indonesia MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.artstation.com/indigojrps

Indigo is a freelance digital artist with experience in the VFX industry. He's been a fantasy enthusiast ever since he was a kid, and finds digital art to be a great outlet for all of his ideas.

1 DUALITY

"Two personifications of a black and white knight. They have tension in their eyes, which is the result of their tumultuous history."

2 RIVER DRAGON

"This is an amalgamation of two favourite childhood obsessions: knights and dinosaurs. It's also partly based on the ancient myth that dragons were borne out of dinosaur fossils."

3 SKY BATTLE

"My most ambitious project to date, depicting a battle between a dragon and a griffon, with their riders ready to fight each other."

4 THE CRYPTS

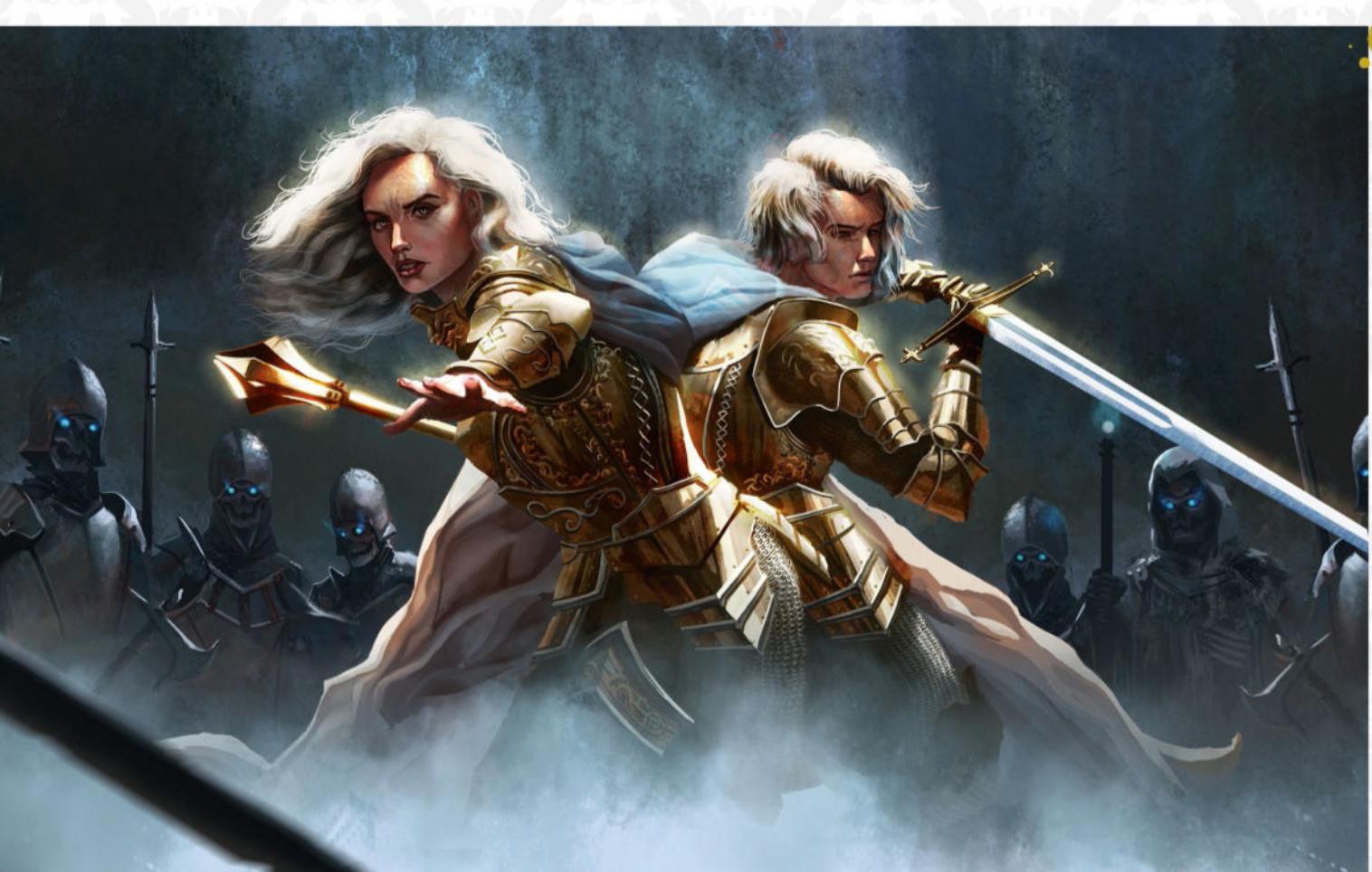
"My interpretation of a familiar fantasy scene, as intrepid adventurers meet skeletons in a crypt."

1



2







Joshua Esmeralda

LOCATION: Philippines MEDIA: Photoshop, Blender WEB: www.artstation.com/jpesmeralda

Joshua is an artist with experience in creating environment concept art and marketing illustrations for various games. He has also worked as an illustrator for book covers and other tabletop RPGs.

1 TWIG BLIGHT

"An illustration I did after experimenting with ZBrush and trying out different ways I could incorporate it into my workflow."

2 WAITING

"I've always found inspiration in Studio Ghibli films, and this is one of the illustrations where I used them as a reference for the colour, light and foliage."

3 SACRED SWAMP

"A personal illustration that I stumbled into after I did some random sketches and colour explorations, and then built a story around it."

4 BALDUR'S GATE 3 TIEFLING WARLOCK

"This is an illustration of my Baldur's Gate 3 character. It's a game that has been quite the source of inspiration, as I've always been fascinated by the fantasy genre."

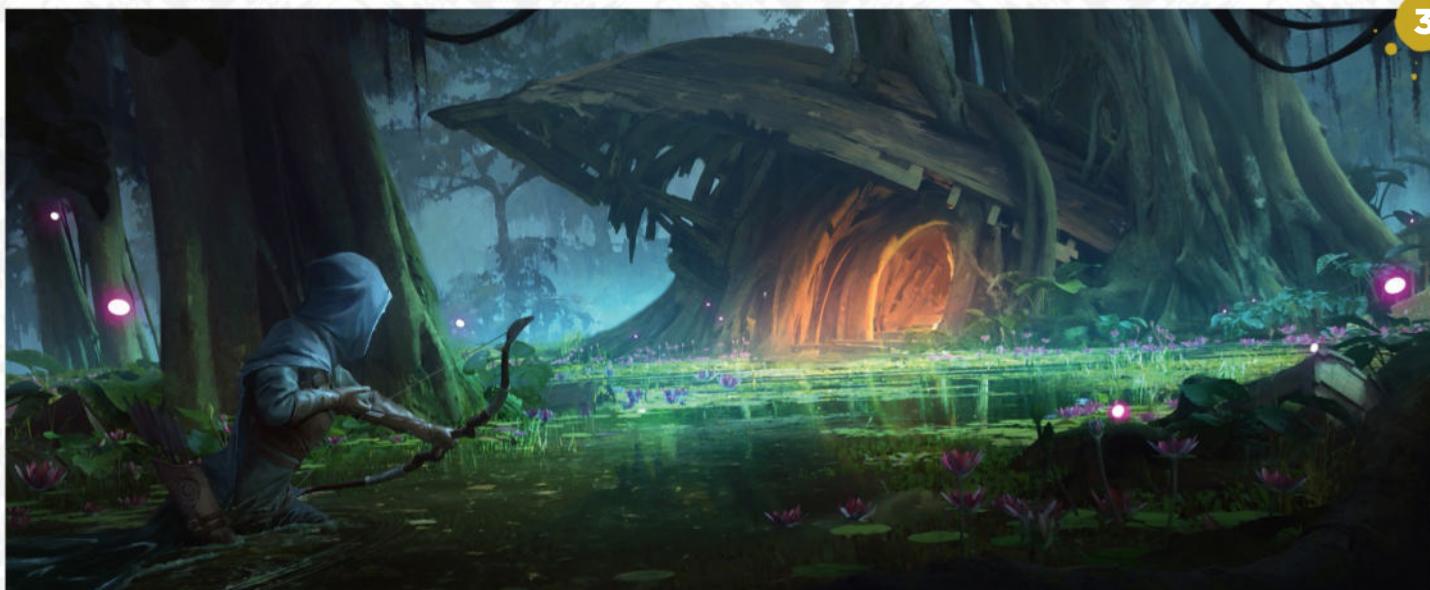
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Aves Company: Elena

YEAR CREATED: 2023 MEDIA: Photoshop

“The image was part of a class assignment in which a character with a background story, prop and environment was created. Honestly, it was a really fun process, especially being able to conceive my own character and story. This is also the first piece of concept art that holds significant meaning for me, and I was able to learn so much from it, such as character proportions, design concepts, and improving my rendering skills.”



Pinata



Sofa

Store Room



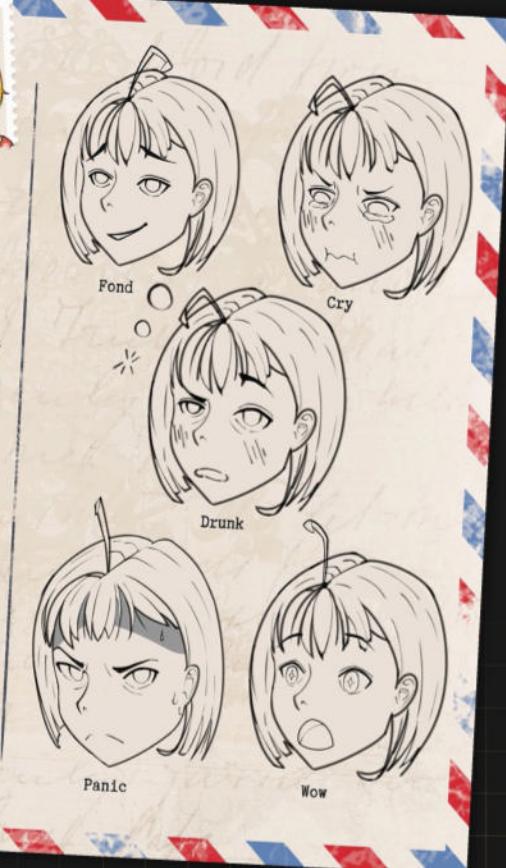
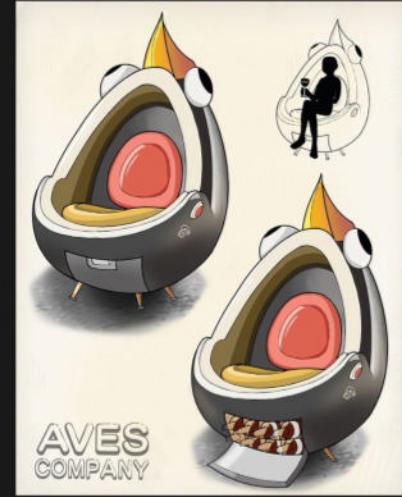
Artist PROFILE

Chong Neng Junn

LOCATION: Malaysia



Chong Neng Junn is a passionate student learning digital 3D animation at The One Academy, and hopes to work for a major game studio in the future.
www.therookies.co/u/ChongNengJunn





Artists stand up for their rights against AI threats

Rage against the machines **Tanya Combrinck** finds out what steps artists are taking to protect their work from being used to train generative AI models

Artists have been disillusioned with social media for some time, but

Meta, the company behind Facebook and Instagram, took relations with the creative community to a new low recently with its announcement that users' images could be used to train its AI models.

We knew last year that images from Instagram and Facebook have been used as training data for Meta's AI image generator. But now the issue has been brought into the spotlight by an email sent to European users, which announced changes to its Privacy Policy and the intention to

extend usage of people's information to develop AI.

Artists have had enough. And the sense of violation is compounded by the fact that it's not just artwork that's



being misused. The Faeries of the Faultlines creator **Iris Compriet** tells us: "The idea that Meta is going to scrape the

images I have on Facebook of my deceased father just sickens me."

The values social media sites were

built upon have been "systematically eroded", in the view of freelance illustrator **Stephen Stone**.



"They were a chance to celebrate global connectivity and individual expression," he laments. "This latest policy will exacerbate what is already a very high level of anxiety for creators."

Meta gives EU citizens the right to object to how their information is used for AI-related purposes, but this is a

“This policy will exacerbate what is already a very high level of anxiety for creators”



TAKING THE CHALLENGE

Our mentions were bursting with fantastic video game character redesigns as you took on the latest ImagineFX Art Challenge. Check out our top picks!

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IMAGINATION PLAYGROUND

Illustrator and concept artist Uko Smith tells us why he's loved the past decade spent in his studio, which is filled with inspiration for his latest creations.

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YOUR VIEWS, YOUR ART

Readers write in with their art news and opinions on what we've covered in ImagineFX. Plus, we feature your art that's caught our eye on social media.

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"This isn't just violating for artists, but also for everybody who has ever uploaded pictures of themselves, family, and friends," says Eva



recent development. An artist who is active in the fight against misuse of AI,

Eva Toorenent says she and some others tried to opt out of Meta's data scraping a few months ago and were denied. "Since then, the AI Act has passed in the EU, which forces companies to respect opt-out," she says.



Col says: "AI could mean career loss for thousands of artists all over the world who have studied, learned, grown and created."

Eva has lodged her objection. She notes, however, that no one knows whether their data has already been used to train AI models. "Without proper transparency obligations for AI companies, we can't know for sure how they'll respect all of our opt-out requests," she adds.

Iris was also able to log her own objection with Meta, but she sees it ➤



Ana notes that alternative social media apps have launched but failed to prosper in recent years.



"Already, I see people I know struggling to find work, or they're asked to overpaint AI images, or their work is fed into an in-house AI that spits out more versions of it," says Col.

► as an "empty gesture" because Meta warns that your images or other data could still be used to develop AI if they are posted by someone else. "We cannot control what others post. They can easily take a picture of my art and put it online," says Iris.

QUESTIONS UNANSWERED

On top of this, in the email sent out to users, Meta says that if your objection



is honoured, "it will be applied going forward". Some, including British concept artist **Col Price** wonder what that entails.

Eva's Belladonna "lumen inter tenebras" was the first Nightshaded painting. The Latin, chosen by the developer Ben Y. Zhao, means "light in darkness".



"What exactly does 'going forward' mean?" he asks. "Are previous works you've posted going to be used?"

Under these conditions it might be tempting for artists to leave Instagram altogether, but for many that's not an option. "If I left Instagram, I doubt that I'd be able to work as a full-time artist," says Eva. "Almost all my clients find my work via Instagram. My social media is something that I've built up since I was 14 years old. I will not throw that away because Meta has decided to jump on the AI hype train."

Other artists have been left feeling trapped. "It's depressing to imagine

“If I left Instagram, I doubt that I'd be able to work as a full-time artist anymore”

abandoning my community on Instagram," says illustrator **Ana Bidault**. "I've been building it for almost 10 years and it's responsible for some of the best opportunities that I've had. Instagram is my window to the world and losing that would mean losing contact with so many people that have seen me grow as an illustrator."



Ana says: "Instagram has become an essential platform for all kinds of artists and entrepreneurs, so making the decision to abandon it isn't easy."

Iris says she'll stay for now, but that she's already using social media much less than she used to because she's tired of "the constant fight against the algorithm". She plans to take down many of her posts, and put her efforts into her website, newsletter and Patreon. "[I'll use Instagram] just to give teasers and point towards those outlets where the art can be enjoyed in full," she says.

Rather than leave or stop posting, another option for artists is to use the anti-AI tools Glaze and Nightshade to protect their artworks. Glaze applies a cloak by making tiny changes that aren't discernible to the human eye,





Iris says: "Instagram used to be the best place for me to put my art out and find my audience. But it hasn't been that for me for a long time now."



Eva says: "Most clients find my work via Instagram. Leaving now means losing significant income."

but make a huge difference to how the image is processed by an AI model. Nightshade goes one further and poisons any dataset that contains its images, which can cause the model to learn behaviours that aren't desired by its makers. The Nightshade FAQ compares it to putting hot sauce on your lunch and labelling it "Do not eat". If someone steals it and gets ill, they've only got themselves to blame.

Eva's artwork, *Belladonna*, was the first Nightshaded painting, and ➔



"The first word that comes to mind is anxiety. Everyone is racing to create AI models without considering what they're destroying," says Ana.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT TACKLING THE BEHEMOTH

Eva Toorenent on what you can do to join the fight against AI

The fact that you signed a social media platform's terms of service shouldn't give it the right to just take your data and do anything they want with it. We have more rights than we think.

I'm part of EGAIR [European Guild for Artificial Intelligence Regulation]. EGAIR is a group of artists, creatives, publishers and associations from across Europe, united in bringing to the public's attention how our data and intellectual properties are being exploited without our consent, on a scale never seen before. We lobby the European Parliament to put laws and regulations in place to protect creatives.

We've already achieved a few legislative wins that work in the favour of artists. Together with other incredible associations we've helped to get this line added to the European Union's AI Act: "Any use of copyright protected content requires the authorisation of the rightsholder concerned unless relevant copyright exceptions and limitations apply." We've seen that the AI companies have been lobbying endlessly to get that specific line removed from the AI Act, and fortunately they've been unsuccessful.

If you want to actively help creatives, donate to our website (www.egair.eu) so we can finish what we've started. There's still a lot to do, but we're on the right track! Also, please write to your representatives and tell them what's happening with your data. If you do nothing, then nothing will happen. The past two years fighting predatory AI companies have shown me how much power individuals can have. Your voice matters.



Eva Toorenent is a Dutch artist and illustrator and a vocal advocate for artists against the threat of AI.

www.evaboneva.com

ImagineNation News



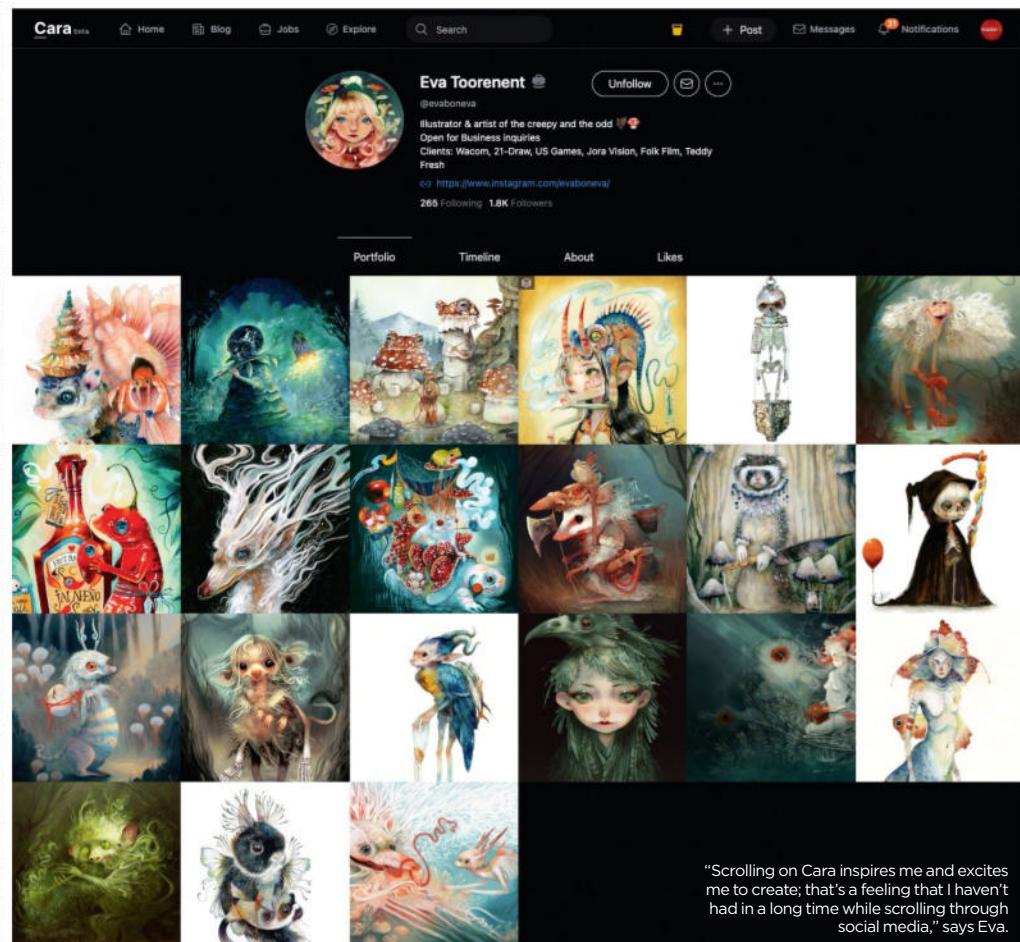
Find us on Cara - @imaginefxmagazine - where we'll be posting all the usual updates about the magazine.

➡ she's a big fan of the technology. "These tools allow artists to protect themselves until regulations and laws are passed to safeguard creatives against generative AI," says Eva. "Most importantly, they give artists a sense of agency over their work again."

The only downside with these tools is that they require a lot of computing power. Ana's computer wasn't up to the job, so she's not using them yet. And even if you do have the resources, it's a big time suck. Col says: "It's daunting to go through 10 years of artwork and update my website and social media. And it's just a sad state of affairs that we have to do this due to people's pure greed."

SOCIAL SAVIOUR

But in all this mess there's a beacon of hope: the rise of Cara, an anti-AI social app run by artists, for artists. In the days following Meta's announcement, its userbase exploded from 40,000 to, at the time of writing this article,



"Scrolling on Cara inspires me and excites me to create; that's a feeling that I haven't had in a long time while scrolling through social media," says Eva.

over 800,000, as people looked for an alternative to Instagram.

Cara's creator is photographer and art director **Jingna Zhang**, who is financing the app herself and heroically working with a small team of developers to keep it running in this time of unexpected and booming growth. A particularly trying moment came on 6 June, when Jingna received a notification that an extra \$96,280 would be added to her server bill to pay for the surge in users.

“Companies have taken a giant risk on AI... I don’t think it’s going to pay off”

Supporters have been frantically clicking the 'Buy Cara a coffee' button to help keep it online.

"AI tools and automation are things I've spent a lot of time thinking about," Jingna explains in a blog post on Cara. "I felt like there should be a platform built by someone who understands the industry and the advancement of the tech, who has experience building art platforms, and has the best interest of artists at heart."

"With image generators becoming mainstream, it's going to get difficult for the creative industry to find artists without proper filtering and labelling of AI vs human-made images. Beyond the debate of art versus craft, and the unethical usage of our work without our permission, there needs to be difficult discussions and education around the reality of what's to come, so we can think about how to help our community and the next generation."





Steve says the rise of generative AI could "suck the lifeblood out of human creators who rely on their skills to make a living".

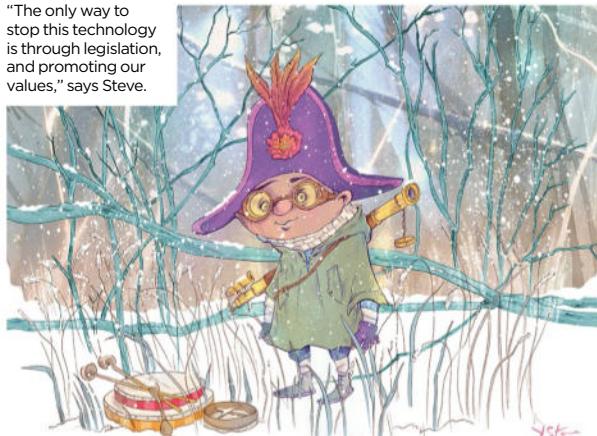


"When I didn't see any large platforms take meaningful measures to do any of these, I figured maybe I should do something, even if it's small. So I began Cara as a passion project with just two engineers, and we've continued on as more volunteers have joined to make this dream a reality."

TAKING A STANCE

Eva says the rise of Cara has been a breath of fresh air for artists, and has already had a positive impact for her. "The platform fosters an extremely

"The only way to stop this technology is through legislation, and promoting our values," says Steve.



Ana says: "Patreon recently added a feature for people to follow creators for free, so that might be my best alternative to Instagram right now."

Eva says: "Generative AI isn't the gold mine companies like Meta think it is. It uses huge amounts of energy and is bleeding money every single day."



"I miss the old Instagram a lot! Having to build up that community again feels daunting," says Iris.



fun and supportive community," she smiles. "Posting on Instagram can feel like guessing what the algorithm is going to like. Posting on Cara makes me focus on creating art again."

"Almost every company that's meant to be on the side of creatives and artists has sold us and our data out to the generative AI hype. We've been gaslit and exploited. I think these companies have taken a giant risk with generative AI technology, and in the long term I don't think it's going to pay off for them. If they can't make money at the height of the AI bubble, I don't expect they're going to make money when things cool off."

"From the beginning Cara had a very clear stance against generative AI technologies. There was a gap in the market for an artist-centred social media platform that took a hard stand against generative AI. I think Cara can fill that gap."



Virtual classics Our awesome ImagineFX readers put a new spin on some iconic video game characters

We loaded up a new level for the latest ImagineFX Art Challenge, and there was no shortage of players!

For this issue, you decided to tackle the Character Redesign theme, based around recreating epic video game icons in your own style. Our mentions were full of fresh takes on legendary heroes, as well as a few unforgettable villains. We even had submissions via our new Cara account – find us at @imaginefxmagazine if you're there.

We loved picking our top pieces to showcase, with plenty of nostalgic nods to some childhood favourites. A huge thank you to everyone who took part. Get ready for the next one!



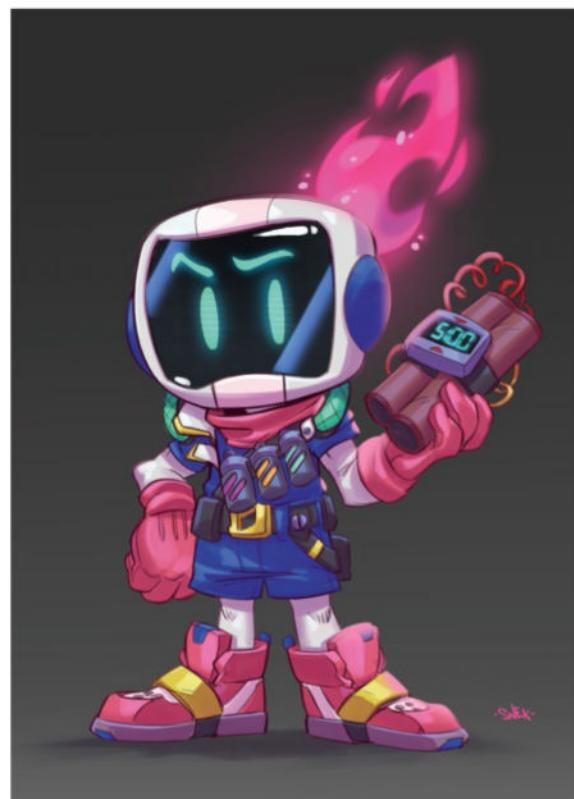
Lenin Pirona ko-fi.com/leninpirona
Sonic the Hedgehog x Mega Man



Evelin Suarez <https://evelinsuarez.portfoliobox.net>
Final Fantasy VII's Tifa Lockhart rides a chocobo



Shaun Herrington www.instagram.com/shauntheillustrator
Diana from League of Legends



Stefano Spagnuolo www.artstation.com/sneekkio
Bomberman

Challenge accepted Keep an eye on our social media channels for all the latest ImagineFX Art Challenge details and you could see your art in a future issue! **Visit page 3 for all our social channels**

Artist news, software & events



Sloane Earl www.sloaneearl.com **Lulu from Final Fantasy**



C.J. Ellison www.cjellisonart.com **Spyro**



Alex Gallego www.alexgallego.com **Golden Axe**



Jaxon Keller [https://jaxonkeller.com](http://jaxonkeller.com) **Conker**

ImagineNation Artist in Residence

A comparison weight-loss picture of me in 2016, when I lost 100lbs. I've gained half of it back, sadly, since then.

Yard sale find of huge hydraulic drafting table for \$25. Yeah!

Table of traditional art goodies – watercolours, acrylics, inks, Copic markers, brushes and pens.

Travel bag of originals and prints for conventions.

Uko Smith

Work and play In the dimension of imagination, here lie one artist's dreams. Parental discretion may be advised

 I can't tell you how many times I'd driven past the building where my studio is now located. I would see a former co-worker's online photos of her jewellery-making setup, and didn't really make the connection until I saw an ad for studio space.

I had been looking for another studio space, since I was running out of room at home – and voilà! I've had two other studios previously: one by myself and another with fellow art grad students, with whom I've been friends with since college and see on the convention circuit.

One of the things I've been able to do here at the studio, since I used to teach at Columbus College of Art & Design, is hold some limited art class time to help younger artists in high school and also some adult art guidance periodically.

I've been here at Millworks Arts Studio for about 10 years now, and I just love the space that I have. It's got large windows, which lets in great light during the day. The windows help me see that 'life' exists when I have to 

Photos by imagesbyterraluna

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IMAGINE NATION ARTISTS

ImagineFX

Artist news, software & events



ImagineNation Artist in Residence



A page from
my upcoming
creator-owned
book, 1500.



Character study of one of my
main characters in 1500.



I'm a scaled car collector and lover of oversized artbooks. I did model cars as a kid but, since I don't currently have time to put those kits together, I just purchase a car, truck or motorcycle from time to time, normally when I'm on the road to a comic convention. Whenever I stop for fuel or need a break from driving, I venture into the novelty area to see what they got.

Artist news, software & events



One of the many bookshelves here at my studio. I just love reading and collecting the books of some of my favourite artists and creators.

ImagineNation Artist in Residence



There's art all over the place here. It helps to keep me motivated. Here is a large-format print of the original art I did for a local show called Sol-Con. To her right is the wraparound original cover to FX2: The Lost Land, a graphic novel that I illustrated for IDW.

→ spend more hours inside than out. One of the best things I love about my space is that I have room for the artbooks (my kryptonite), which range from artists' sketchbooks and art history books of my fave artists to pre-production books for film and animation. Millworks houses about 100 artists here, still with room to accommodate more. I've been fortunate to meet some good artists here of different disciplines. Since I've acquired a new (to me) hydraulic

“One of the best things I love about my space is that I have room for artbooks”

The studio is a place to focus on work that matters, including freelance projects and creator-owned material.

drafting table, which I've always wanted, I've had to do some rearranging of things. Being able to set any desired angle with the foot pedal is grand. Another great purchase I've had recently was finding a large flat-file cabinet, which allows me to store my work and have more table space.

A SPACE TO FOCUS

I get up around 6-7am. I struggle to get my gym clothes on and work out for about an hour, then I deal with my two little ankle-biting dogs, Sierra and Penny, with some outside time. I'm usually at the studio by 10am and stay until around 9-9:30pm. I've definitely burned some midnight oil here at times. Although I've enjoyed working from home, I needed more solitude – especially when my doggies come up every hour for me to take them out. I can focus a bit more when I'm at the studio: I just listen to the music that gets me going for the day, or some



More character development work for creator-owned title 1500, slated for a 2025 release.

podcasts when I want something different. A key that helps me produce work is stepping away for a bit every hour or so to stretch, so that I'm not physically run down by the end of the day. I split my week doing freelance work for various clients; handling commissions, packaging and shipping; creating some quick, daily warmups; and fitting in time for my creator-owned work, which I look forward to finishing for you to read.

Uko is an illustrator, concept artist, storyteller and former instructor. For more info, visit www.ukosmith.com



Artist news, software & events

My best friend finds these cool toy guns at yard sales, Frankensteins them together, and paints them. He let me borrow one for some reference I needed - it's been mine ever since. You'll also find an array of artbooks I've self-published over the years and the first-ever artbook collection of the comic book class that I taught at my art college. I'm also a big fan of the film Desperado; here is a print I did of Salma Hayek and Antonio Banderas.

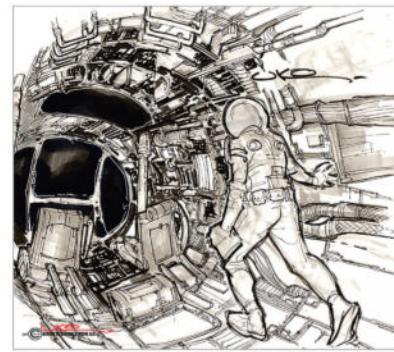


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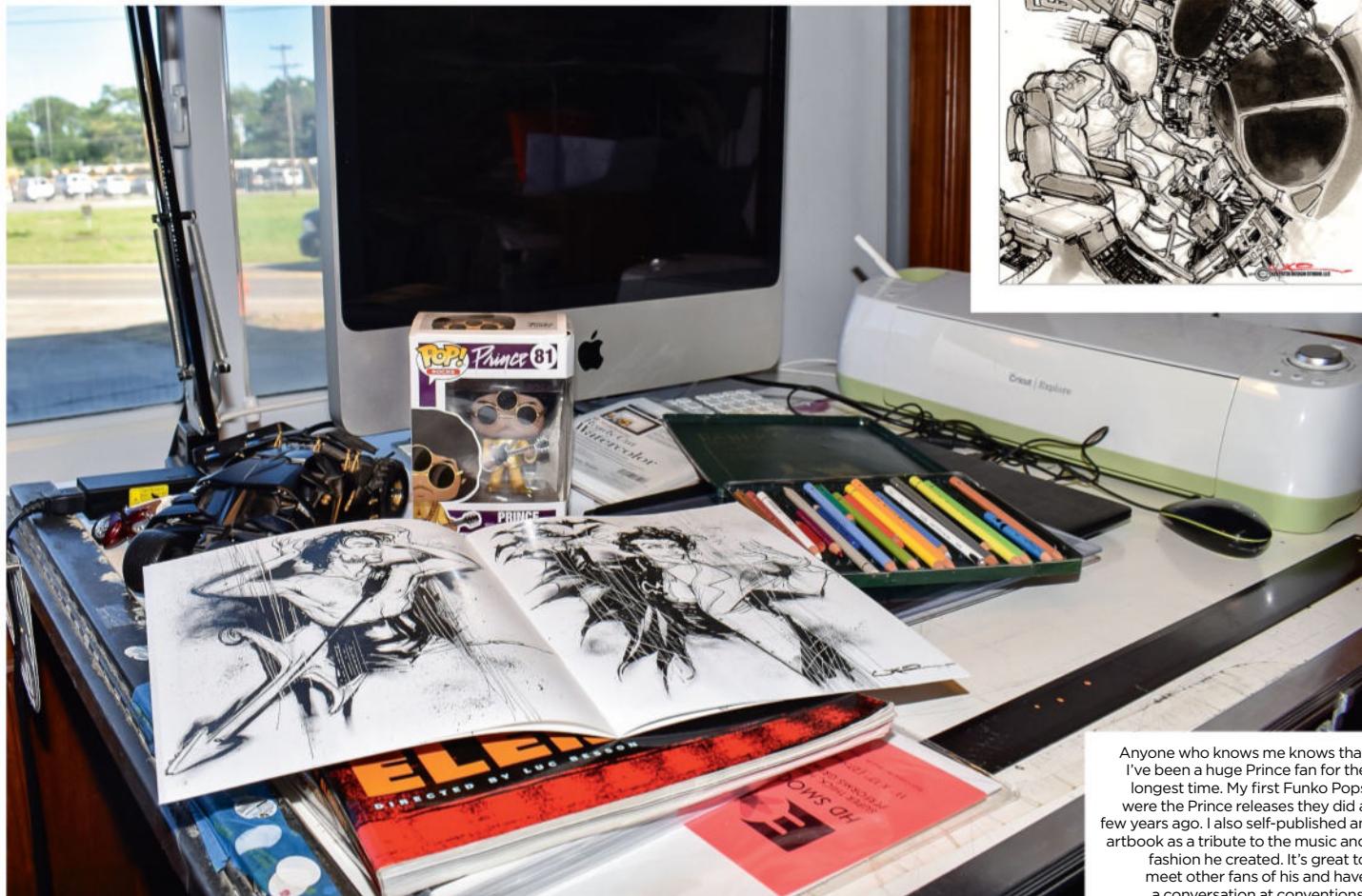


(Above) My main creator-owned project is titled 1500. Looking forward to getting these ladies out there.

(Below) Some panel work from a short space opera story that I'm currently working on.



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Anyone who knows me knows that I've been a huge Prince fan for the longest time. My first Funko Pops were the Prince releases they did a few years ago. I also self-published an artbook as a tribute to the music and fashion he created. It's great to meet other fans of his and have a conversation at conventions.

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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES



Issue 241

August 2024

Discover how to sketch like a pro with Brooks Kim's tips on drawing a portrait like his beautiful cover artwork. Disney artist Nathan Fowkes also shares his story in an insightful Q&A, plus top skills for photobashing, Blender and more.



Issue 240

July 2024

Find out how fan art can take you to new heights! We have tutorials on recreating some much-loved characters from Howl's Moving Castle, Spider-Man and Pokémon, and learn why creating fan art could lift your career prospects.



Issue 239

June 2024

Get the secrets behind making magical characters in Clip Studio Paint, just like our stunning cover art. We chat about getting into game art in our big interview with Grégory Fromenteau, and teach you the basics of powerful values.



Issue 238

May 2024

We go all out on manga with a full feast of tutorials, including the vibrant cover from our star artist Julio Cesar. Blizzard's Airi Pan shares her mission statement in our big interview, plus we visit Wayne Barlowe's curious studio.

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Sketchbook pointers

Hi Rob. I just read ImagineFX 241 from cover to cover and loved it, especially the interview you did with Nathan Fowkes! I wasn't as aware of him as I should have been – but I'm definitely going to go out explore more of his work after reading all of his thoughts.

I've never really thought of my sketchbooks as being useful for much, other than doodling some ideas. That's changed for the better now, and I'll be using them in a much more constructive way. Thank you for talking to him and sharing his advice!

Jen, via email

Rob replies I'm so glad you found Nathan's words useful, Jen. I'd say that sketchbooks are a really useful tool as well. They're great for testing ideas as well as new techniques, and for building muscle memory. I love how passionate artists like Nathan share these things and drive the community forward, so look out for future issues, where we'll have much more of this kind of advice and insight!

Our feature on Nathan Fowkes last issue was full of insights that could help you with your art.



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?
Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 241 at ifxm.ag/single-ifx.



Jeremy Fenske showed us how to use dynamic environments to support the narrative in your art.

Wonderful environments

Hello ImagineFX. I've been a long-time subscriber to the magazine and love it. I really enjoy finding something new each issue, and it has helped me develop my own art, so thank you.

The tutorial you had last month on using the environment as a storytelling tool was great. I'm confident with my characters, but not so much with overall scenes, and this has helped me to try and do better. Thank you!

Tara, via email

Rob replies Hello there Tara. It's great that you're still enjoying the magazine after all these years with us and getting useful insights from the tutorials. Jeremy's insights on environments last issue were great, and I think quite a few people out there will have benefitted from them.

Social power

I'm writing to say I really appreciate a lot of the new art you showcase – not just in the gallery section, but also the little pointers to artists' Instagram accounts. I've discovered a bunch of cool art from that. Thanks, and don't stop! It's so useful for my inspiration.

Alex, via Instagram

Rob replies Thanks for getting in touch Alex. I'm thrilled to hear that you get a kick from discovering new art and artists. We do too, so it's only right that we share as many as possible with all of you.

There are a few good sites out there for looking at new art, but it can be time-consuming to find the content that's of particular interest. That's why we do the hard work, hunting down the best there is to help you get your creative juices flowing. I hope you enjoy this issue's selection, and keep an eye on our social pages too, where we share even more fantastic art!

FRESH PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention



Mat Sadler
[@matsadlerart](https://matsadlerart.com)



gurmukhs840
[@gurmukhs840](https://www.instagram.com/gurmukhs840)



Nystique Arts
[@nystiquearts](https://www.instagram.com/nystiquearts)

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

FRONT AND CENTRE

Melinoë makes for an imposing figure on the game's cover art.

THE ART OF HADES

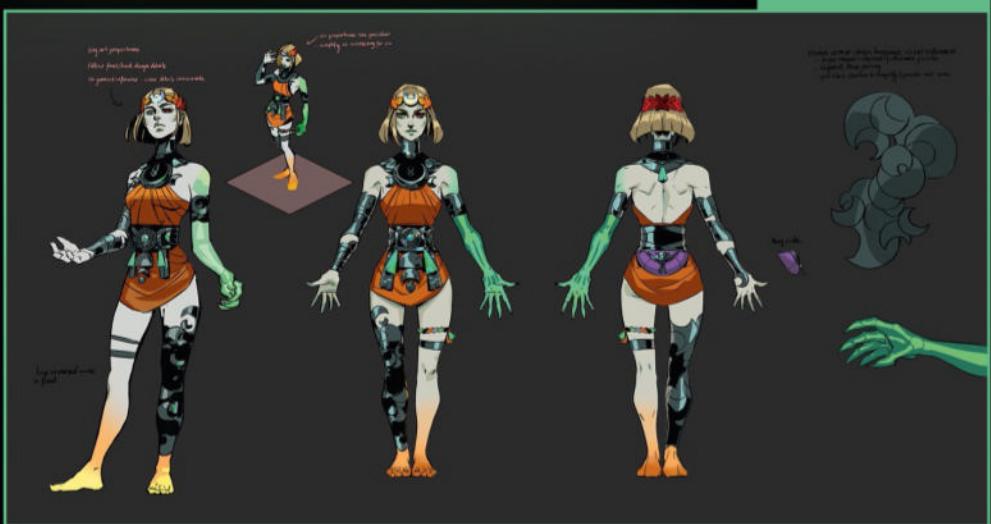
As **Hades II** releases in early access, we explore its characters and chat to art lead Jen Zee

After the critics got their mitts on Supergiant Games' first Hades entry, it was rightly acclaimed as a masterpiece, and not just for its stellar gameplay. The title took the studio's signature art style and infused it into the tales of ancient Greek mythology, with the result an eyeball-satisfyingly engrossing way to tell its narrative.

This May saw the early access release of its sequel, *Hades II*. Supergiant's art director Jen Zee and her team have hit the spot again, introducing brand new protagonist Melinoë while evolving the look of the original's cast of deities.

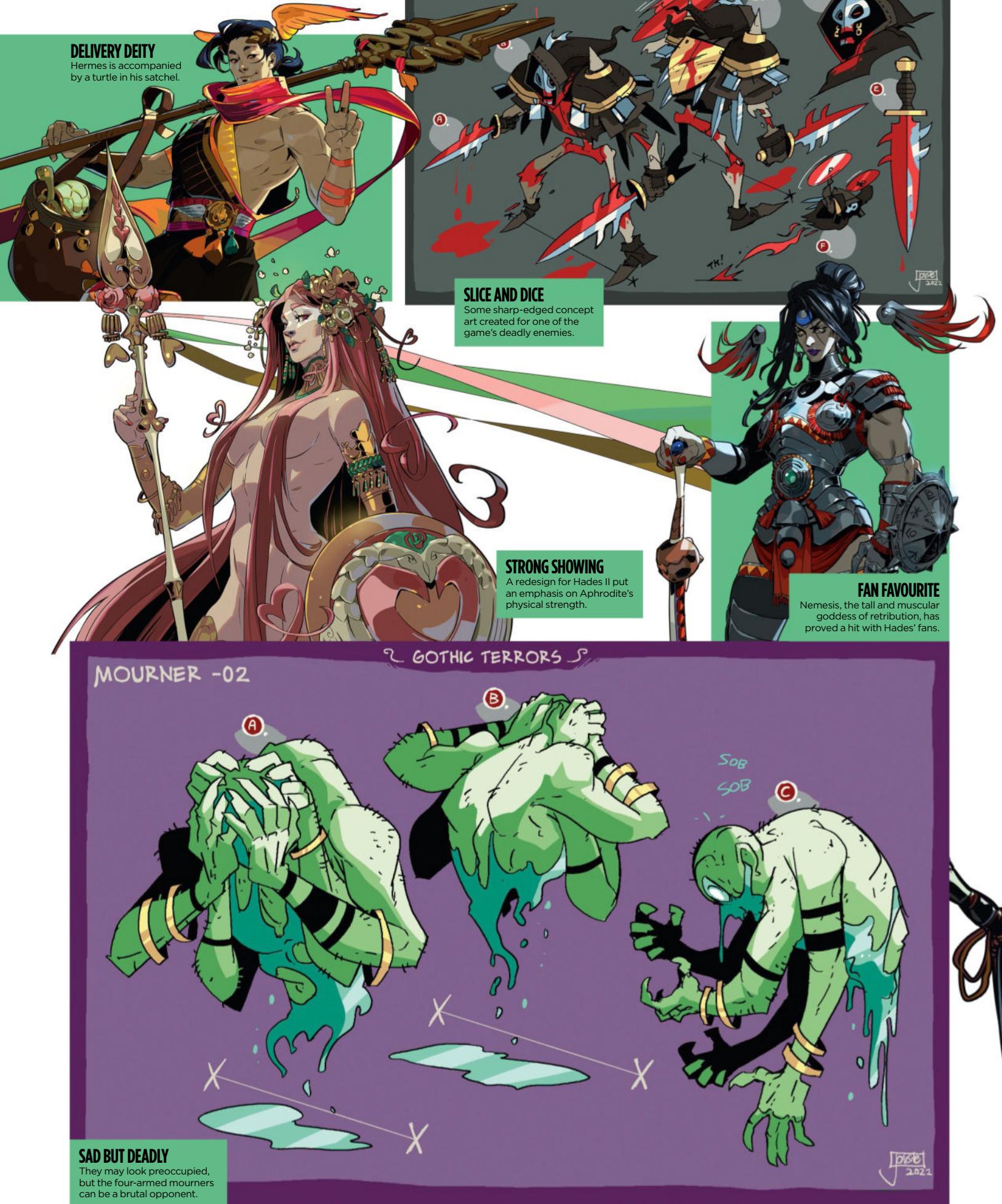
MELINOË CONCEPT ART

Designs for the princess of the underworld saw many different hairstyles tested.



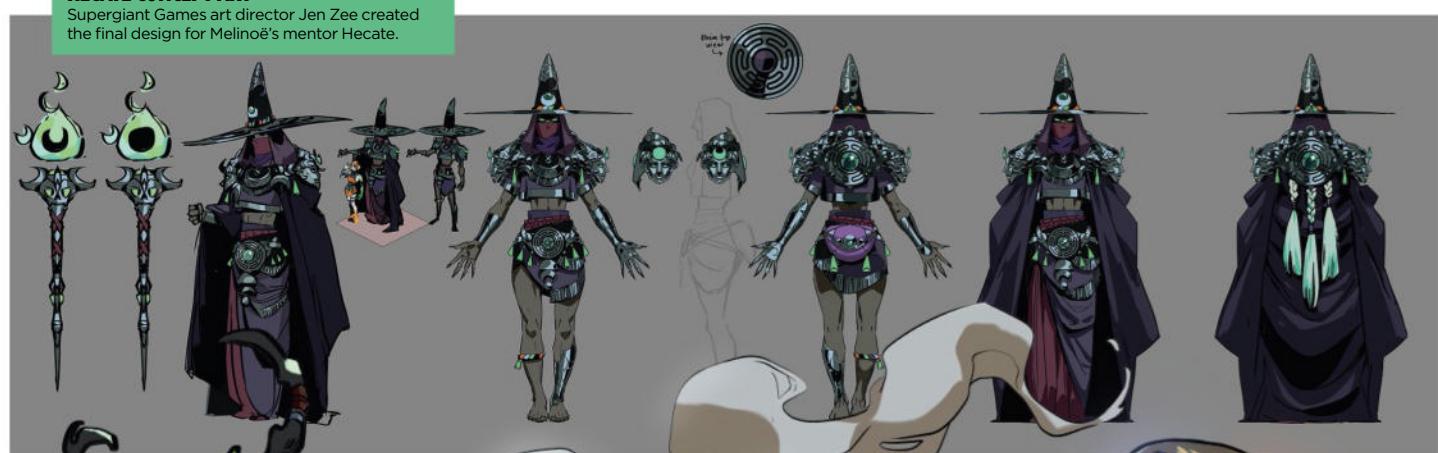


Feature



HECATE CONCEPT ART

Supergiant Games art director Jen Zee created the final design for Melinoë's mentor Hecate.



FLAME GODDESS

The fiery Hestia is suitably adorned with warm colours and accessories.



TAKING THE LEAD

Protagonist Melinoë is the daughter of Greek deities Hades and Persephone.

OUT OF LUCK

Moros, the personification of doom and bad luck, cuts a darker figure.

FROM THE DEPTHS

The nymph turned sea monster Scylla has a maritime feel, as well as a microphone for her siren songs.



HADES II Q&A: JEN ZEE

In her role as Supergiant Games' art director, Jen Zee has defined the studio's visual style since its first release, *Bastion*, hit the shelves in 2011, and her distinctive character designs for *Hades* have been central to its success. **Chris Schilling** caught up with her to discuss the process of delivering a contemporary twist on ancient Greek mythology, revisiting old friends, and creating powerful female figures.

What sort of conversations do you have about a character before coming up with their design?

Over the years, Greg [Kasavin, creative director] and I have developed a process that provides just enough creative boundaries to make appealing characters that fit the story, and also feel that they come from our hearts. From the start of development of the original *Hades*, we agreed that it was important to draw upon classical source material as the seed for our creative endeavours. So during the character design process, we're both constantly referring to the original, oldest myths we can find.

and have more problems to solve, and the sheer number of creative choices can sometimes feel overwhelming.

On the other hand, I'm a huge fan of time-skips in any media, and reinventing a character is essentially like getting an opportunity to visit an old friend. The creative problem-solving process is easier, coming up with answers to questions such as: how has the character changed between the two games? How have they stayed the same? Is there a design element I was excited about when creating the original that I never got to use? For me, it's the perfect amount of creative challenge.

“New designs are super fun, but challenging. You start with very little and have more problems to solve”

Greg typically provides me with a short blurb on narrative context and personalities he thinks are in service of the game, as well as my favourite part: something we call the 'tonality stack rank'. This lists the top three tonal qualities we want a character to embody at a glance: is a character meant to be scary, funny, easy-going, sad? And so on. Since we have a cast of over 30 characters, it's important each be distinct, and this helps provide a clear way of setting them apart. For example, Odysseus's tonal qualities were 'rugged, cool, neighbourly'.

Once we have those ducks in a row, I get to drawing, and touch base with Greg as necessary to clarify any details. It's really important that both of us are happy with the final design and feel they satisfy our narrative, design and artistic goals.

Is it more challenging to come up with a new design or to redevelop an existing one?

Coming up with a new design is super fun, but in general it's much more challenging. You start with very little

Presumably Melinoë's design required the most iteration. Were there any particular designs that came together surprisingly quickly? Although Melinoë's design took the most iteration, it was perhaps less than you might expect. She showed up in an early mood painting during the first phases of pre-production, when the project was loosely constrained by our sense of the tone, basic plot and design philosophy.

I drew an illustration that tried to capture those elements and came from the heart. We adjusted Melinoë's design a bit from there to properly suit the gameplay needs.

NEW PROTAGONIST

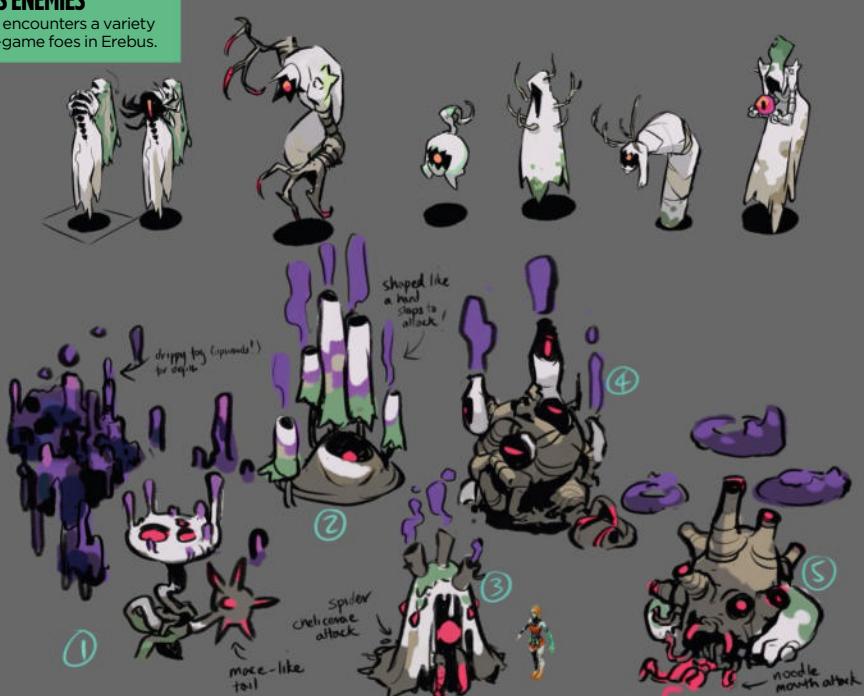
Players were in control of Zagreus for the first entry to the *Hades* series, but his little sister Melinoë takes over in the sequel.





EREBUS ENEMIES

Melinoë encounters a variety of early-game foes in Erebus.



It feels like you've emphasised the physical strength of the women in the cast. Was there a desire for you to reflect the more prominent female influence in the story?

Knowing we wanted to tell a story about witchcraft and its connection to the underworld of ancient Greek lore, we naturally wanted to incorporate important figures found within that mythology, most of which are female. The fact that they appear so powerful is a result of Hades II's narrative circumstances, the fascinating source material in the ancient myths about these characters, and my own instincts around drawing characters that I find interesting and appealing.

For example, Hecate is the goddess of witchcraft and magic, and in our game also a mentor, mother figure, leader of a secret rebellion against Chronos, and a powerful warrior. I knew she had to be immediately impressive, intimidating and badass.

One of the most important aspects though was for the character to look like someone that Melinoë, who is an accomplished witch herself, could look up to and learn both magic and martial skill from. As witches, they wouldn't have the big, bulky muscles of a weightlifter, so I remember trying to incorporate the fierce, poised agility that Muay Thai fighters often exude.

As for Aphrodite, unlike in Hades, where she was probably lounging in a hot spring on Olympus the entire time, she and the other Olympians are now engaged in all-out war against the forces of Chronos. She's geared up, weaponising her most powerful abilities as accessories to make it clear that she means business. Aphrodite takes to the battlefield in the Trojan War according to The Iliad [Homer's ancient Greek epic poem], so she's definitely no stranger to getting her hands dirty.

THE SHAPE OF DESTINY

Jess Kinghorn goes behind the scenes with Bungie following the release of **Destiny 2: The Final Shape**



Just released, Destiny 2: The Final Shape is the culmination of 10 years of art, game design and an ambitious vision to create a universe rich in lore, action and epic, jaw-dropping vistas. It extends the popular, award-winning multiplayer shooter from Bungie – the video game studio that created Xbox's original killer app, Halo – into exciting new territory.

The core Destiny 2 game is free to play, so anyone can step into the role of Guardian and start blasting on PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X/S or PC. Destiny 2's depiction of space is less of the unyielding void of hard sci-fi and more of an abstract, weird and wonderful backdrop. It's a rich science-fantasy universe that keeps you coming back – and will eventually, inevitably pique your interest in its paid expansions. These include the evocatively titled and acclaimed The Witch Queen in 2022

and 2023's Lightfall. Both are chapters in the overarching Light and Darkness Saga, with The Final Shape forming the closing verse – of this saga, at least.

To create one video game world, let alone a starry sky full of planets, takes a village, so we caught up with creatives across Bungie as they fired up the engines ahead of The Final Shape's launch.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Rusty Durbin has seen the long arc of this science-fantasy epic. At Bungie for the last 11 years, he first contributed to 2014's Destiny, and now leads the world art and palette teams on Destiny 2. "Creating environments for The Final Shape was a really amazing creative challenge that was unique to this release," he says, "and we did a handful of things different than we ordinarily do."

Fresh expansions usually introduce a new planet – a fresh destination for



THE FIGHT GOES ON

The Guardians have a host of new foes to combat in The Final Shape, each one meticulously crafted by the Bungie team.

the story to orbit – but The Final Shape departs from this structure in favour of a more linear 'hero's journey'. Even when the developers aren't breaking the mould, though, building environments for players to move through and interact with presents plenty of challenges to navigate.

"I think balance comes to mind as one of the more poetic challenges the world art team had to tackle all through this release," Rusty says. "We naturally need to balance the frame from a composition perspective, but also from a navigational composition perspective [that will help to guide] players through spaces."

"We're trying to really tell a lot of narrative in these environments. And so there's a lot to balance when it comes to how much information ➤



Destiny 2: The Final Shape



SUPER-POWERED

Featuring the mighty new Prismatic subclass of Guardian, The Final Shape closes out an epic chapter in the Destiny universe.

Feature

» we're trying to show on-screen to the player at once."

One vista Rusty's team has been working on is permeated by purple, depicting massive structures colliding towards a shining vanishing point.

"This one was a particularly interesting challenge," he smiles.

Rusty describes this purple point as "the crossing-the-threshold sort of moment, the point of no return", early on in *The Final Shape*. He likens it to Dorothy's trip up the tornado before crash-landing in Oz, with memories of the people she's leaving behind swirling past the windows of her buffeted farmhouse.

He elaborates: "We wanted to create an environment that portrayed familiar elements and locations from across Destiny. So in here, you'll see the human colony ships, you'll see pyramid ships, European Dead Zone environments; there's sections of the Kings Fall raid."

All of these landmarks represent the Guardians' memories, accompanying the player on this new, strange journey – call it a full-circle moment in the overall cycle of the game story. It's hard not to hear something that echoes like a metaphor for the creative process when Rusty adds: "[We're trying] to convey the sense that these memories are, like, intentionally being extracted, sliced, catalogued, and that



GEIST IN THE SHELL

Gabriel Garza's development for the Geist started with shape exploration, to assess options for establishing a distinctive silhouette for this enemy.

sense of 'How are these things going to come together on the other side?'"

LOVING THE ENEMY

Unlike Dorothy, Guardians can't simply dump cold water on their enemies. It's a big, bad galaxy out there, and bringing it to life requires an ongoing conversation across creative departments at Bungie. Eric Elton, the 3D character lead on the bosses and combatants team, notes that an ongoing inter-departmental

conversation, throughout conceiving and beyond, is essential to the creative process at Bungie.

Eric walks us through the creative process behind the Grim, an in-game enemy, describing the initial idea behind the combatant as "hey, we want it to be a flying creature". His team began by roughly blocking out a model in Maya that could then be quickly implemented in an early build: "Purposefully very simple and blocky, because we're at the stage

THE GUARDIANS

This promotional artwork for *The Final Shape* spotlights the various classes of Guardian you can play as, and suggests their abilities.



Destiny 2: The Final Shape



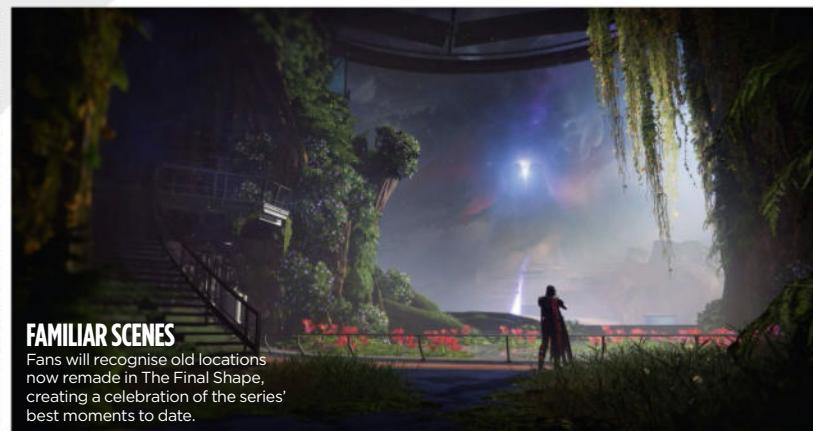
where we're just getting the first pass of it," Eric says. "We just want to get something in the game, so that we can react to it.

"Gameplay is super-important. So we'll always prioritise that – not at the expense of art, but making sure that the gameplay feels right [is key]. And then the art can fill in the rest of that story."

While riggers and animators tinker with these early sculpts, the concept team will further flesh out the design. While the Grim is obviously inspired by the natural world, with bat-like wings and powerful limbs reminiscent of a primate, it's also a creature that has been warped by Destiny 2's big bad, The Witness. More naturalistic

BEAT THE HUSK

Gabriel Garza's concept art for the Husk shows the visual outcome for each of the two ways you can beat this deadly foe.



FAMILIAR SCENES

Fans will recognise old locations now remade in The Final Shape, creating a celebration of the series' best moments to date.

design elements reduced to simplistic, sculptural shapes represent that influence, alongside shape language associated with Rhulk, a previous raid boss and disciple of the Witness.

Eric moves on to highlight concept work by Bungie artist Jacob Gonzalez that demonstrates the Grim's shriek attack. "He did an awesome job,

taking this really different kind of approach to a screech, and an animal that can open its mouth. It's sort of this weird kind of Pyramidion, Witness-looking shape that can screech in a way that's unexpected and exciting. So once we saw this, we were really excited... We went back to the rigging team and said, 'Hey, can we change it so that we can open it this way, where it's this triple-layer kind of mouth thing?' And so there's always this iteration, there's always this give and take with the process of 'Hey, we've got this other idea. Can we do this?' 'Yeah, let's try it out. Let's get it in game, let's see how this feels.'"

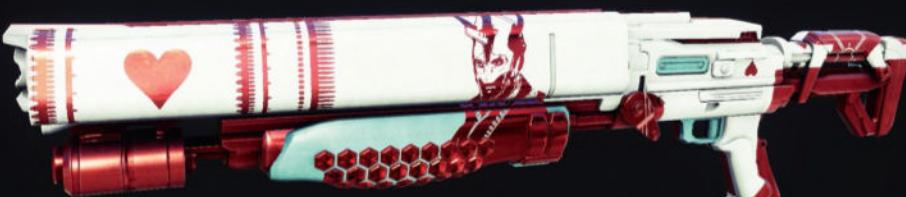
Eric concludes: "The concept evolves as we work back and forth together, which makes it really fun."

IT STARTS WITH THE ART

During this ongoing multi-discipline conversation, how does Bungie ensure it doesn't lose the thread? Gabriel Garza, the lead concept artist for

SOMEDAY

The Someday shotgun is one of several weapons to feature playing-card motifs in its textures.





HONOR OF ZAVALA

This weapon is named after fan-favourite character Zavala and features his likeness on the barrel.



► Destiny 2, tells us: "Our job in the concept team is to put those ideas [gathered from across the development team] in visual form."

Opening Clip Studio Paint, his software of choice for many years, Gabriel demonstrates some of his work that led to key elements in The Final Shape. "In this example, I did a sketch in the middle of what could be the unit, the Husk, and the things I wanted to telegraph on the design."

The Husk is a melee unit, suited to close-quarters combat as highlighted by its bright red tonfa-style weapons. Gabriel explains: "[The bright red blades] could end up in the game, they could not. But at this point in

THE DREAD UNITE

Enemies come in all shapes and sizes in Destiny 2, with Eric Elton's 3D team responsible for fleshing out concepts and making them function in the game.

the process, I want my teammates' eyes to go to a specific place."

The second idea Gabriel has sketched out is the Husk's resistance to headshots, indicated in the concept art by heavy armour-plating around the head, neck and shoulder areas. This armour design borrows from Pyramidion shape language already established in earlier expansions, and these visual cues clue players into exactly which side this creature is on.

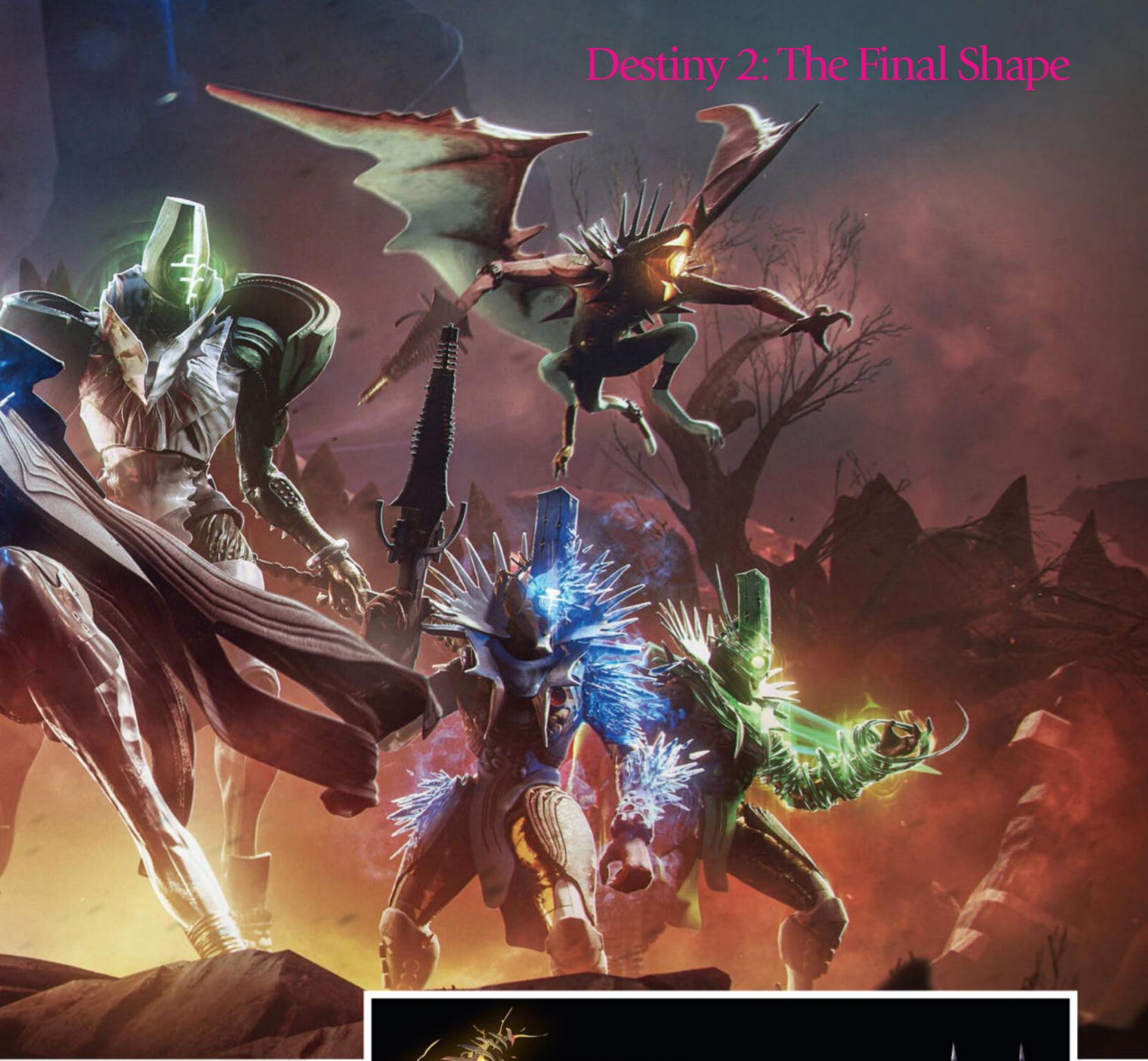
The Husk is designed to get in the player's face, so how do you fight it? Presented in the concept art are two options and gameplay outcomes. You can either target the Husk's weak point in the belly of the beast, causing the armour to erupt into a mass of roots reminiscent of the defeated silhouette of a boss from an earlier expansion, Calus; or destroy that hefty armour, freeing a pilot creature known as a Geist that then gives chase.

"We work on something unique every season, which is super-cool"

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

In a universe of Husks, Grims and worse, players have to constantly up their arsenal. Destiny 2 is known for its striking weaponry, from

Destiny 2: The Final Shape



high-powered guns to tricked-out blades. Much of this armoury falls under the domain of Michael Climer, the lead on the 15-person hard-surface art team.

"We get to work on something unique every season, which is super-cool," he says. "We have a fixed number of weapon archetypes, but it never feels like you're doing the same thing over and over again."

He shares the result of another multi-disciplinary pitch meeting, showing a number of weapon concepts themed around playing card suits. Among these concepts is a firearm with a subtle heart motif called the Honor of Zavala, ➡



HUSK CONCEPT

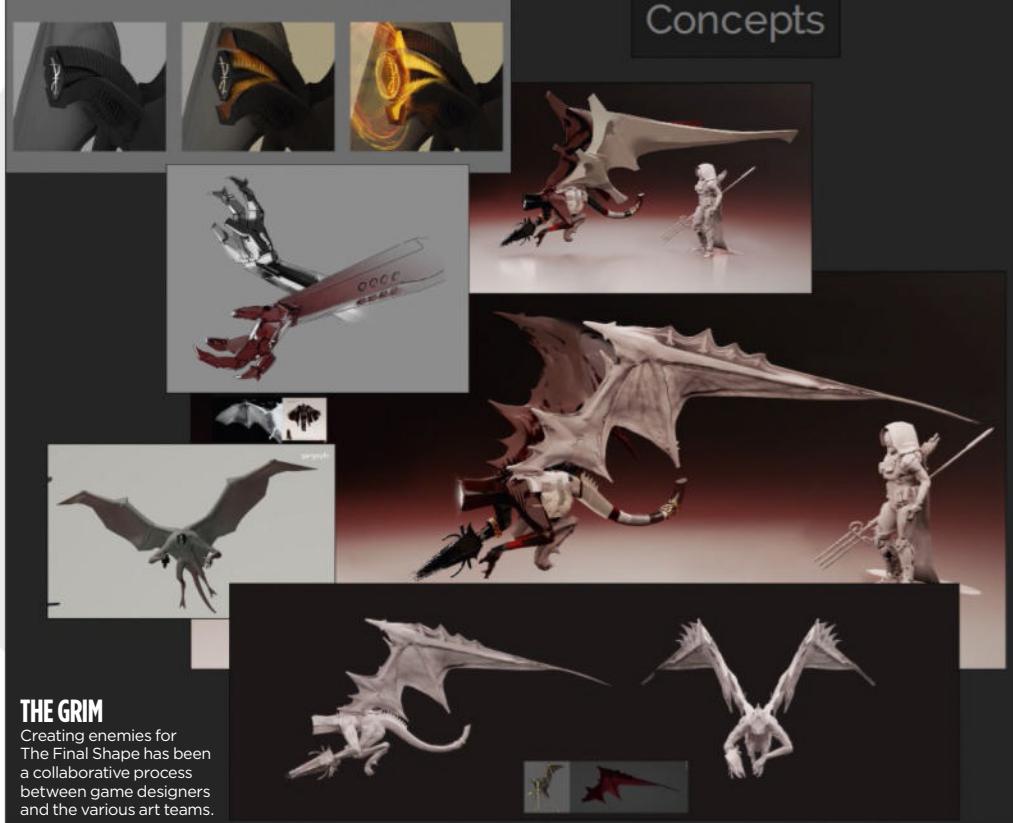
A detailed Husk concept shows the inspiration behind the design, as well as ideas for weapons and posing.

Feature

► in reference to Commander Zavala, the fan-favourite character played by late actor Lance Reddick.

He says: "Once we have the concept, we'll go ahead and start working through the same process that Eric [Elton] talked about, where we'll block it out, and we'll come up with sort of a rough prototype that we can verify works in-game, and is not too big, not too small."

Michael's team uses a variety of 3D software packages, including the usual suspects Maya and ZBrush, but also notes: "Blender has become a really popular one over the last couple of years. Each person can kind of pick and choose whatever software that they want, that works best for their workflow. So we're not super-prescriptive [about what our artists should use]."



► Each person can pick and choose whatever software that they want, that works best for their workflow ►

Returning to the aforementioned concepts, he shares: "We do a lot of tie-in with narrative and story... The backstory of this is [Cayde-6's] Ace of Spades hand cannon. This set of weapons is very much a direct tie into that, of 'What if there was also another stash of weapons that he had?'

This was just his favourites."

Michael also tells us: "We'll work with environment, we'll work with story and narrative, we'll work with art direction and concept, and sort of build this bigger picture than just 'This is a really cool-looking gun, and the player wants to chase after it.'"

LEARNING TO SHARE

It's no surprise, then, that when we ask Climer for advice on working in the

industry, he highlights the ability to collaborate as the most desired skill. "Over time, you'll get better at the craft; you just have to be persistent about it. But one of the big things that I look for, especially with people wanting to join the industry, is how well do you work with others?

"None of us work in a vacuum. So it's all about how well you can collaborate and communicate, and receive and provide feedback."

To hammer home the importance of this, Rusty Durbin quips: "Giving and receiving feedback" was going to be mine. I should have spoken up first."

Along similar lines, Elton says, "Learn from the people around you. I've been here at the studio for a while,

but I'm still constantly amazed at the talent that comes in and that I get to learn from. Always be open to those other influences [and to learning from other people]."

Garza builds on this point: "What I tell my students is to use their life experience, to reflect that in their art. Technique, all these things you learn with time [and by collaborating with] your co-workers: like, all this is important too, but what you bring from what you experience through your day-by-day... I think that's an invaluable skill."

There are no small roles at Bungie. Whether it's Hunters, Warlocks and Titans coming together to blast their way through the latest in-game raid, or concept artists, modellers and animators combining their creative powers to craft a really cool gun, Destiny 2 is a universe that's all about collaboration. ■



THE CALL

The Call is a rocket-assisted sidearm developed by Michael Climer's hard-surface art team.



FALSE IDOLS

Development artwork for False Idols, one of the swords you can discover and use.

Destiny 2: The Final Shape



SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

The cover art for the Annual Pass edition of The Final Shape showcases characters who play a big role in the narrative.

Interview



HARBINGER

An early exploration of the Harbinger character design for Halo Infinite.

FORERUNNER ROOM

Ben's design of the technologically advanced Forerunner control room from *Halo Infinite*.



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THE ART OF BEN MAURO

Dominic Carter finds out how the concept artist brings video game worlds to life and creates his own graphic novel series

Halo and Call of Duty are just two of the landmark video game franchises on Ben Mauro's impressive CV. And when he's not helping to bring major films and video games to life, he's also busy working on his own graphic novel series, HUXLEY. We caught up with Ben to hear how he juggles everything and manages to stay inspired.

Can you tell us a little about your background as an artist? How did you get started, and what path has your career taken?

I always had a passion for drawing and storytelling. I was deeply influenced

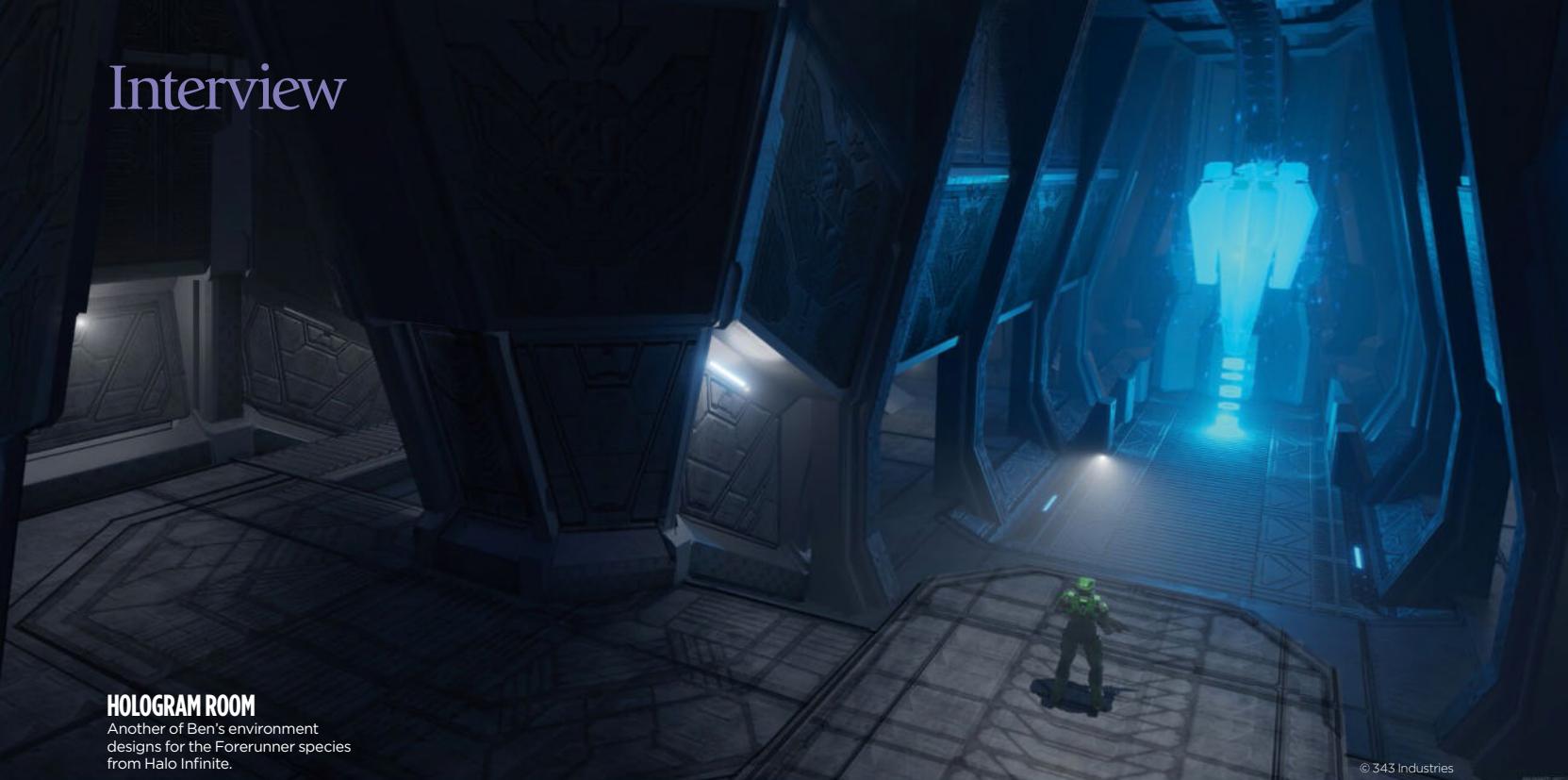
by my love for movies, video games, anime and comics from a young age, but it wasn't until maybe 17 that I took it more seriously and tried to pursue it as a career. I was a huge gamer, and I think the idea that I could one day work within the industry and create architecture and designs for games like Halo was a big motivating factor.

My career path in design began at the ArtCenter College of Design, with a focus on artwork for industrial and

entertainment design. This foundational education propelled me into various roles within the film and game industries. I started out down in New Zealand at Weta Workshop, working on projects that included both The Hobbit trilogy and Elysium, among many others.

After about four years I decided to begin freelancing, where I worked on multiple Call of Duty games like Black Ops 3 and 4 while travelling the world for around three years, living out of a suitcase. I eventually settled in the Seattle area to work at 343 Industries for many years on *Halo Infinite* while I finished my graphic novel, HUXLEY. Each of these projects has been an ➤

“Each project expanded my skills and pushed me into new territories of creativity”



Hologram Room

Another of Ben's environment designs for the Forerunner species from Halo Infinite.

education in a way, expanding my skills and pushing me into new territories of creativity.

Which artists have inspired you?

Artists such as Syd Mead, Ralph McQuarrie, Katsuhiro Otomo, Hayao Miyazaki and Moebius have been monumental inspirations for me over the years. Their ability to craft worlds that are both visionary and deeply immersive, or create films and stories that leave a lasting impact with an audience has always driven me to push the boundaries of my own work.



TERADA ROUGH

A first pass of the HUXLEY illustration that Ben shares more details about on page 58.

“Being an avid gamer, creating worlds players could fully immerse themselves in was a natural career progression”

Artist PROFILE

Ben Mauro



LOCATION: US

FAVOURITE ARTISTS:
Syd Mead, Ralph McQuarrie,
Katsuhiro Otomo, Hayao
Miyazaki, Moebius

MEDIA: Photoshop, ZBrush, Blender,
Unreal Engine 5, pencil

WEB: <https://benmaurodesign.com>

Which tools do you use to create your work?

I predominantly use Photoshop for my digital painting and sketching, combined with 3D modelling tools like ZBrush, Unreal Engine 5 and Blender for most of my work, while still keeping a pencil and paper around for traditional sketching. These tools allow me to explore complex designs and worlds at a level of detail and realism that matches my vision.

How has your art developed over the years, and what has been behind those changes?

My art has constantly evolved, and is influenced by the demands of the projects I'm working on, the industry I've worked in, and my ongoing quest to better my craft. Initially my work leaned more towards traditional drawing and painting techniques, but as technology and my career have



HUXLEY: ORACLES

An image from the HUXLEY Legendary Art collection, brought to life with the help of Nikolas Gekko.

advanced, I've integrated more digital tools and techniques such as ZBrush, Blender and Unreal Engine. This rapid arms race of techniques usually happens in my professional work, so to offset this a lot of my personal work and projects like HUXLEY were intentionally more old school pencil on paper and illustrated by hand.

What made you want to get into video game projects? Have you always been a gamer?

The interactive aspect of video games always fascinated me. Being an avid gamer, the prospect of creating worlds that players could explore and fully immerse themselves in was a ➤



HARBINGER DESIGN

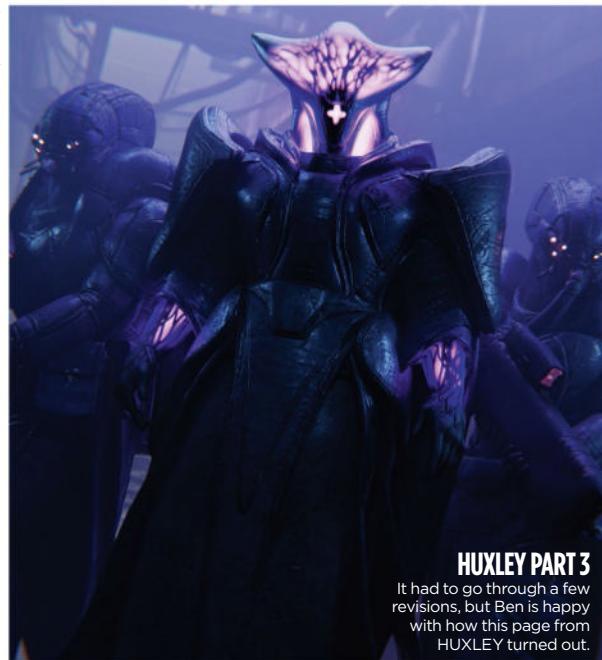
Ben's final look for Halo Infinite's Harbinger, which took inspiration from early designs by Daniel Chavez.

FORERUNNER ENTRANCE

The imposing entrance to the Forerunner building, with added elements for scale.

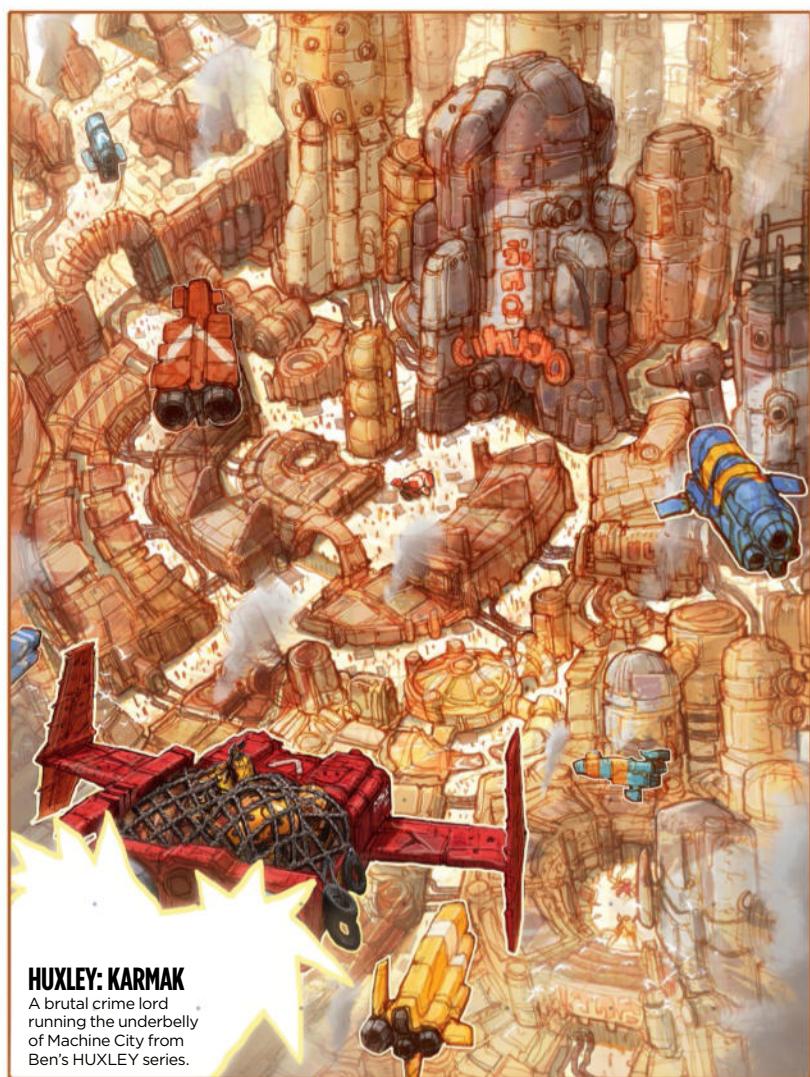


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HUXLEY PART 3

It had to go through a few revisions, but Ben is happy with how this page from HUXLEY turned out.



HUXLEY: KARMAK

A brutal crime lord running the underbelly of Machine City from Ben's HUXLEY series.

FIVE WAYS TO FIND CREATIVE INSPIRATION

Being an artist involves staying curious! Ben reveals the five ways he fuels his creativity

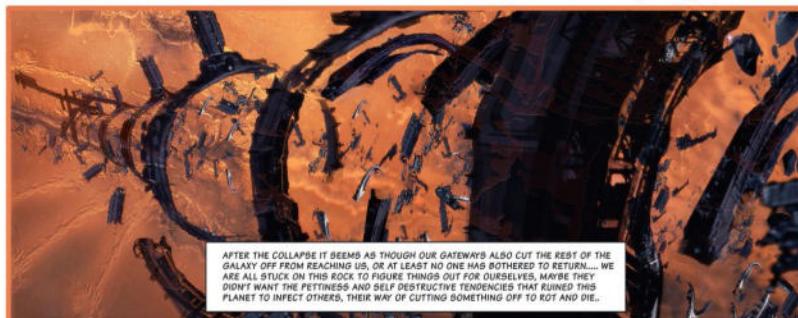
1 Constantly watch and learn what's being made in the game and film worlds. This helps you to stay on the cutting edge of the games that are being released and the stories being told.

2 Get out into the world and travel whenever possible to gain new perspectives.

3 Engage with a community of artists to find inspiration and get critiques on your work.

4 Develop personal projects that will challenge and grow your current skill set.

5 Stay updated with the advances in art tools and technologies in a fast-changing industry.



► natural progression in my career. I really enjoy being able to spend more time designing each aspect of a game world than is usually allowed on film; it's a more long-term process, but I really enjoy being able to experience the end result in-game.

You're currently working as a senior concept designer and art director within the video game industry.

What does this role involve?

As a senior concept designer and art director, my role involves developing visual language and design elements that define the universe of a game, and ensuring that everything is consistent from a production design standpoint. From characters and environments through to props and vehicles, I work closely with other departments to ensure there's a coherence and fidelity to the game's vision.

For example, on Halo Infinite I was heavily involved in updating the Forerunner design language seen in the game's architecture, environments and objects. The original Halo game, and specifically the Forerunner

architecture, was one of the big reasons I ended up going down the path of being an artist in the first place, so it was a huge honour and full-circle moment to help bring that world to life in the new game. It was a fun but challenging task in terms of respecting what I loved in the old games, while updating things with all the next-generation details that we could push now.

What does your average working day look like?

No two days are the same, but they typically involve a mix of sketching, digital painting, 3D modelling, and meetings with the development teams to ensure alignment with the project's goals. Lately, a lot of my time is taken up with emails and meetings as my roles grow on the personal and professional projects I work on. This



CROWD PLEASER

Another piece from the HUXLEY Legendary Art collection, which in total encompasses 250 exclusive pieces of artwork.



HUXLEY: DEMON

Seeing the Demon from the HUXLEY comics realised with such fidelity was a real blast for Ben.

involves managing teams and making sure larger groups of people are all moving collectively toward a bigger goal. It's something I'm learning to grow into as opposed to individually creating a piece of art by myself.

What's your favourite part about being a concept artist in the video game industry?

The opportunity to bring new worlds and stories to life is so incredibly fulfilling for me. Knowing that your work will offer players an escape into a

“The opportunity to bring new worlds and stories to life is so incredibly fulfilling”

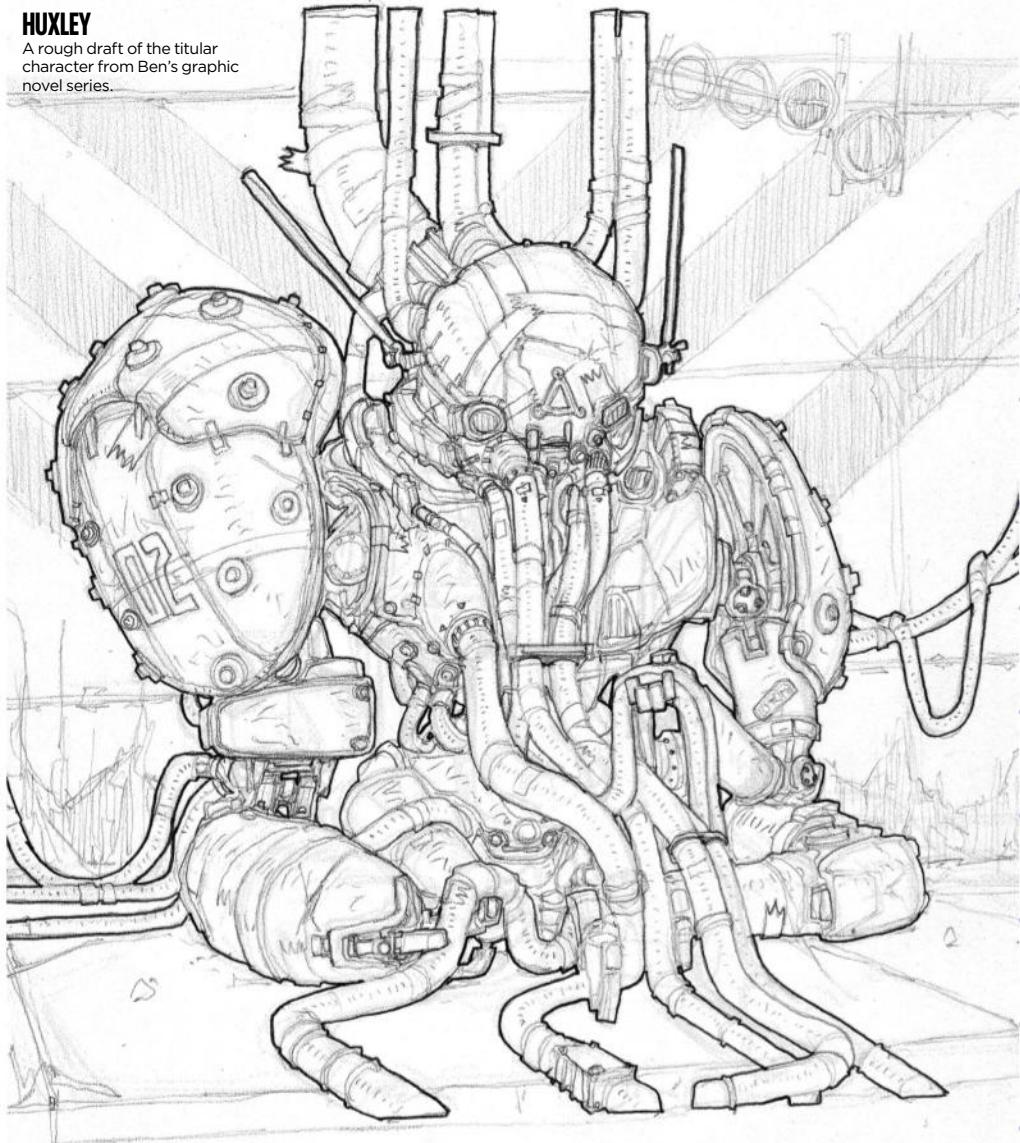
HALO INFINITE: RING

Ben's realisation of Halo's iconic rings was added to the menu screens in a recent update.

© 343 Industries

HUXLEY

A rough draft of the titular character from Ben's graphic novel series.



whole new universe is both humbling and exciting.

What's different about working on video game projects as opposed to film and TV?

Working in video games offers a unique set of challenges and rewards, primarily due to the interactive nature of the medium. Unlike film and TV where the narrative is fixed, games require designs that accommodate various player actions and decisions. This makes the design process much more involved since the player can look at any object from all angles.

A lot of the time in film and TV we would design things for a specific shot that's seen at a very specific angle, so we wouldn't need to design things quite in the same way as we do for games, unless it needed to be built and onset. But each production is different and there's more and more overlap in terms of the design processes for each medium over the years.

Of all the work that you've created so far, what are you the most proud of and why?

The work I did for Elysium holds a special place for me because it marked a significant period of growth as an artist, and allowed me to ➤

Interview

HUXLEY: TERADA

Ben explains how this illustration for his HUXLEY series evolved into a multiple-artist effort

This scene started life as a pencil on paper drawing while I was working on the HUXLEY graphic novel. After the composition was finalised, I painted it digitally and added in all the text and narrative elements needed for that moment in the story.

When the book was getting ready for release, I worked back and forth with Antonio Esparza to model and texture the HUXLEY robot character we see in the foreground. Meanwhile, the background character Terada and the overall scene were created by Nikolas Gekko. So while it started out really old school, other talented artists got involved with the art and IP as the brand continues to grow.

FEELING BLUE

Terada is an ancient and mysterious warrior of the Cerulean tribe.





HARBINGER SCULPT

Ben had fun sculpting the final look of his Harbinger design in ZBrush.

“A healthy exercise routine and eating well have helped to keep me more balanced”

contribute to a film that aligned closely with my interests in science fiction and societal commentary. It was also the first film I worked on completely from a couple of words on a page all the way through to a final movie in theatres, so it was really educational in terms of getting to fully understand how that process works from start to finish.

Can you share any details with us about the projects you’re working on right now?

A lot of my time is currently dedicated to HUXLEY, working on future books and stories to complete the first trilogy in my IP, along with going out to pitch

HUXLEY PART TWO

Each instalment of HUXLEY has been years in the making, and can be traced back as far as 2008.



THE WARS WERE IN FULL SWING, GIANT WAR MACHINES ROAMED THE PLANET, DESTROYING PATH...THE ESCALATION LED TO THE USE OF THE ATOMICS...AND LIFE HAS LIMPED ON SINCE THEN ON THIS ROCK...IT WAS A DARK TIME...BUT FROM DARKNESS COMES LIGHT.

BACK STORY

Terada provides some disturbing context in the pages of HUXLEY.

the IP for a TV series and other, bigger verticals this year like the public book release. Fingers crossed it all goes well!

Do you ever suffer from burnout, and if so, how do you deal with it? I've definitely experienced burnout a few times in my career, and it would typically happen when I would overwork for too many hours a day for too many years without a break. To recover, I ended up needing to force myself to take breaks, get away from

the computer, try to not work on weekends as much, and go on trips.

I also turned to other things like trying to find adjacent hobbies and creative activities that get me away from a screen – things such as cars, Dungeons & Dragons, photography, 3D printing, and so on – and keeping a healthy work-life balance. Some other things like having a healthy exercise routine and eating well have also helped to keep me more balanced over the years.

What advice would you give to aspiring artists hoping to follow in your footsteps?

Never stop learning and be open to criticism. Focus on building a strong foundational skill set in drawing and design principles before jumping into 3D and other programs if possible.

And most importantly, be persistent and highly adaptable to what is a fast-changing industry in the AI age we're heading into. During my whole career things have moved really fast, but it feels like that's only accelerating as time goes on.



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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

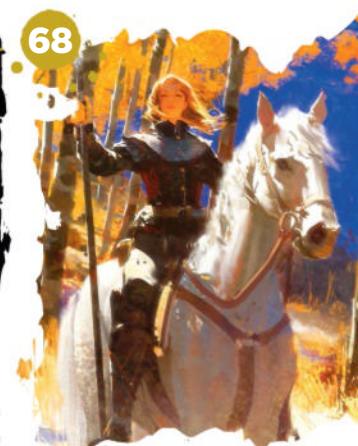
ImagineEX Workshops

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Advice from the world's best artists



This issue:

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your characters**

Discover Hardy Fowler's advice on how to create interesting characters with shape principles.

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Raja Nandepu mixes vibrant colours with greys and neutrals to catch the viewer's eye.

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character artwork**

Joel Chaim Holtzman builds a palette to help the storytelling in a selection of Dune-inspired art.

Artist insight

15 TIPS TO SHAPE YOUR CHARACTERS

Hardy Fowler shares his simple but effective shape principles that lead to dynamic, interesting character designs every time

Artist PROFILE

Hardy Fowler

LOCATION: US

Hardy is a concept artist and illustrator, with clients that include Disney and Magic: The Gathering. He is also an art mentor on his online learning platform, Digital Painting Studio. <https://bit.ly/3KMju81>



Designing and painting characters that have the elusive 'cool factor' can be like trying to capture lightning in a bottle. What makes one character cool and another one not? Over a long career, I have boiled down a formula that leads to reliably cool results every time – and it all revolves around one key element.

Shape is the most fundamental and powerful element of visual design. Our eyes just seem to recognise and process shapes more

easily than other elements like value and colour – think of how you can identify popular characters just from their silhouette. Character designers can take advantage of this by designing directly with shapes.

Instead of exhaustive sketching or line art (which is time-consuming and often gets painted over anyway), I find that blocking in shapes directly has some huge upsides. It lets us truly see our designs instantly, and it helps us avoid any shape or silhouette surprises that seem to always happen when we

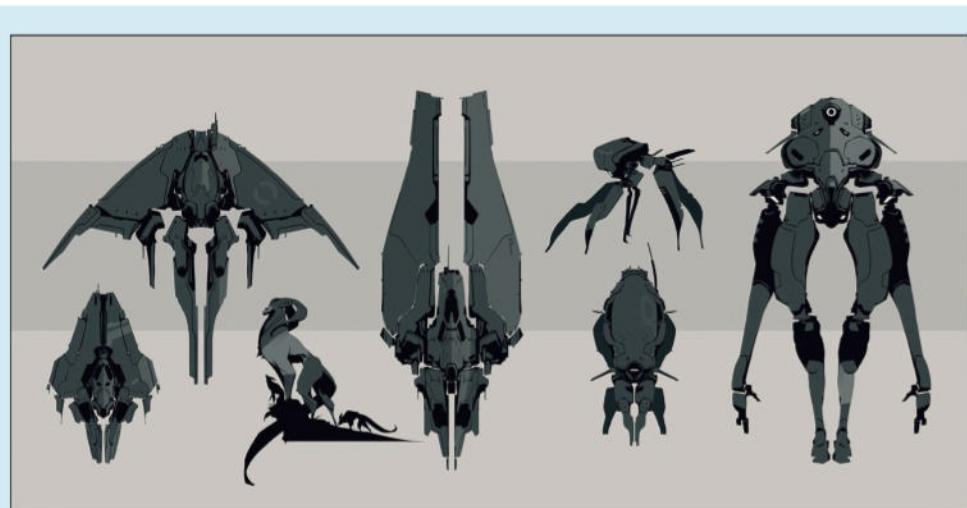
block in sketches; but most importantly, it lets us wield some simple but very powerful shape principles in real time. Although it may seem basic, this is the stuff at the heart of what makes things look cool – mastery of these principles is the key to getting those elite, professional-looking results. Shape design is where pros are made!

In this workshop, I'll go over 15 core shape design principles that lead to dynamic character designs, and show how to work them into an effective and efficient workflow.



1 SHAPE LANGUAGE

Shape language can be understood with three primary shapes: circle, square and triangle. Using these in our designs can create a powerful emotional resonance. Circles can represent femininity, friendliness or organic forms (Volkswagen Beetle, Eve from Wall-E). Squares can represent masculinity, stability or solidity (Optimus Prime, Wall-E). Triangles can represent speed, or can seem predatory or villainous (sharks or a fighter jet). Disney characters are a great study in these core shape language principles.

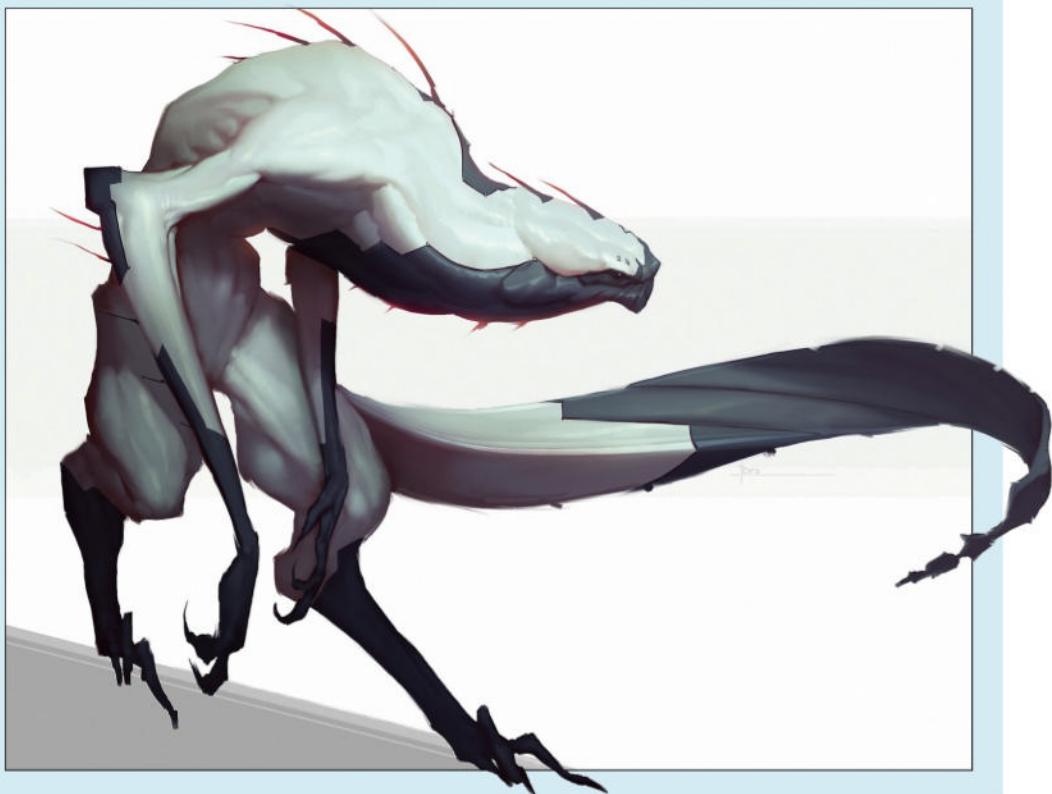


2 BIG/MIDDLE/SMALL

I love this principle – and it has been a game-changer in my career as a concept artist. If we arrange shape relationships into big/middle/small relationships, they just seem to always look good. It's the closest thing to a guarantee in art – it works every time! A trio of trees, three clouds in the sky, three clumps of hair on a character's forehead – this principle is universal, and is hugely effective when I'm blocking in shapes for character clothing. The ratio of the shape relationships is important: this is based on the Golden Ratio of roughly 1.6:1 (thanks, Fibonacci!). When big/middle and middle/small have this approximate scale, things just look cool and 'designy'. Try it – it works!

3 MOVEMENT

I always want characters to look dynamic. Movement is the principle most responsible for achieving this. Now, the concept of visual movement can take many forms. We can actually show a character moving (running or jumping), but we can also go a more subtle route and show secondary movement, with hair or clothing blowing in the wind – instant drama! More core to the principle of movement is the concept of an action line: this is the invisible ‘spine’ that runs through each element we design. Make sure your action line is energetic and has a pleasing curve, and your character will leap off the screen.



4 BALANCE

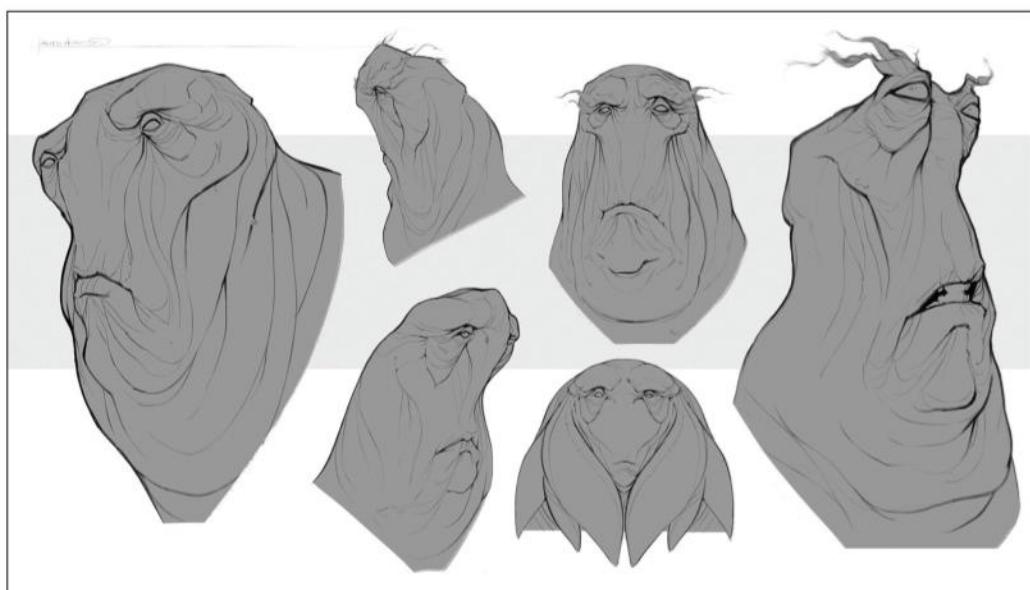
Second only to big/middle/small, balance is a powerful principle that led to an instant level-up in my career. Basically, we need to pair large shapes next to numerous smaller shapes: big and empty next to small and noisy. We need both sides of this equation to be balanced, or our images feel stale. If we have an image that is too visually active (with too many small, choppy shapes) it feels overwhelming and lacks a focal point – but if we have only large, empty shapes, it feels boring and incomplete. Pair these two things for a pleasing, professional look.



“Contrast is everywhere! We can even use it in our themes”

5 CONTRAST

Pairing opposite attributes is essential to making characters that look dynamic and interesting. We can do this in so many ways! Have light and dark values next to each other, complementary colours, different textures, different materials – contrast is everywhere! We can even use contrast in our themes: violence vs peace, nature vs man-made, good vs evil. ➤



Workshops

6 REPETITION

I like to think of this principle as visual music. Find ways to repeat certain design elements. Belt buckles, buttons, tattoos, clothing stitch lines – look for ways to take a lonely design element and make it part of a sequence. It gives your design a rhythm and harmony it would otherwise lack. Digital design tools often make this as easy as copy and paste.

“Take a lonely design element and make it part of a sequence”



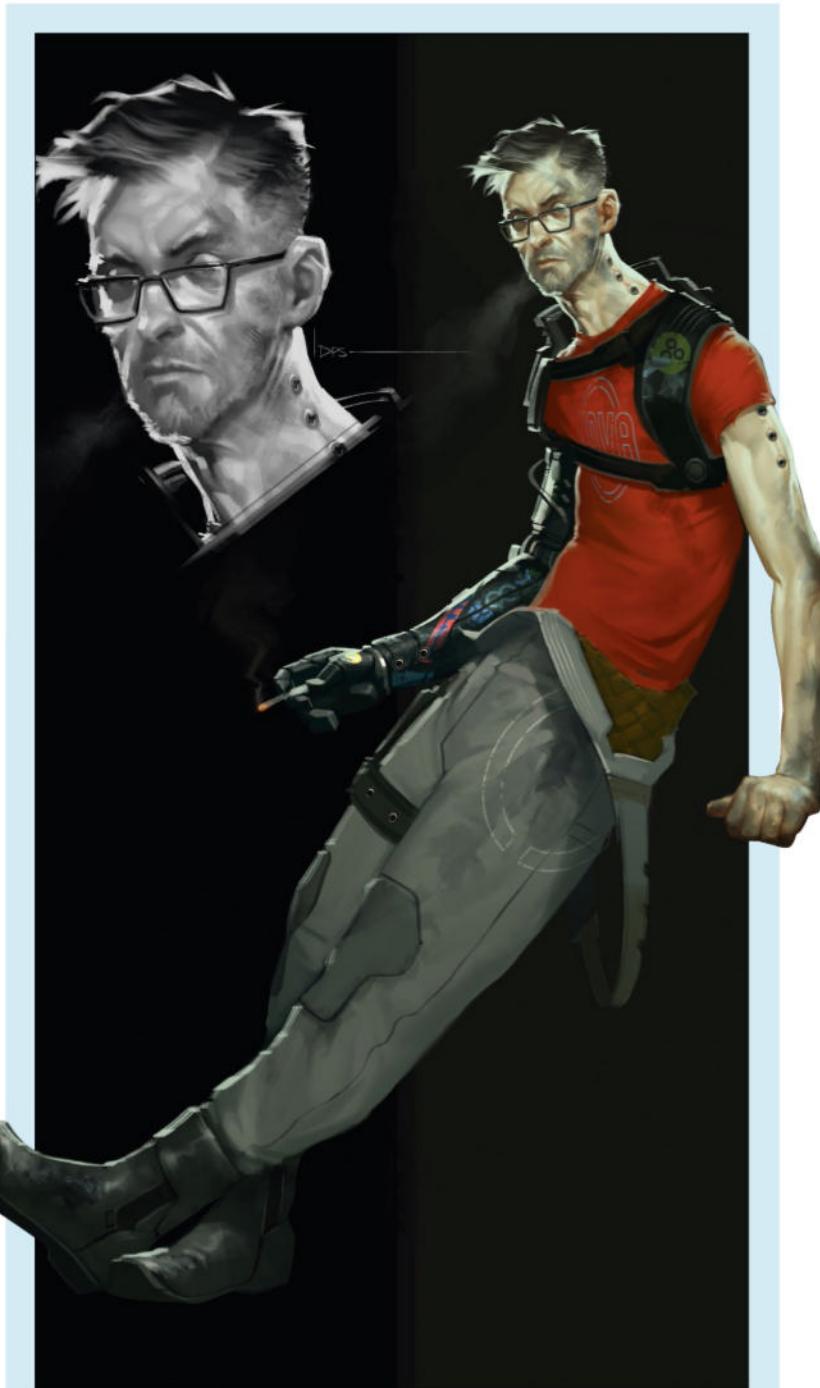
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7 DISSECT DESIGN LANGUAGES

One of the key skills a concept artist needs to cultivate is the ability to examine references and dissect them into their core shapes. If you are designing a character from the Victorian era, you'll need to study Victorian-era style references in order to make your design fit the genre. But if we simply study images and copy them, we aren't really designing or making something original.

The key to overcoming this is to break references down into their core ingredients – shapes! Look at the lines and shapes those Victorian garments make. The proportions, the edges, the curves – all of those core elements are what give a design its emotional resonance. Learn to dissect references into their building blocks, then build your own original ideas.

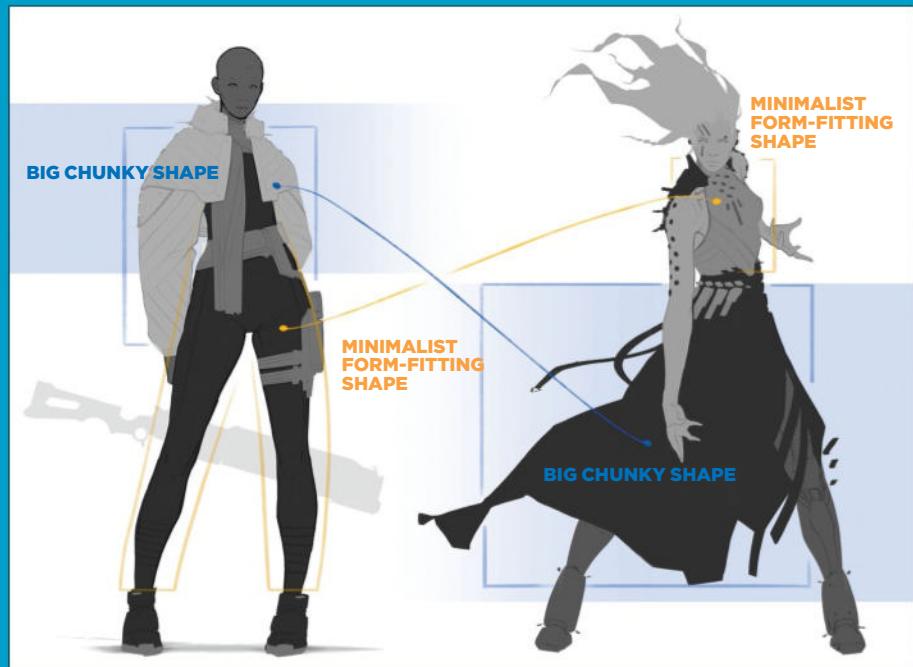
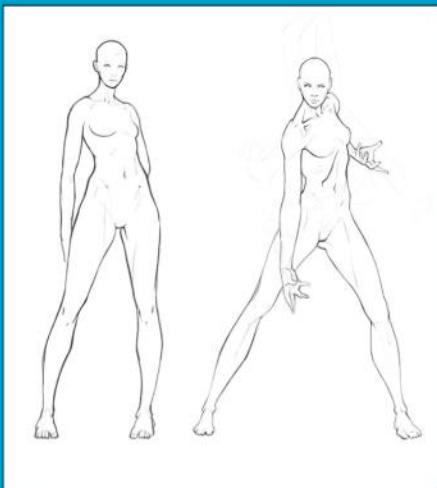


8 THE 80/20 RULE

It can feel hard to design something truly original. Oftentimes, everything we do feels derivative or played out. But when I was first setting out to be a concept artist, I ended up trying too hard to be original, and I ended up with a lot of very weird designs that didn't feel grounded in reality. The key to this is to simplify, and to use reality as a jump-off point. The 80/20 rule is perfect for this: make something that's 80% familiar (like a sci-fi pilot or a fantasy blacksmith), then add in 20% new and original (get weird with this 20%). This ensures that your design will be relatable and grounded in reality, but will also be interesting, original and cool!

9 CHUNKY VS FORM-FITTING

Try this simple but effective trick for distinctive costume designs

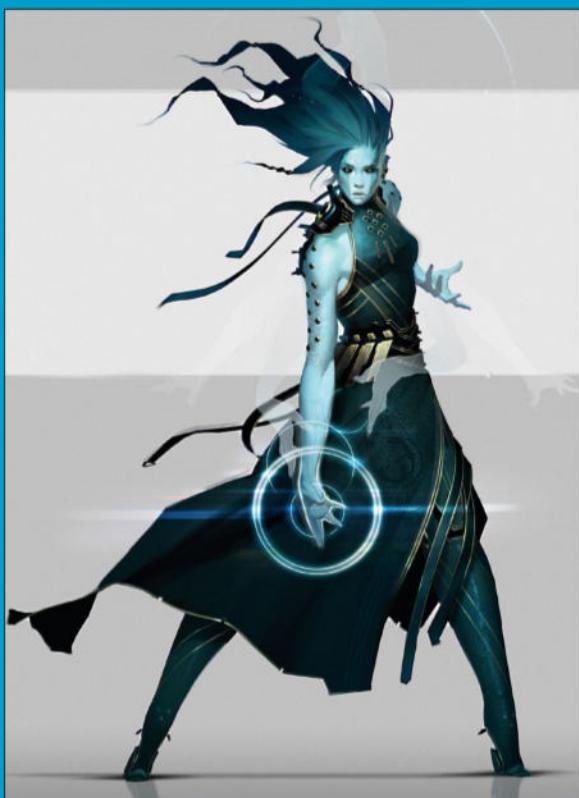


A Start with the figure

Remember that the character can never work if the figure doesn't work first. I always start a character design with a mannequin drawing, like these. I spend quite a bit of time refining and polishing these simple figure drawings to make sure that the pose, proportions, attitude and facial expression all fit my vision for the character. This way, we are designing up from a solid foundation.

B Pair contrasting shapes

Here's a cool shape design trick: pair one big, chunky garment with a minimalist, form-fitting garment. You can switch this up, like we see in these two example designs: chunky jacket with tights, or chunky dress or pants with form-fitting top. Remember your big/middle/small shape relationships as well, and this tip works every time!



C Add detail

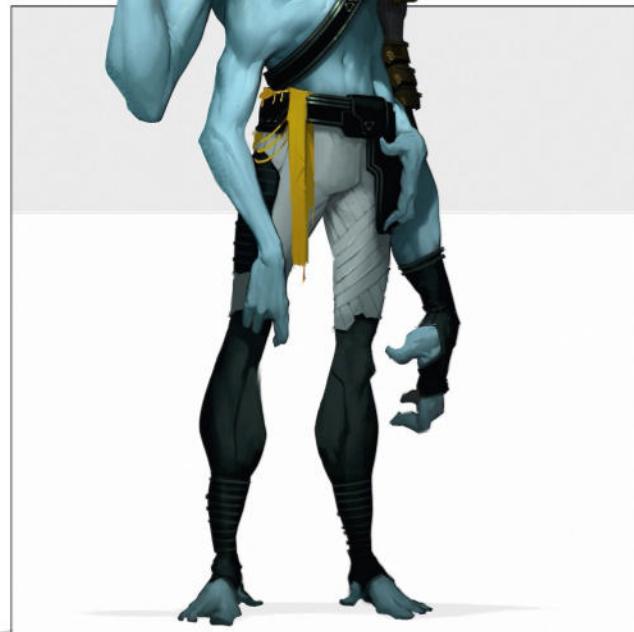
Final paintings! When we apply shape design and solid human figure drawing at the core of our characters, it sets us up for success in later steps. Polish and rendering are undeniably cool, but the shape design and the figure drawing we solve in the earlier steps is what ultimately determines the success or failure of a character design.

Workshops



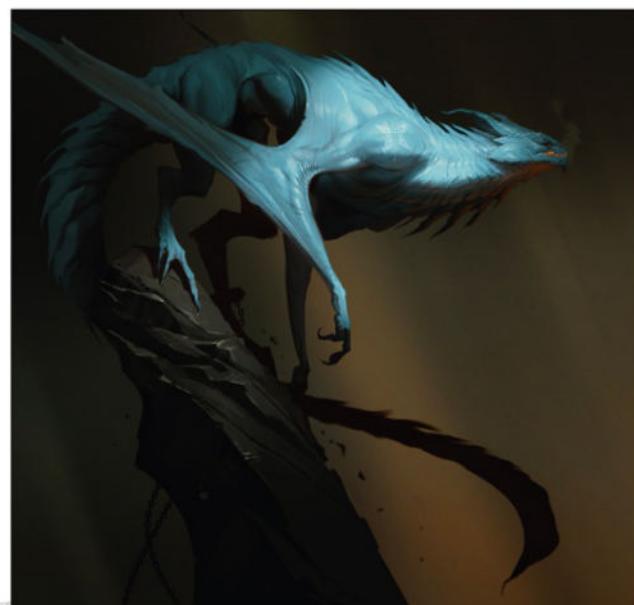
10 HUMAN FACTOR

Most of my tips have been about designing shapes for character clothing, gear and costuming, but we must never forget the most important element of a character design: the human being! Characters are always fascinating because we humans relate to each other, and see ourselves in others. For this reason, drawing and painting a believable, engaging and authentic human is the most important part of any character design. To put it another way: if the human you draw isn't working, the rest of the character won't matter.



11 SYMMETRY AND ASYMMETRY

Symmetry just looks cool. Our human eyes have an appetite for patterns, so when things match like we expect them to, it can give a pleasing sense of order and harmony. But, just like everything else in design, if we do any one thing too much, it starts to look boring and stale. So (similar to the balance principle in tip 4), we need to balance symmetry with asymmetry. Show a character who has symmetry in their clothing, but find opportunities for a bit of asymmetry. Add in a belt that crosses on a diagonal, or shoulder armour on just one side. Every design element must have its opposite.

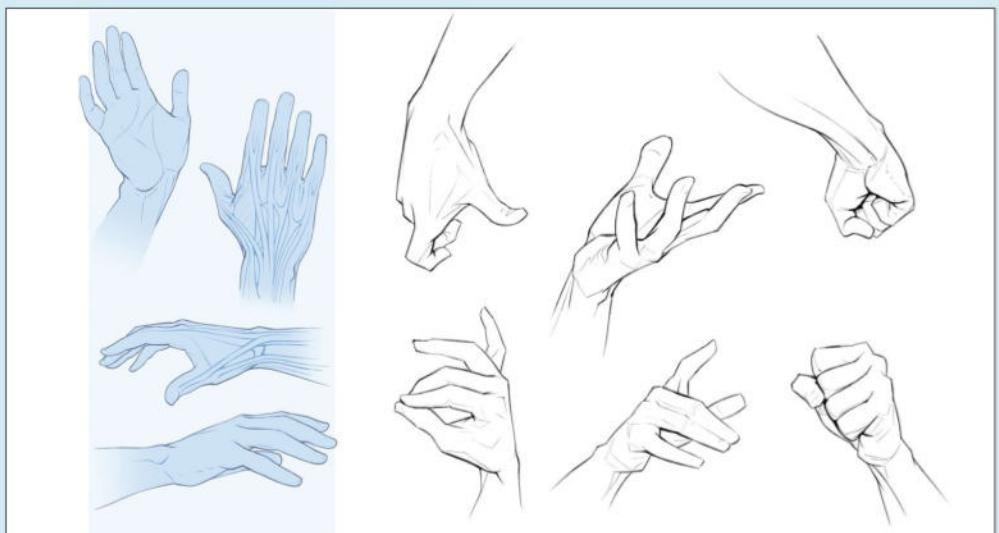


12 S.I.C.

These three letters represent three main line types (that look exactly like these letters). S-curves can give a pose spring and fluidity. C-curves can show changes in direction or coiled potential energy (like in a squatting pose). I is just a straight line: it implies power and deliberateness, and can make strong characters feel firmly planted to the ground.

13 FOCUS ON THE HANDS

After the face, hands are the most expressive and nuanced part of the body – which is why they are so difficult to draw and paint realistically. My advice is to cheat! Take photos and really get those hand poses right – the attention you pay to your characters' hands will shine through in your drawing and final painting, and add depth to your characters.

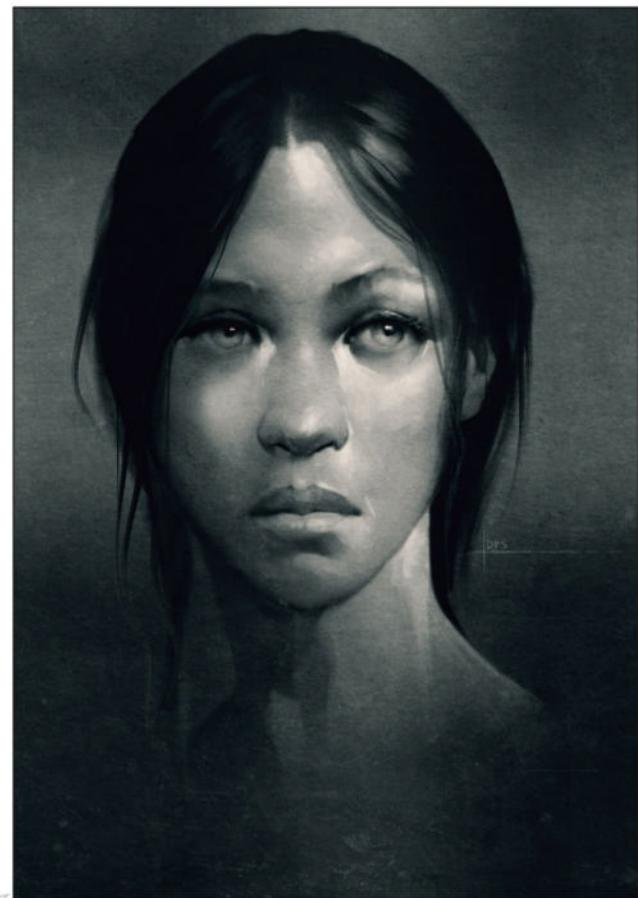


“Choose a pose that fits the character”



14 GESTURE AND POSE

Part of getting that authentic human factor to work is in the figure's pose and gesture. Choose a pose that fits the character. If you're designing a barbarian warrior, make sure they look aggressive and confident. If you are designing a malevolent villain, give them a sinister overtone in their posture. Study references and model poses in the mirror to figure things out – anything to make sure that this human factor shines through in your base pose. Again, this is foundational: if the pose doesn't communicate, it really doesn't matter how cool the clothing on top of it looks.



15 KEEP IT LOOSE

When drawing and painting characters, there is so much that we have to get right – it can be overwhelming. Balancing the nuances of figure drawing, shape design and visual storytelling can feel like it puts us into a box. This has the effect of making us feel hesitant and timid as artists: we second-guess every decision. Fight this tendency by keeping your lines, your shapes and your brush strokes as loose and expressive as possible. It will bring you to finished paintings that feel alive! 

Technique focus

GUIDE WITH COLOUR

Raja Nandepu balances vibrant hues with greys and neutrals to direct your attention to the central character



"This piece is from my Warriors series, which features mediaeval characters in adventurous scenarios. I wanted to capture the changing of the seasons through the

colours of the sky and the golden leaves against the knight and her horse. When you create an autumn scene, focus on balancing light and shadow to make key elements stand out. Use vibrant colours in the background to capture the viewer's

attention, and save subdued tones or complementary colours for central figures to create a sense of depth and focus. If you're struggling with colour or anatomy, refer to photos or Old Master paintings with an established colour palette."

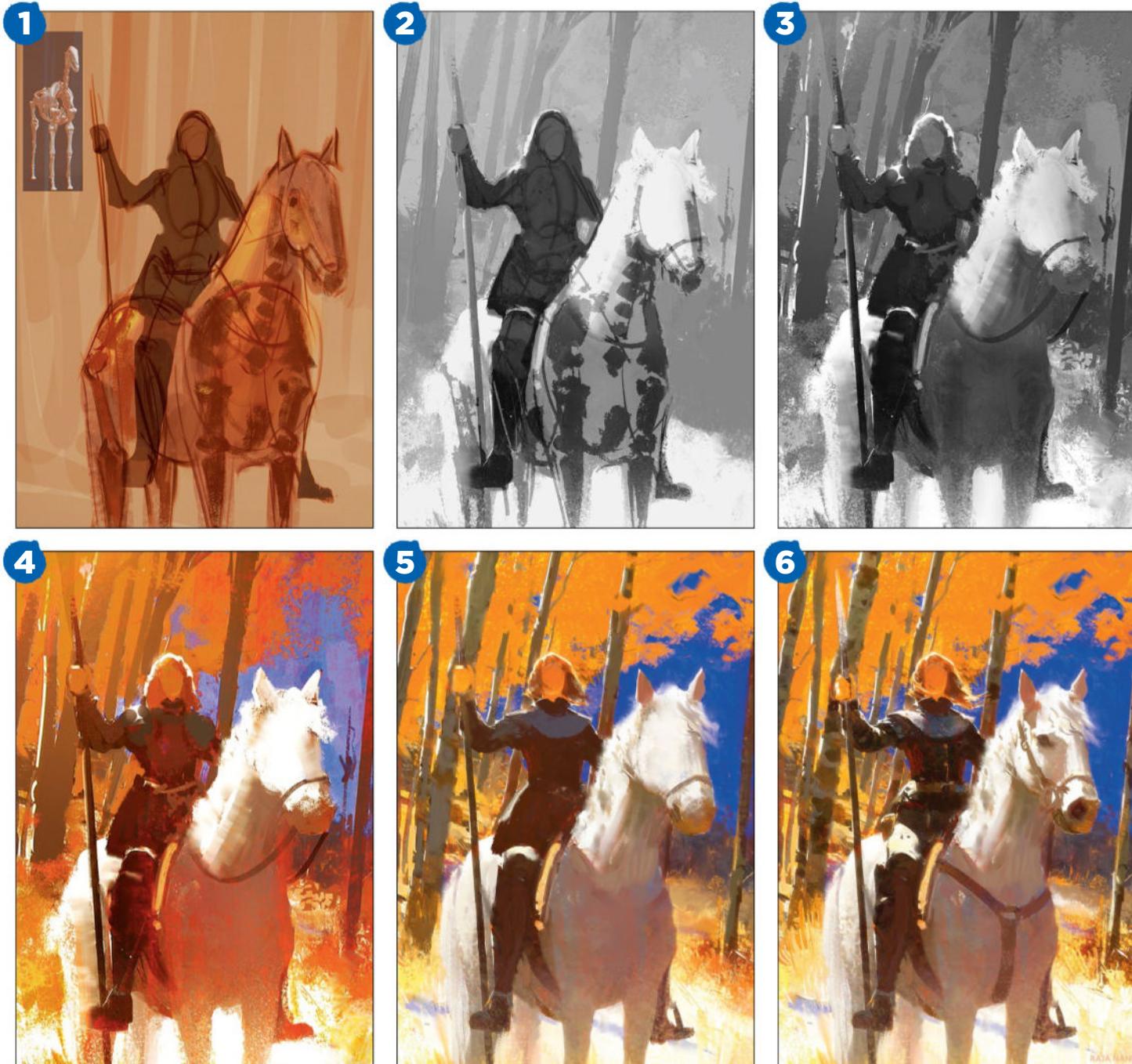
Artist PROFILE

Raja Nandepu

LOCATION: India

Raja is a freelance concept artist and illustrator who works in gaming and film. His previous projects include *Stranger Things*, *Arcane* and *Shadow and Bone*, and he is currently in pre-production on a film.

<https://bit.ly/3xsua8M>





Blender, 3DCoat & Photoshop CREATE A DARK FANTASY CONCEPT

Concept artist **Andrew Palyanov** shows how he develops a detailed location, from sketch and 3D model to digital painting

Artist PROFILE

Andrew Palyanov

LOCATION: Poland

Andrew is a game and film concept artist, specializing in environment concept art and keyframe concepts. <https://bit.ly/3VK5iTp>



I'm a fan of Souls-like games, and of dark fantasy style overall. The idea of creating this concept came to me after I played Mortal Shell, developed by Cold Symmetry. I like the mystic and foggy environments in that game, with their abandoned medieval-style architecture, so I wanted to create a location in a similar style.

I decided to create a level that would lead to the main location boss. For the level design itself, I decided to make it simple, literally a straight pass. However, the environment design needed to be really epic, preparing the character for something dangerous inside. It was important to not only create a nice-looking image, but also to create a comprehensive location that would look attractive from any

point of gameplay and convey the necessary mood.

I always try to use 3D software, which makes it quicker and simpler to immerse myself in the environment and reveal what I need to fix or replace. It's important to think out all the element designs according to the mood of the environment. The design should look attractive and support the atmosphere and story.

How I create... AN INITIAL EPIC CONCEPT



1 Draw the sketch

After the reference research, I roughly imagined the basic structure of my future location. It would be an old, semi-ruined stone bridge, leading to the main entrance of the boss room, with two enormous statues of guards standing next to the entrance. I began with a line sketch in Photoshop, in order to define these core elements of the location.



2 Block in 3D

After figuring out the main location structure, I did primitive 3D blocking in Blender. I always put a human figure in each of my 3D scenes to understand the scale. In addition, I will think up a design for the elements, create simple 3D models for them, and paste them into the 3D scene, permanently specifying and enhancing them.



3 Focal element

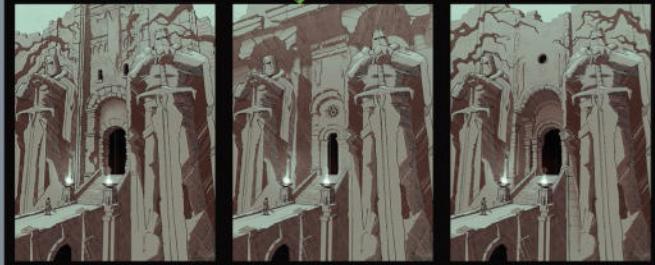
It's important for me to have some prominent, eye-catching element in the image. This element should represent the idea of the location. In the case of this chamber and entrance, I decided to create two huge statues of guard knights, symbolising prohibition to enter on one side and power on the other, that point out the boss nearby.

In depth Environment concept art



Workshops

DEVELOP A SCENE



Explore concepts

The next step was main element concepts. Clients like it when you give them options to choose between. Consequently, I try to do several options for each element concept, instead of only one. Obviously, this is a personal project, so I am an art director for myself, but even the concept artist himself isn't always sure what will look better if he doesn't actually paint it and compare the options.



RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: SAMPLED BRUSH 1 (ROTATION)



SAMPLED BRUSH 2

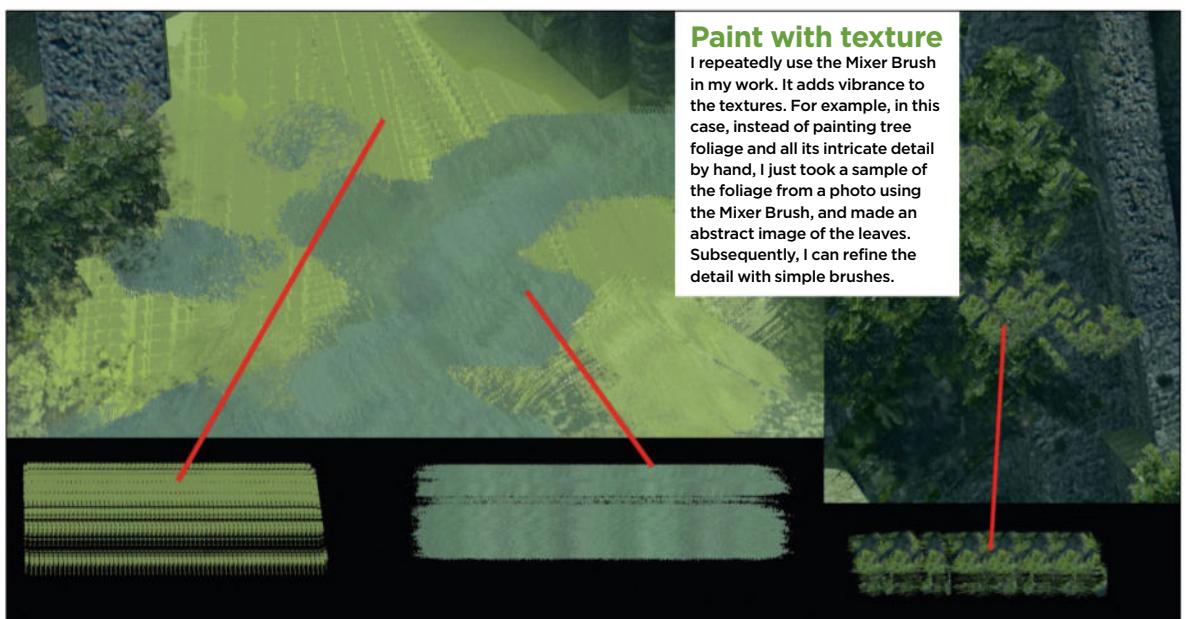


MH 8B BRUSH (ROTATION)



Some of my brushes are set to take advantage of Rotation, found in Photoshop under Brush Pose in Brush Settings.

 **GET YOUR
RESOURCES**
See page 5 now!



Paint with texture

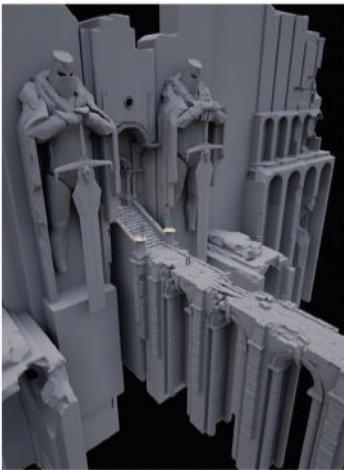
I repeatedly use the Mixer Brush in my work. It adds vibrance to the textures. For example, in this case, instead of painting tree foliage and all its intricate detail by hand, I just took a sample of the foliage from a photo using the Mixer Brush, and made an abstract image of the leaves. Subsequently, I can refine the detail with simple brushes.

In depth Environment concept art

Assemble the model

I made 3D models from my chosen 2D concepts. Some of them were made in Blender, some of them in 3DCoat. Blender is nice for doing hard-surface modelling, whereas 3DCoat is useful for organic forms and medieval architecture.

Next, I arranged all the models in the Blender scene. The advantage of using Blender is that you can switch to first-person navigation and walk around your scene, just like in a game. I tried to make my scene look nice from any angle, but for the final concept, I chose the view from which I could see the main details. It's necessary in commercial projects to see all the details for modellers.



Add detail

I use the Art Pen from Wacom, which is sensitive to rotation, giving much more control over brushstrokes. If you use a standard Wacom pen, you can imitate rotation by adjusting Tilt in Brush Settings. I often use a flat brush with texture (Sampled Brush 2) and try to control the direction of my brushstrokes, taking into account the composition of the image and object shape. In such a way, you can add more dynamism to the image. I also use a brush with dynamic colour and value settings (MH 8B Brush (Rotation)). It brings more colour vibrance to the image compared with a solid-colour brush.

Vary 3D textures

I had a very tiled stone texture after 3D rendering. It created a 'noisy' effect. Therefore, I had to break up the tiles here and there by adding different textures to the castle bricks and revealing them through masks.



3D render

I did a simple 3D render, to overpaint in Photoshop. I created a single material for all architectural elements, with specific settings. The main material has an old stone texture, whereas the top surfaces are covered by green moss: this helps to visually separate elements and highlight their shapes.



People for scale

I always add some human characters to my environment concepts. They add life to the image, and help the viewer to figure out the overall scale.

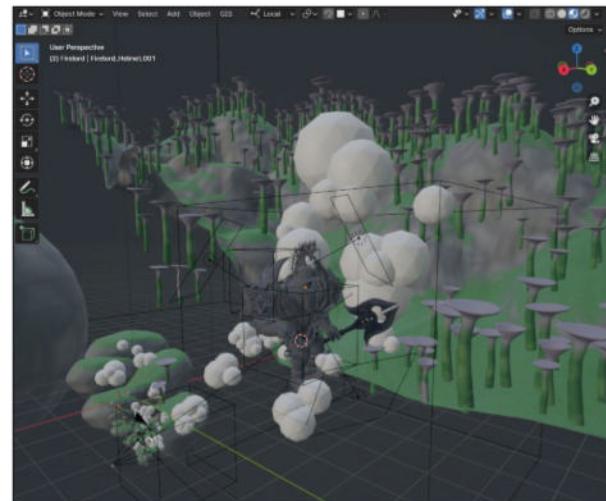
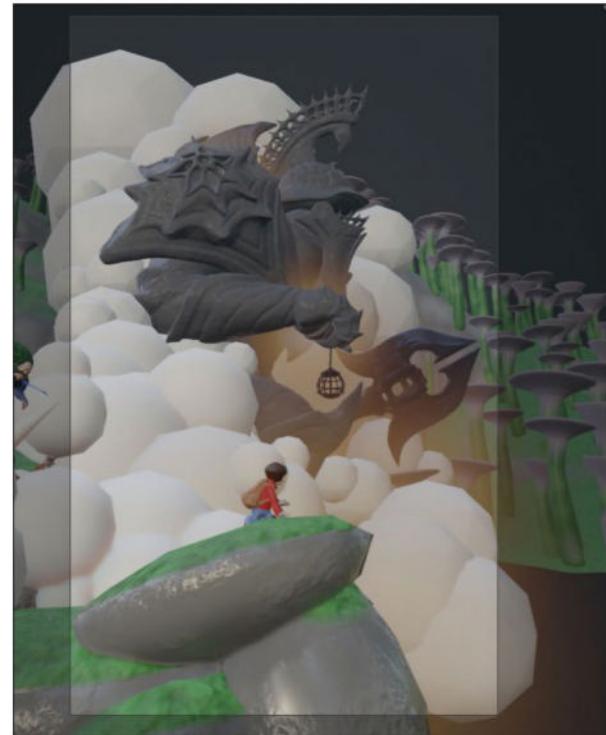
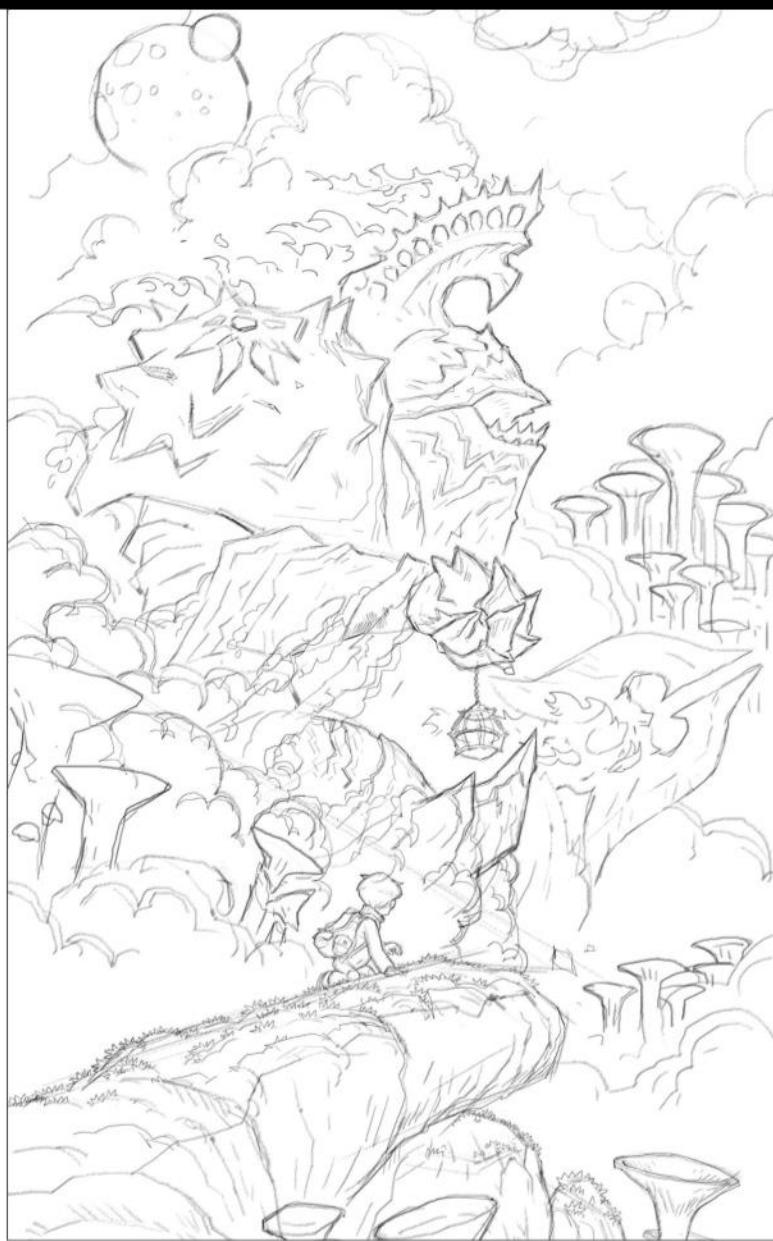


Roots and vines

To make the scene feel more abandoned and mystic, I added tree roots under the bridge.



Workshops



Technique focus

USE 3D MODELS FOR REFERENCE

Daniel Lieske shows how to start off your composition in 3D software before you paint

"This piece depicts a pivotal moment in my fantasy graphic novel The Wormworld Saga. I started by setting up a reference scene with simple 3D models in Blender, then I rendered and retouched the composition to create a rough greyscale version of the artwork. Next, I created a line drawing on top of the first composition and used it to guide the

blocking in of my colours. Finally, I used overlay textures and the Mixer brush in Photoshop to enhance the painterly look of the artwork."

I find that even a simple 3D model can help to balance the visual masses in your composition, and build a strong foundation for all the detailing work that you end up putting into your art."



Artist PROFILE

Daniel Lieske
LOCATION: Germany

Daniel is a digital artist and graphic novel author from Warendorf, Germany. Alongside his own projects, he works as a freelance illustrator and a games artist. www.daniellieske.com



Clip Studio Paint, Photoshop, Blender & Character Creator 4

DEVELOP DRAMA WITH CONTRAST

Environment specialist **Enoch Driscoll** combines a selection of tools to create a striking concept piece

Artist PROFILE

Enoch Driscoll

LOCATION: US



One of my passions is creating worlds for others to explore. This has manifested itself in many ways, from being an avid Dungeons & Dragons player to my work as a concept artist.

Enoch Driscoll works as a freelance environment concept artist with a speciality creating sci-fi and fantasy video game settings. He loves to capture the soul of an environment by building keyframe art.
<https://bit.ly/3xmJbsY>

In this workshop, I'll walk you through my process for completing visual development art for movies and video games. Vis dev is more specific than just being a big image full of highly polished characters doing cool things. Its main goal is to give the rest of the art department a shared vision. With a well-thought piece, every other artist will have a clear vision for their own projects; it shows the character designs, lighting, mood and environment, and can even show VFX and UI design.

When I create one of these pieces, I use every tool available to me. From 3D to photobashing, if it speeds me up I'll use it. But more important than any software is the story. If I put together the perfect image with incredible textures, perspective and proportions but don't show any foreshadowing or emotion, then the image will probably be considered a failure by vis dev standards. Viewers will need something to attach to mentally, emotionally and visually.

Only once I have the story can I start designing, eventually bringing the image to life in 3D, and then compiling everything cohesively in Photoshop. Of course, the artistic fundamentals are key, mixed with solid technical skills in the typical digital art software.



Level up your concepts with a
FREE 30-DAY TRIAL FOR CHARACTER CREATOR 4

<https://bit.ly/4c0xwiv>

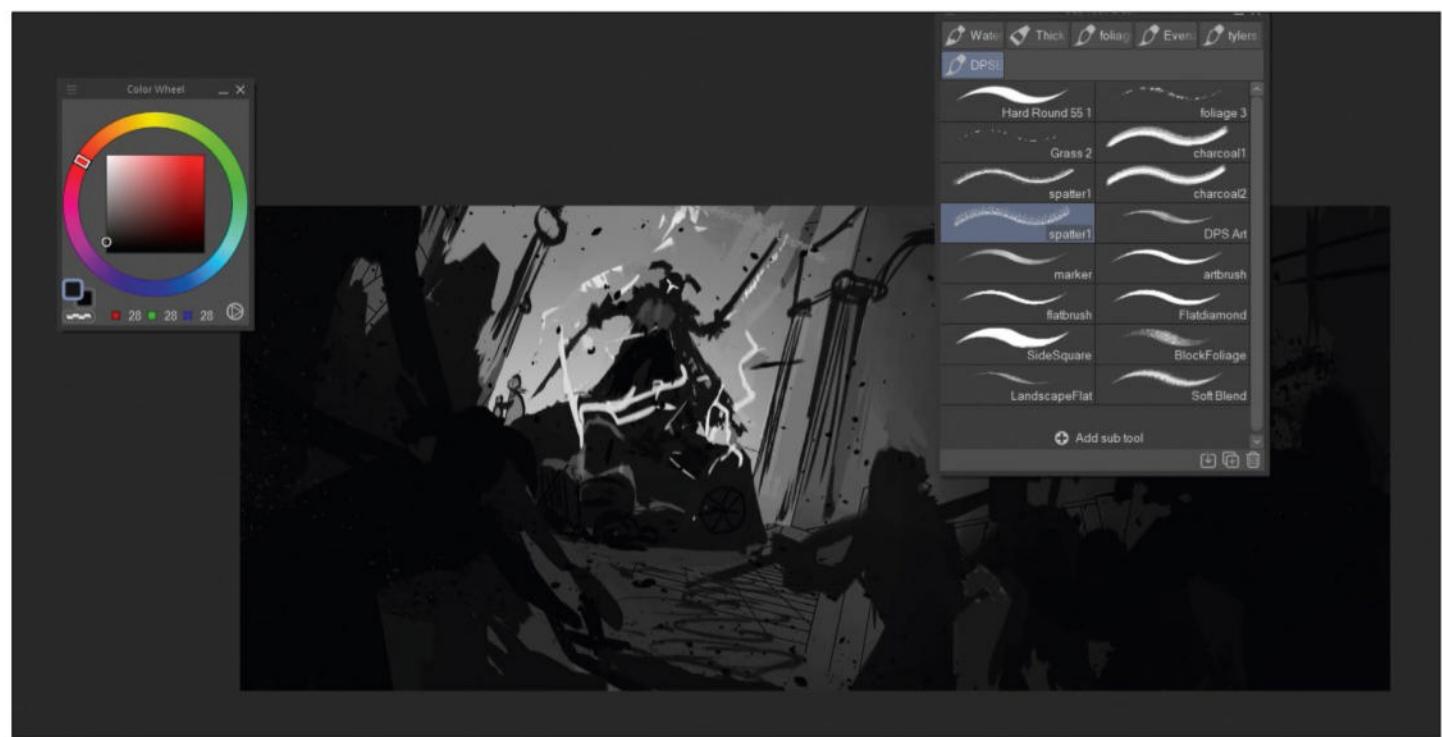
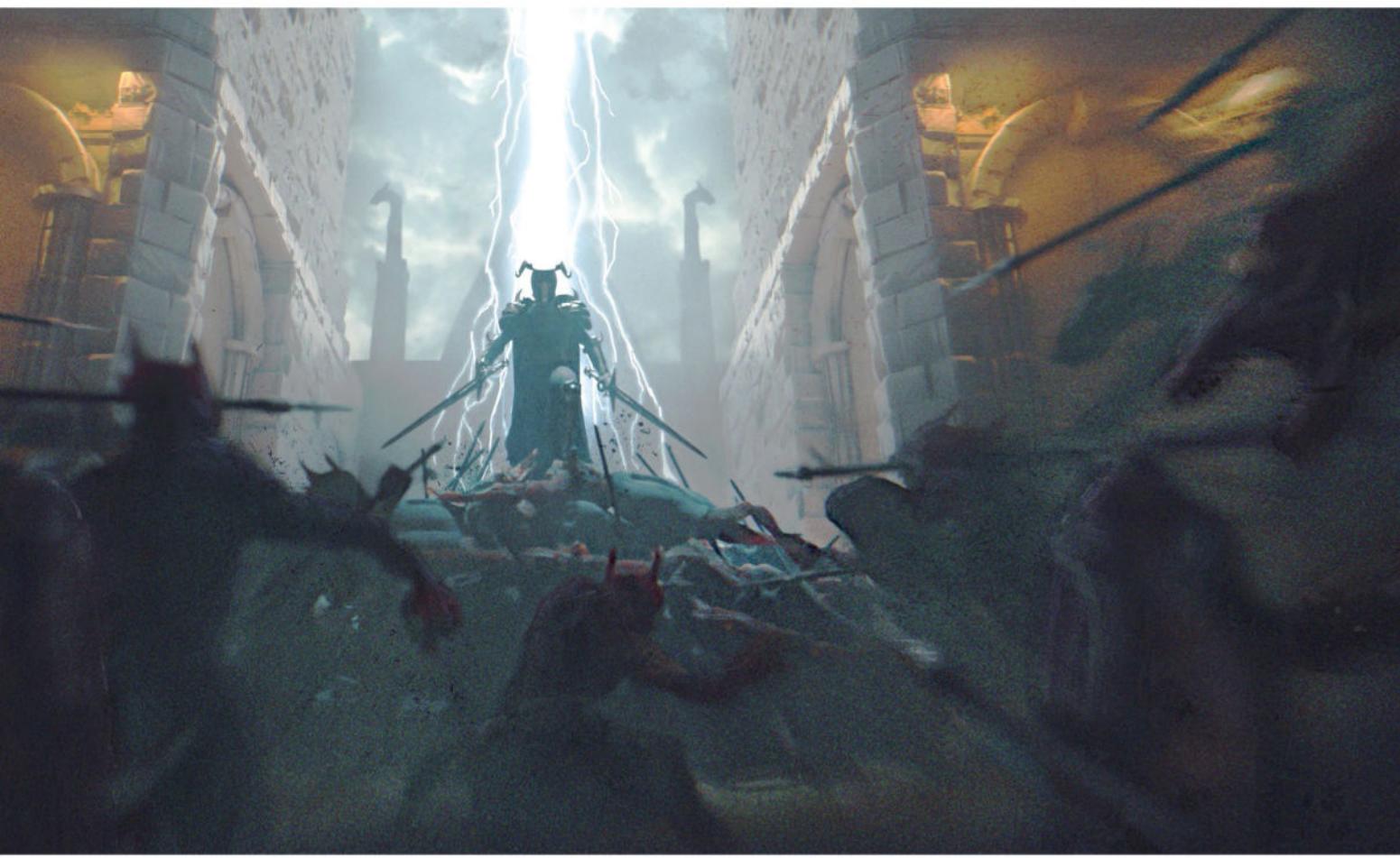
1 Work out your vision

My story is about an unusual world full of dangerous creatures. The protagonists have sheltered in an abandoned ruin, and the hero must fight off monsters and save people. To brainstorm story ideas, look for similarities in popular books and movies; these become themes that can be infused into the story. Find references for the environment, architecture, main character, monsters, colour key and composition, then write out a list of moods you want to convey in your image.



2 Draw up sketches

The first thing to create are line drawings of what you expect to appear within your scene. Mine includes a gate, a viking house, the hero, and the monsters, along with several props and weapons. Use every trick available, from the Symmetry tool in painting software, to using 3D underlays in perspective drawings, and tracing over anatomy from static poses.



3 Develop a powerful composition for your images

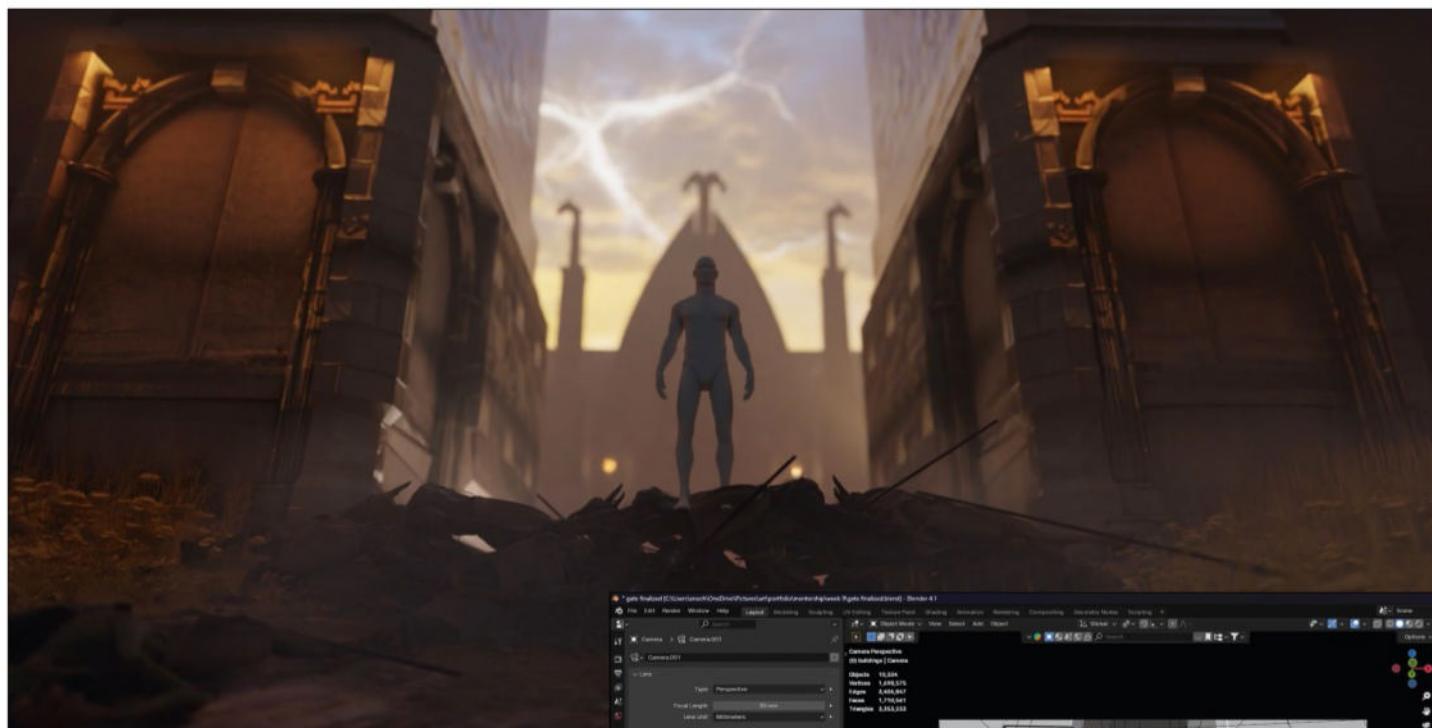
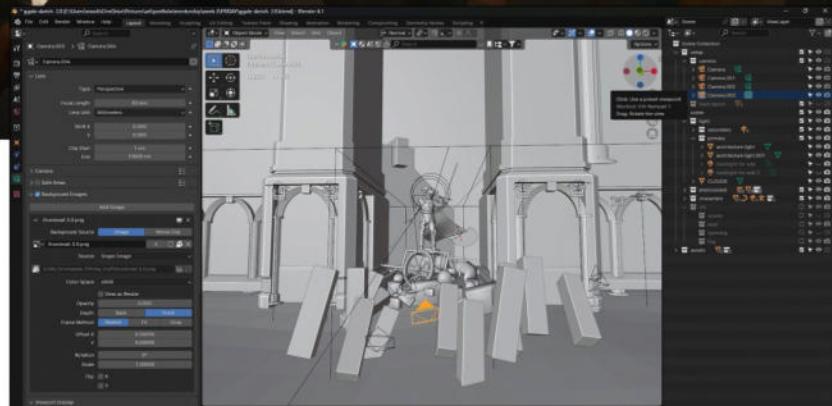
A strong composition is essential for impactful storytelling. It's vital to place every aspect of your image in a way that draws the viewer's eye to one spot, using size, leading lines, saturation and value. The vast majority of the time, the focal point will be placed in either the centre of the image, or on one of the lines of thirds, and will contain the biggest contrast in value and saturation. ➤

Workshops



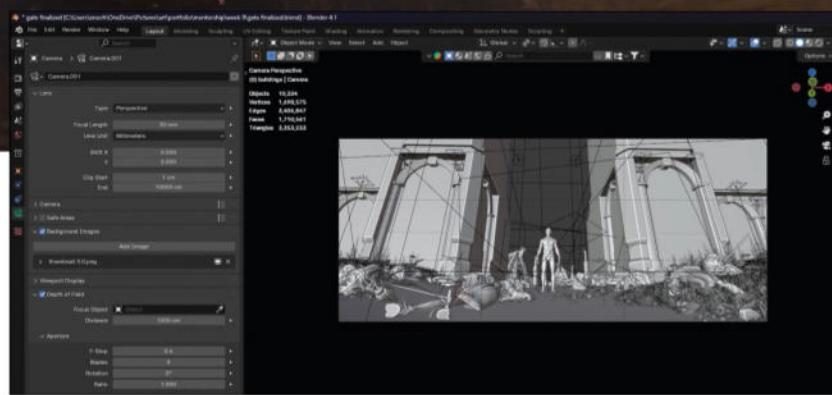
4 Block in the 3D elements

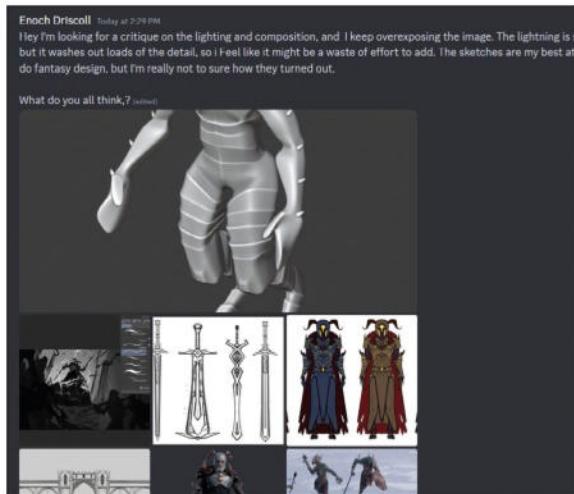
When you have a good idea of what the elements in your scene will look like, start laying out the scene in Blender using a lot of placeholder items, which we'll eventually replace and refine later. Try to arrange the environment and characters to best show the story, and experiment with different perspectives and cameras. In this stage, the project looks fairly ugly, but over the next several steps it will become much more dynamic.



5 Make it cinematic

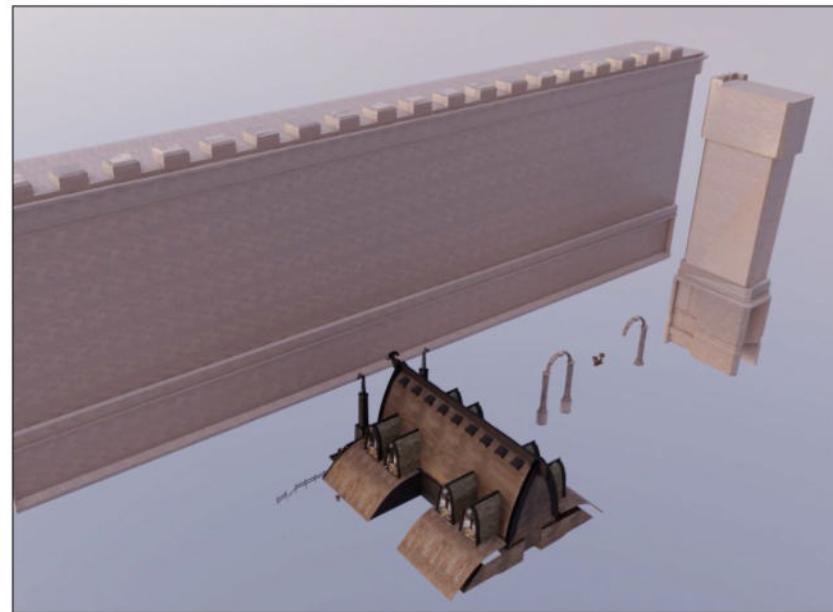
Cinematography is all about how the camera is placed in the scene, and what type of frame and lens is used. Tweak your composition so the camera is angled upwards to the hero to give them a powerful aura, and use a wide lens to show the action happening across the scene. Using cinematography in your composition is key for developing better storytelling.





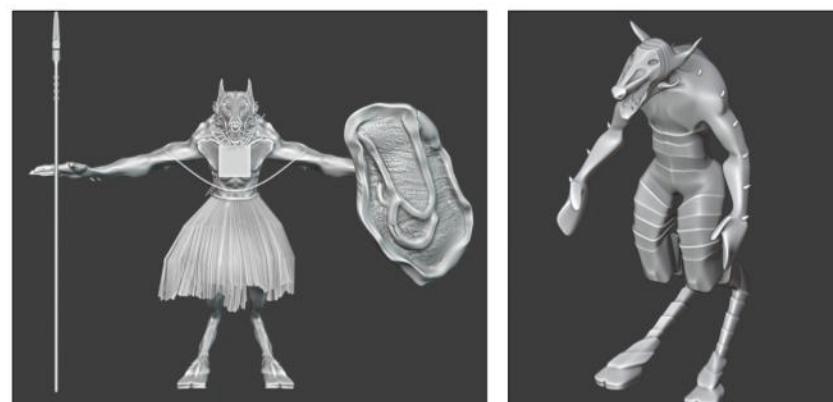
6 Seek out feedback

As I work, I like to upload progress shots to several Discord servers and other art forums, as I always pick up good advice, and make a lot of friends along the way! My two best tips for working with feedback are to ask honestly, and to use it to find problems in your drawing rather than solutions. For instance, if someone tells you your anatomy is off and the character looks weird, this identifies a problem. However, the solution might not be in the anatomy, and could be down to the character's pose looking stiff instead.



8 Character creation

I use Character Creator 4 for the base character, and then model clothes and armour around it. Rig separately for long cloth, and for armour transfer the weights from the skin to the armour. You can find free PBR (physically based rendering) textures online and set everything possible to be procedural to speed things up.



9 Model a monster

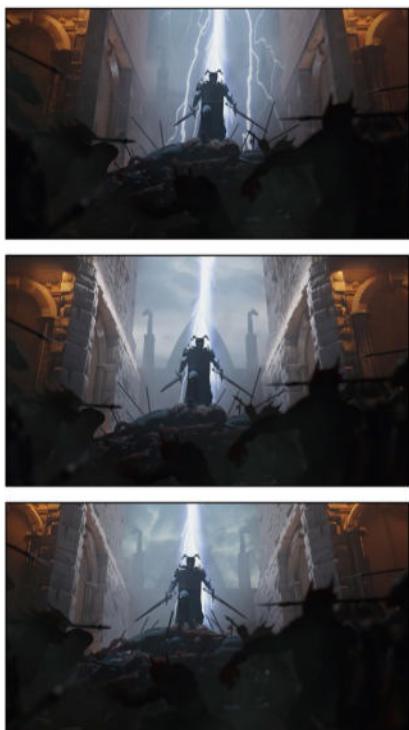
When sculpting monsters in Blender, start with a humanoid blockout, then slowly raise the resolution and detail until you're satisfied. Next UV unwrap it and paint the bony parts. As I know these monsters will mostly be hidden in the shadows, I don't bother to make them particularly photorealistic. ➤

Workshops



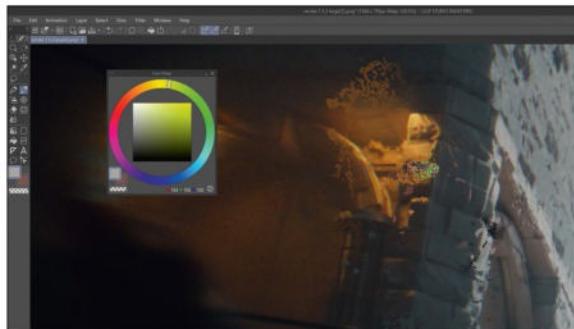
10 Pose the monsters

Rig the monsters with Blender's Auto Weight Transfer and then fix the head, which will be the only noticeable error the system makes. Create three active poses, and three dead poses. By mirroring and rotating these options, as well as changing their equipment, we can create an entire army with only a couple of meshes.



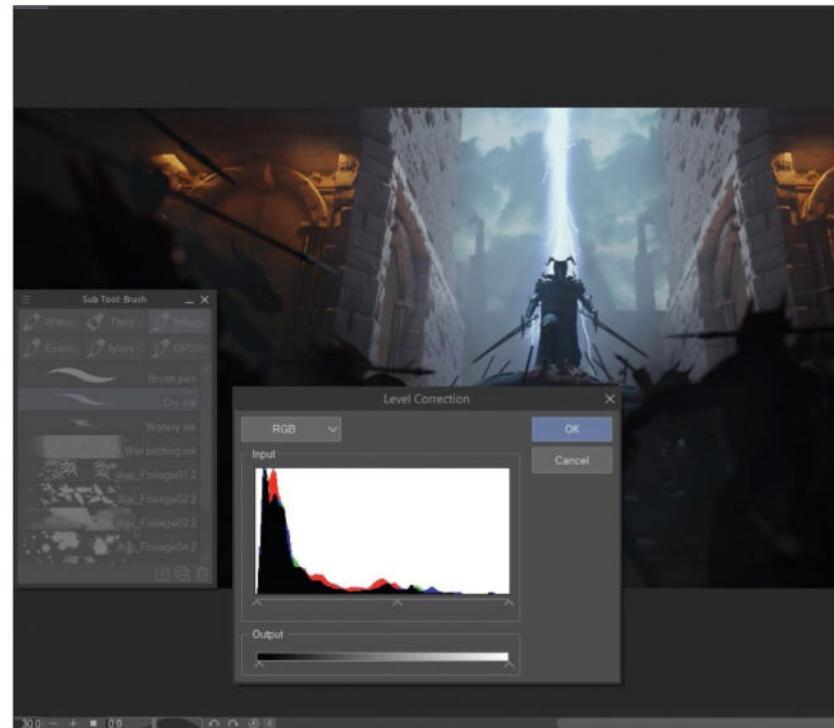
11 Refine the composition with additional touches

Once the scene resembles your thumbnail, add elements that will enhance the focal point, such as arrows, spears and extra lights. Next import images of fog clouds as planes, and use those to correct any values; this smooths out the dark shadows in the image. You'll know this step is finished when the elements closest to the camera have the darkest values, and you can see how far away everything is without perspective, relying on only the percentage of black in its shadows instead.



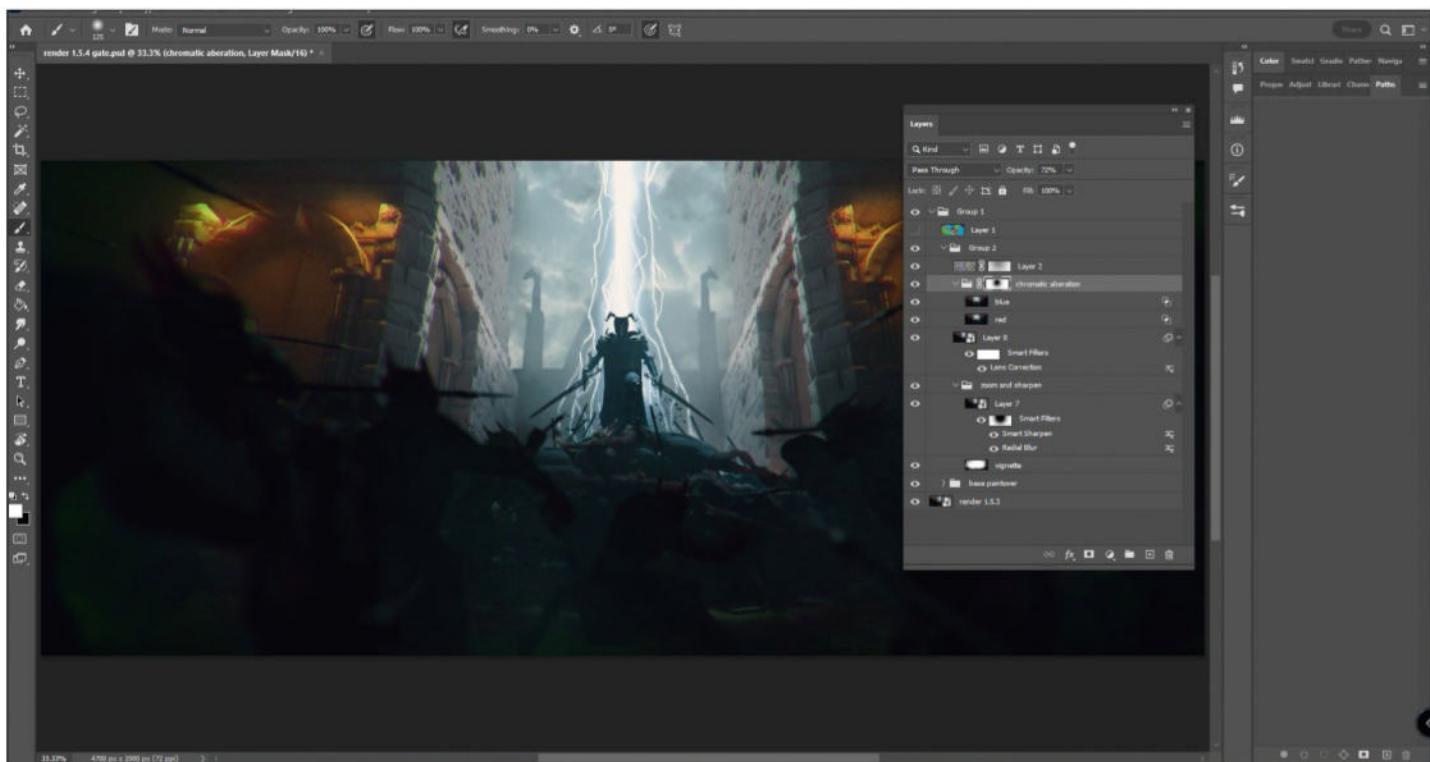
12 Paintover in Photoshop

Render the scene to your liking, head to Photoshop, and begin working on parts of the image you want to overpaint. For mine, I softened edges, and added motion blur, dust and other effects. Photoshop's History Brush is great here. Also use this step to enhance the clothing, add variation to repeating textures, and also paint in organic materials that are hard to recreate in Blender.



13 Adjust colours and values

Make sure the closest objects have the deeper blacks, and then play around with colour adjustment layers. Value is much more important than colour, because it can convey mood, depth and energy, while colour usually only conveys energy. Look-up Tables (LUTs) are great at automating this kind of work, as they basically overlay a gradient on your image, and can greatly speed up colour correction.



14 Finish up your piece with post-processing

My post-processing ritual comes in four steps. Save the file as a copy, then flatten everything down to one layer. Use a Smart Sharpen filter and add Chromatic Aberration to the image, before masking out the centre of the Chromatic Aberration folder so that it only appears on the edges. After that, add a Lens Correction layer, and finish by adding Film Noise at about 15 per cent opacity.

Technique focus

COLOURFUL CHARACTERS

Joel Chaim Holtzman shows how palette choices can bring out character and support narrative



"For my Dune series, I wanted every painting to stand out visually in terms of each planet and

faction. The art needed to be faithful to the books, while still exploring my own interpretations. For the Harkonnens, I used bold reds and harsh light to reflect their tyranny, and I also wanted to ensure their ornaments would show decadence.

Gurney Halleck is a more sympathetic character, so I went for soothing blues and greens. Rather

than depict him as a hardened warrior with a grudge against the Harkonnens, I wanted to reflect his sensitive side as a bard in his moments of solitude.

For Paul Atreides as a main character, I went for minimalism. I used a bird's eye perspective to show the endlessness of the desert, as well as bright, saturated colours to emphasise the setting of Dune. For contrast purposes, I used a dark and desaturated purple for the stillsuit, as well as a strong blue for the eyes, a key element within the story."

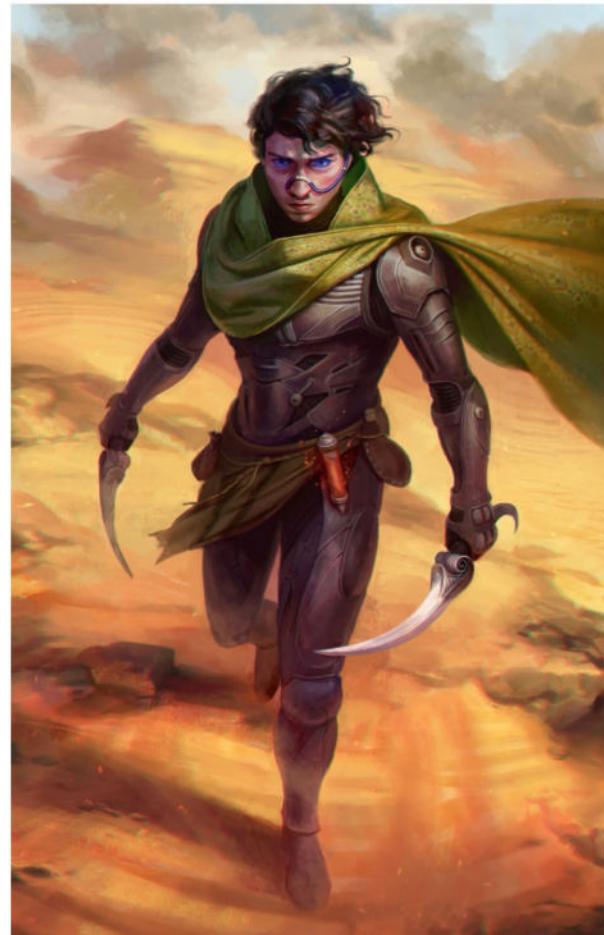


Artist PROFILE

Joel Chaim Holtzman

LOCATION:
The Netherlands

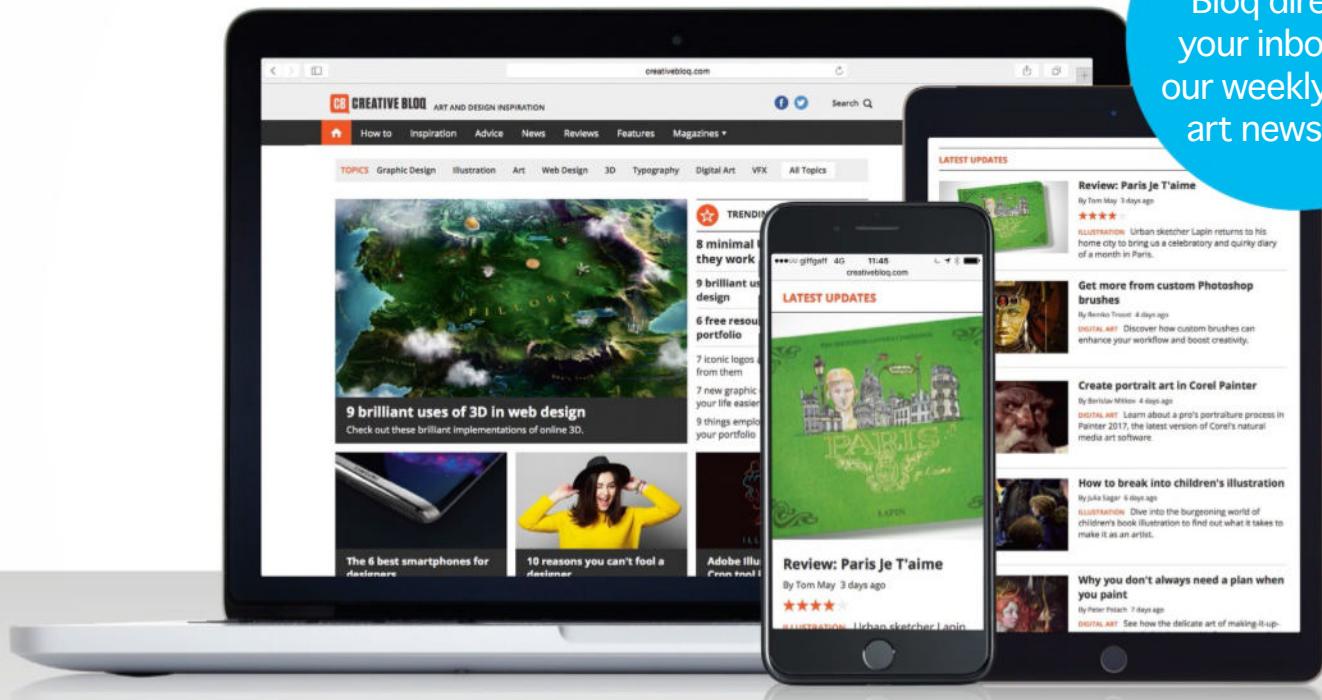
Joel is an illustrator and concept artist in the entertainment industry. His work is inspired by Biblical themes, history, anthropology, fantasy and science fiction.
<https://bit.ly/3VL8TR8>





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Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists



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Nik Henderson explores the process for his whimsical image.

96 First Impressions: Mike Butkus
The path from playground scribbler to pro concept artist.

FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



Tamara Nederkoorn

LOCATION: The Netherlands MEDIA: Alcohol markers

WEB: www.instagram.com/arts.by.tamara

Tamara is a self-taught artist who specialises in subtle, earthy colour palettes. Despite having drawn all her life, she says it's only recently that she's developed a style that feels entirely her own.



1 AURELIA

"Participating in challenges allows me to explore new subjects. It's a great practice that pushes me out of my comfort zone, and allows me to connect with other creatives."

2 CELEBRATING NATURE

"One from my series that revolves around birthday flowers. This is January - Snowdrop. Each piece portrays a character with details that symbolise nature's colour palette."



3 WAY OF WATER

"My characters often symbolise strength and have tribal, fantasy or warrior-like features. I find myself drawn to their fierce expressions and dynamic poses."

4 GAIA'S SOLACE

"This is my most recent work, and resonates with me the most. With a muted palette, I can guide the viewer around the piece by using contrast and colour more sporadically."

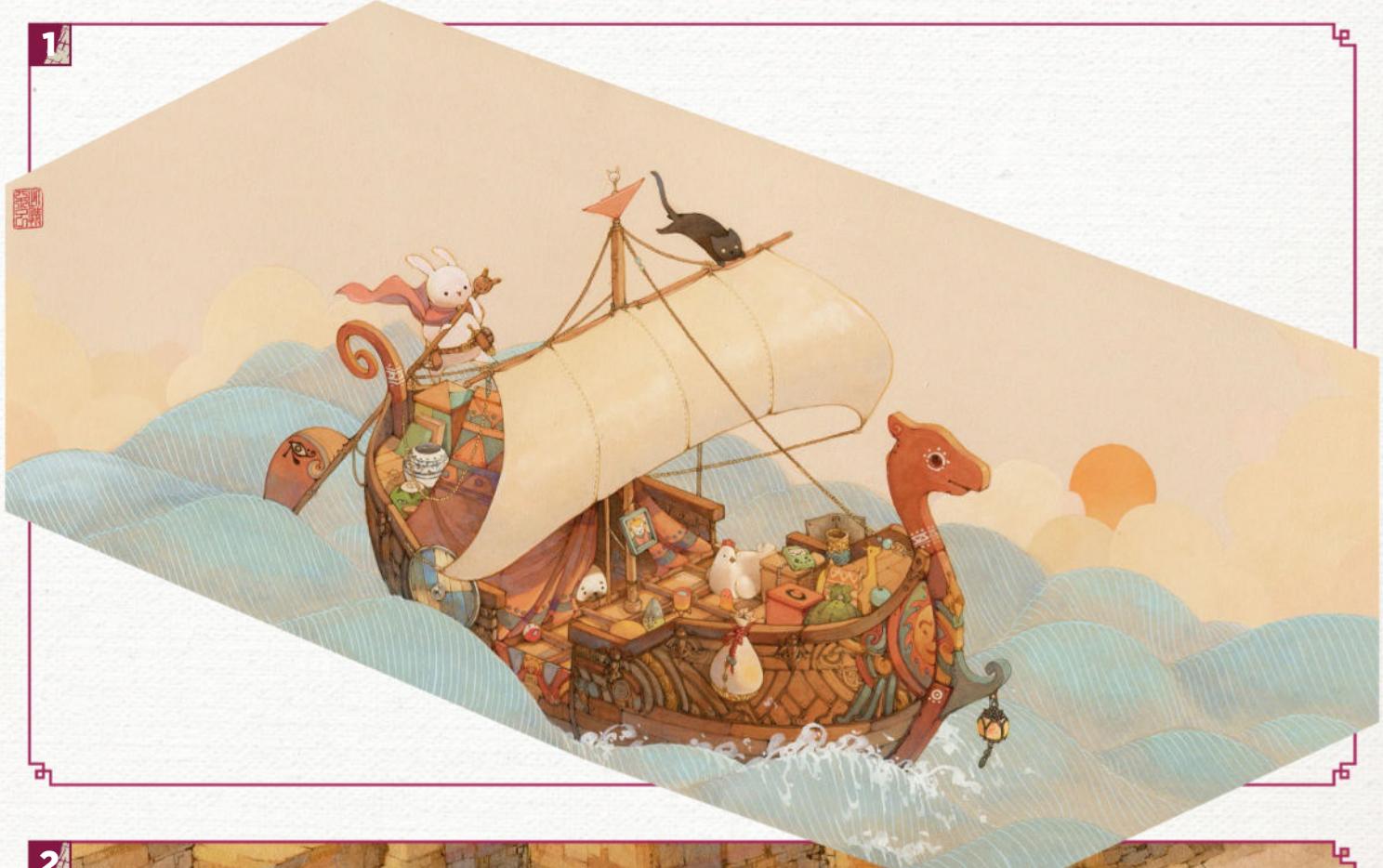




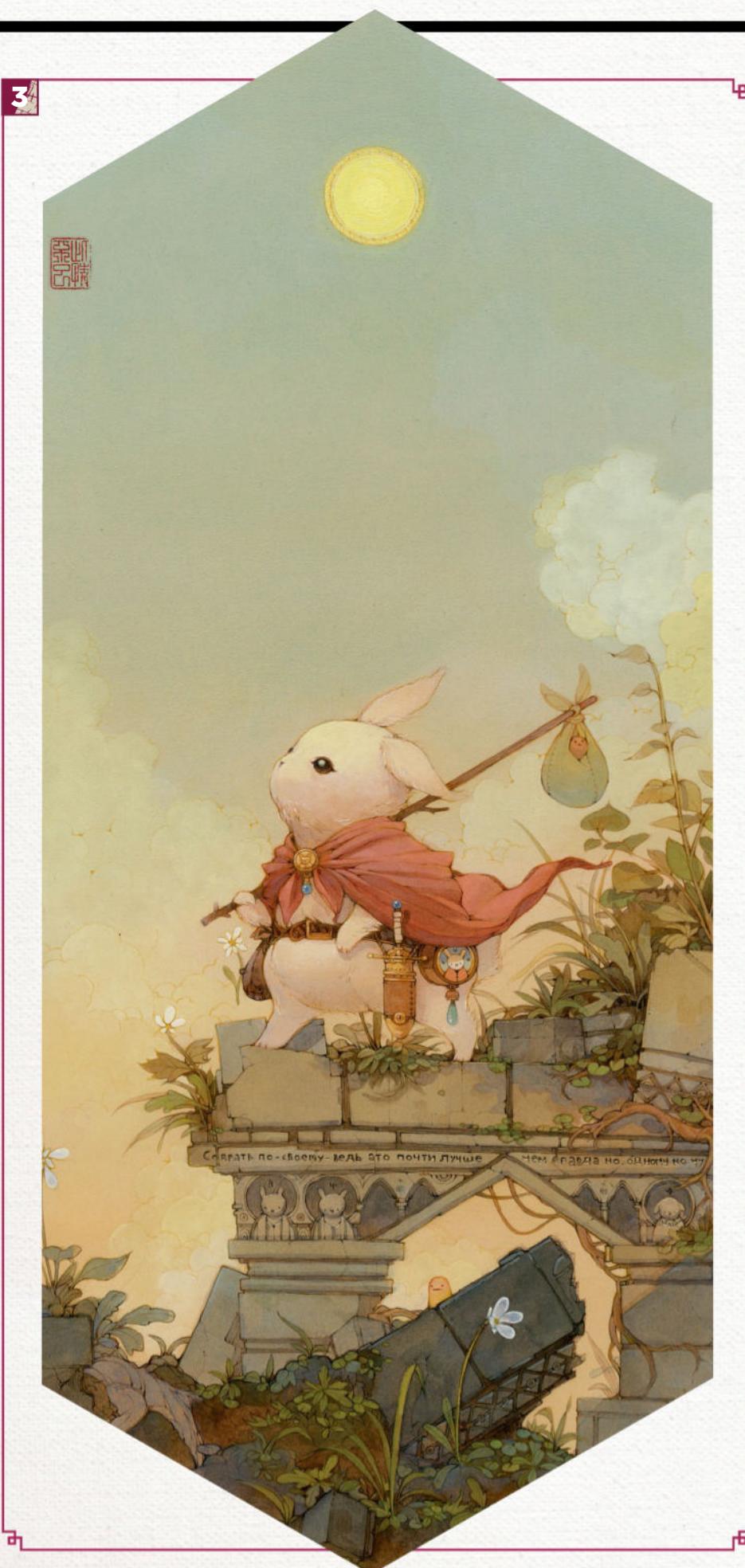
Alfred Liu

LOCATION: Australia MEDIA: Coloured pencil and gouache WEB: www.alfredliuart.com

Alfred is an artist who primarily works with galleries in Australia and the USA. He loves fantasy, science fiction and history, and he tries to explore these themes in his work.



3



4



1 WIND IN MY SAILS

"The idea of sailing has always felt romantic to me: the vast oceans can take you anywhere, so in a sense it's very nomadic. I wanted to capture that feeling."

2 EXODUS

"Although I'm not great at painting deserts, I wanted to test myself by making a piece about tiny travellers venturing through the sands and stone."

3 THE FOOL

"My son was born in 2023, which was the Chinese Year of the Rabbit; so I wanted to make a painting that celebrates optimism and courage, which the tarot card can represent."

4 RUINS

"This piece is about two adventurers making their way through ancient ruins, where they spot a mysterious creature in the distance."

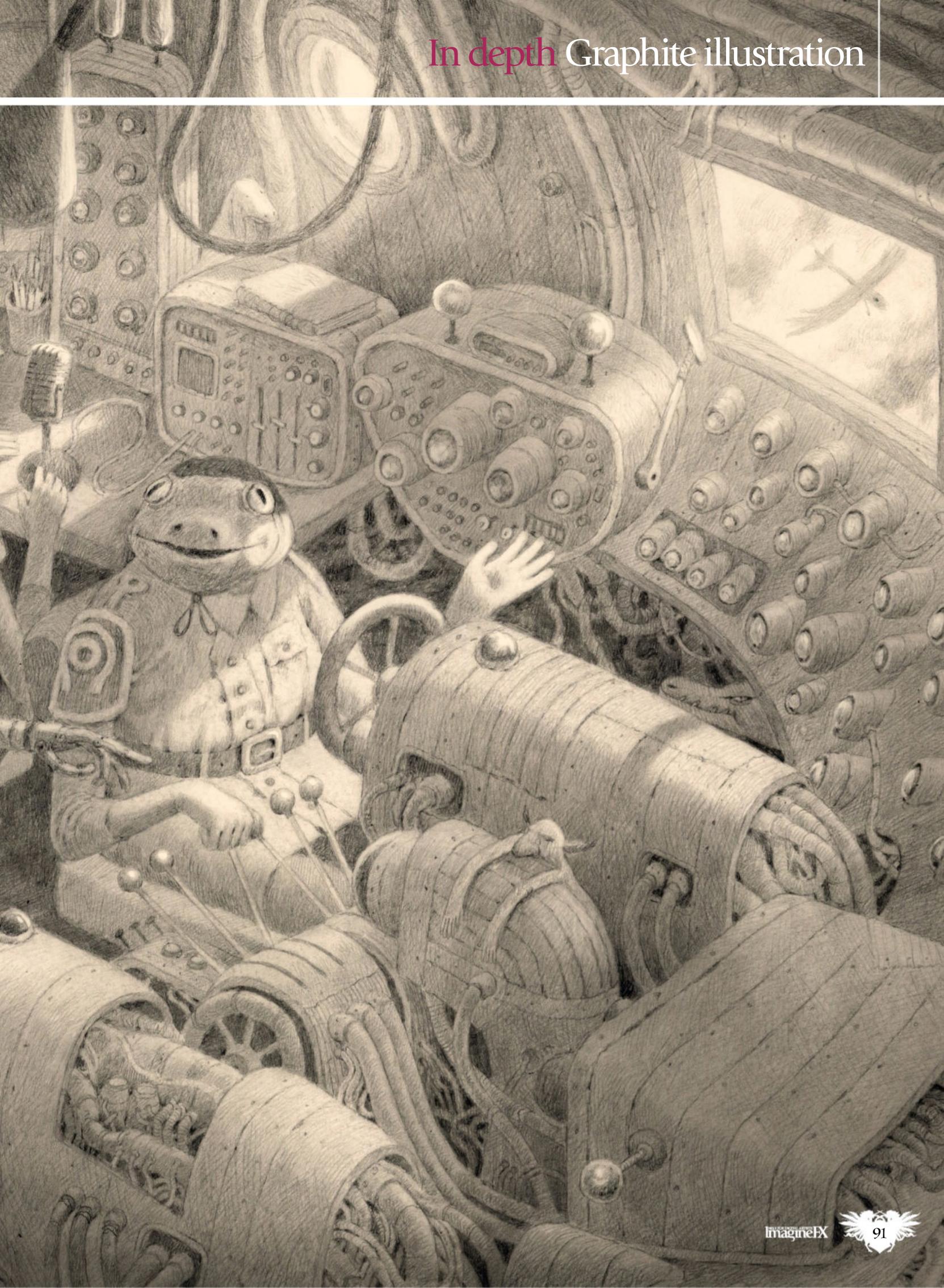
Traditional Artist Workshop

Pencil

DRAW A SCENE IN GRAPHITE

NIK HENDERSON demonstrates his process for drawing a whimsical aviation scene in graphite, from thumbnail to final

In depth Graphite illustration



Traditional Artist Workshop

Graphite has always been the go-to medium for me. I love the way it feels on paper, and the myriad of textures and techniques I can get from it. Working traditionally forces me to learn and adapt. I can't simply undo a line or delete a layer: I have to work around my mistakes or confront them head-on, and I find that so exciting!

In this workshop, you will see how I plan and build up my drawing in stages. I'll show you my process for thumbnailing, rendering, and adding final touches.

I grew up around airplanes and lots of goats and chickens, so my work often centres around aviation

MATERIALS

PAPER

- Bristol paper
- Tracing paper

PENCILS

- Graphgear 500 (0.3-0.7mm)
- Tombow Mono 4B
- HB-4B lead refills

MISCELLANEOUS

- Hard eraser
- Kneadable eraser
- Mechanical eraser
- Soft paper towels
- Soft paint brush
- Pencil extender
- Artist tape

and anthropomorphic animals, typically birds. So this piece will be a love letter to both, in the form of a whimsical flight deck run by strange avian creatures.

For materials, I primarily work with mechanical pencils on Bristol paper. I'm not too picky about the pencil model, as long as it's durable and can reliably hold the graphite. I use a combination of cross-hatching and blending in my work. For blending, I use soft paper towels or brushes. I generally avoid using tortillons (blending stumps): I find they make unpredictable markings.

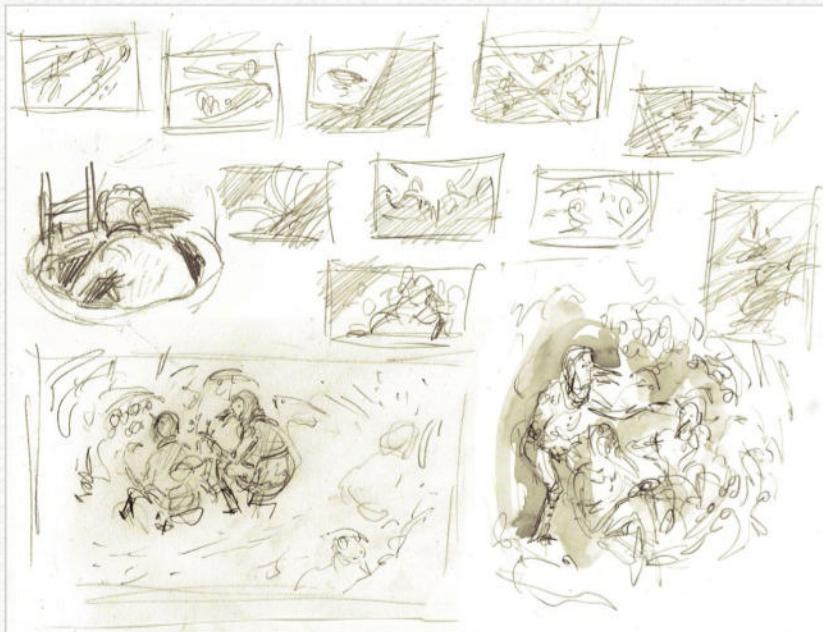
My studio sits inside a remodeled shed, and is full of old things that fascinate me. I'm always collecting

antique art supplies I can use; my ruler is 120 years old. I'm a fan of the old and the handmade, and I try to imbue those qualities into my work.

I try very hard to get my reference and inspiration from the real world. I build dioramas and maquettes for reference, and I collect photo reference books by the dozen. The Generative AI controversy has really pushed me away from the digital world, and has led me to appreciate art and life beyond the screen.



Nik Henderson is a children's book illustrator and an occasional vis dev artist. He studied illustration at SCAD and is represented by The CAT Agency. www.instagram.com/henderson_nik



1 Start working on ideas

I always start with lots of super-rough thumbnails on cheap paper, usually just printer paper. It's important to not be precious at this stage: the goal is to jot down as many ideas as possible and see what sticks. I try not to spend more than a minute on each drawing.

2 Develop it further

After selecting a few thumbnails I like, I draw something a little larger – but still only a couple of inches high. I bring in story elements and really start thinking about character placement and the rough value structure. I blend and erase until I'm satisfied, still not being too precious with the drawing.



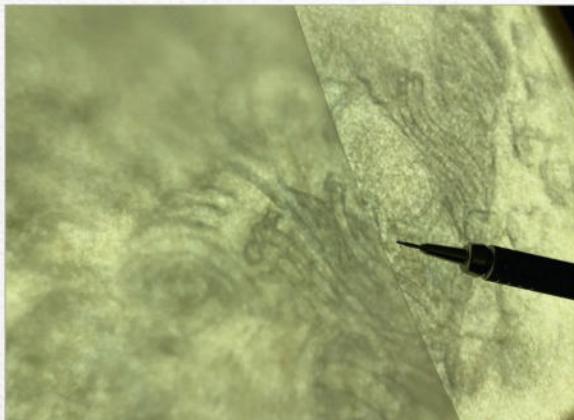
3 The final sketch

Once I'm satisfied with the previous drawing, I translate it to full-size paper – 18x24 inches in this case. I have a rough idea of the proportions, so I mark the important points and build from there. Here is where I really get into the details and think about specifics.



4 Experiment in Procreate

I scan the sketch and bring it into Procreate to start playing around with values and lighting. This is the time to experiment and plan out highlights and silhouettes, as well as getting an idea of the final colour. I also take this moment to flip the sketch horizontally: this helps me check the proportions and composition.



6 Transfer the sketch

Using a light board, I lightly trace the main outlines of my sketch. The lines don't need to be perfect, and every detail doesn't have to be transferred; it just needs to be enough to indicate placement. When I am done, I scrub the trace lines with soft paper towels to make them even lighter.



5 Prepare the paper

I attach the sketch to the back of 18x24-inch Bristol paper with two or three pieces of tape, so that I can lift and check the art underneath for reference. I personally do not tape the edges of my work, because then I tend to hesitate as I draw near the tape, creating a noticeable change in texture.



7 Start small

I like to begin by focusing on small areas. In this case, I began on one of the instrument panels, then started rotating through different elements. I find I get overwhelmed if I try to address the whole drawing at once, so I think it's important to go about the drawing with a strategy. ➤

Traditional Artist Workshop



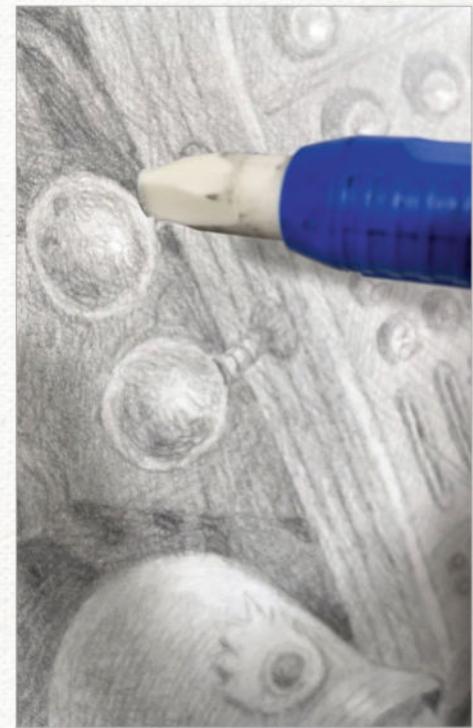
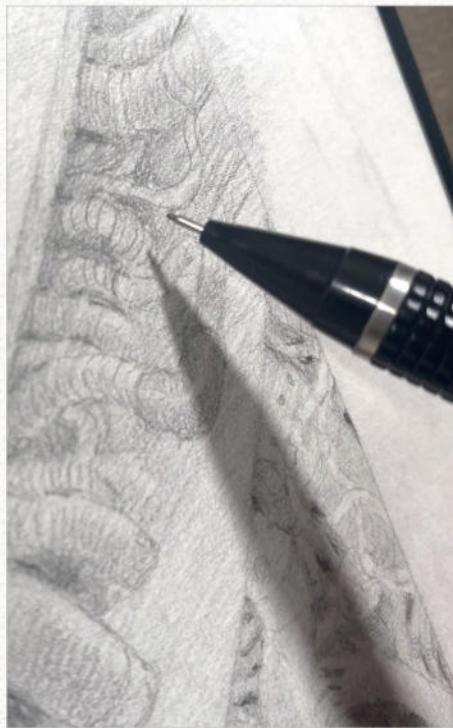
8 Hands off!

Left on the paper, the natural oils of the skin can create headaches when it's time to blend or erase. To combat this, I always wash my hands and use a sheet of tracing paper to rest my wrist on, and I only handle the piece by the white borders.



9 Start rendering

Rendering is my favourite part of the process; it's almost meditative. It's here that I put on music or an audiobook, and relax a bit. I utilise cross-hatching to build up my darks. I hear some people complain about the shiny quality of graphite, but I find that building up in layers reduces that dreaded lustre significantly.



10 Soften with blending

When I feel there is a good amount of rendered elements, I take a folded sheet of soft paper towel and lightly scrub the entire piece. This softens the lines and helps me to develop the values. A large soft paint brush will also do the trick. I then go in and add another layer of hatching.

11 Add highlights

Using a mechanical eraser, I add in sharp highlights to any reflective surfaces. I use a blade to shape the eraser to a fine point. For a softer glow effect, I will also use a kneadable eraser, although I personally find kneadable erasers a little unpredictable, so I use them sparingly.

12 Final touches

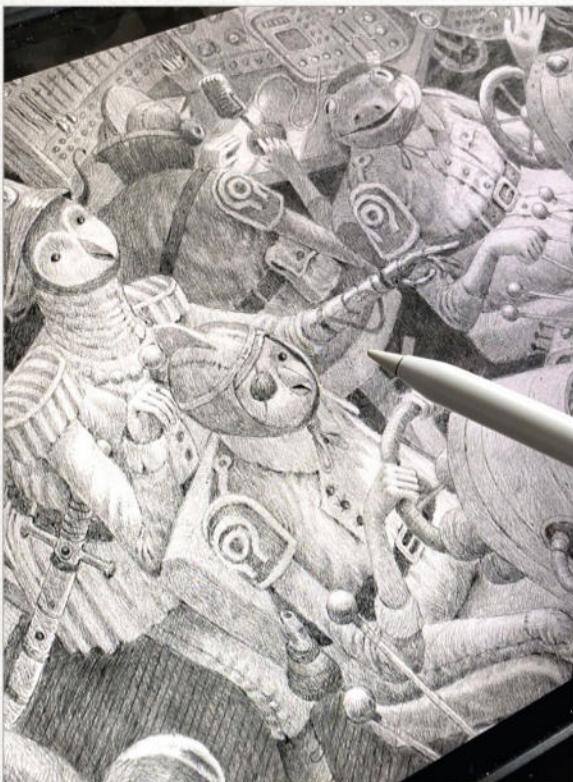
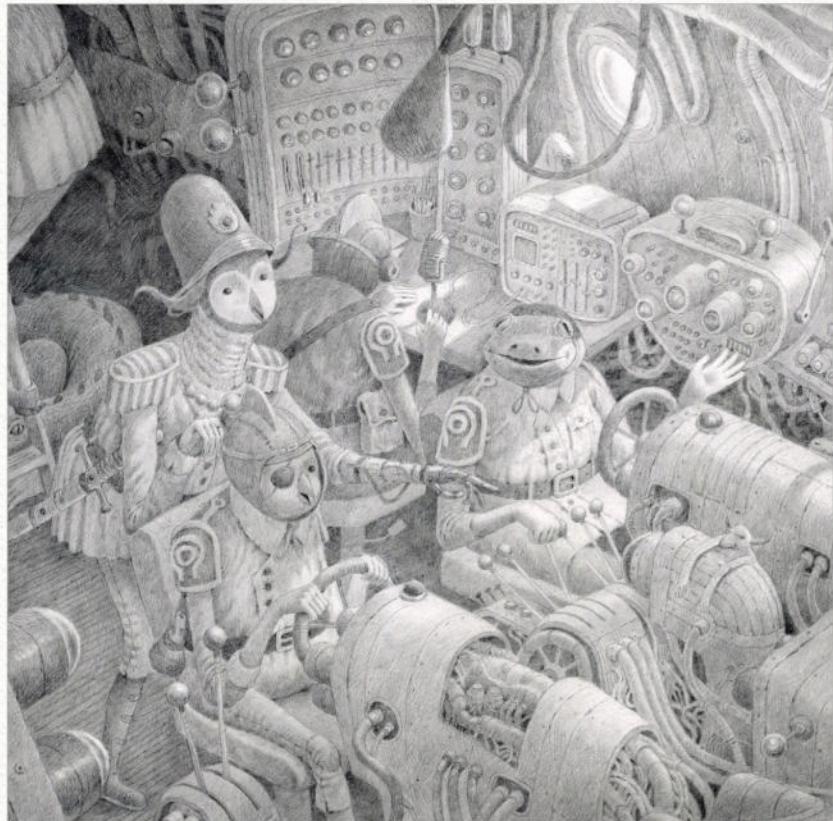
My final lines are spent developing hatch marks and darkening some values, and double-checking my shadows. I'm often asked how I know when I'm done. For me, it's when my marks stop making a real, noticeable difference. Once the goal of the piece is met, it's time to stop.

In depth Graphite illustration



13 To the scanner

I scan the piece at 400dpi in black and white. The paper is quite large, so I have to scan it in sections and stitch it back together in Procreate. Then, I go in and address accidental imperfections, like stray marks and eraser shavings. I try to prevent these by lightly brushing off both the paper and the scanning bed.



14 Adjust lights and darks

I go in and reinforce the values and contrast. I want the hatch marks to be visible, so I will often use black in the Overlay blend mode to help bring them out. I also add a slight glow effect to the windows and highlights, using a low-opacity layer of white.



15 Add an aged effect

I like giving my work an aged look. A hobby of mine is collecting paper from different centuries, so I bring in a scanned file from my archive and overlay it onto my drawing using the Multiply blend mode. Then I call it done. The added benefit of working on paper is that you have a physical piece to sell! 🎀

First Impressions

★ *Mike Butkus* ★

Entrepreneurial spirit and beloved books spark an artistic life



Where did you grow up, and how did this influence your art?

My upbringing in Southern California may not have directly influenced my art, but the books that I read sparked my creative journey. As a wee tot, I observed my parents engrossed in the classics, science fiction, and mysteries. I'd then delve into these very same books, often illustrating my favourite scenes; a practice that has continued to shape my artistic expression.

What, outside of art, has most influenced your work?

Outside of art itself, observing my surroundings has had an influence on my work the most. When you pay attention to your environment, the people and their interactions, you'll start seeing some peculiar things that can inspire you. And equally, keeping up with the latest advancements in science and tech provides a unique and enlightening perspective that has significantly influenced my work.

What was your first ever paid commission, and does it stand as a representation of your talent?

My first paid commission was in sixth grade. I would draw Annie



WORK IN PROGRESS

I did a couple of thumbnails for my wife's upcoming paintings. I used markers, warm and cool, pencils and graphite.

Fanny comics, naked girls, tanks, and race cars for classmates at 25 cents a pop. These drawings were so popular that I actually made enough money to buy my first used bike! It was a way more lucrative endeavour than mowing the lawn for my father. And yes, I think they still represent my work quite well to this day. I'm still asked to draw beautiful women and tough, fast vehicles all the time.

SELF REFERENCE

A character for my upcoming book. I used myself as reference for creating this one!

“I’m excited to continue this journey, always striving to improve and learn”

What's the last piece you finished, and how do they differ?

The last piece that I finished was a traditionally illustrated movie poster for *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes*. It's fascinating to compare it with the *Annie Fanny* drawings I did in sixth grade. The difference is remarkable, reflecting the 50 or so years of experience I've gained. I'm excited to continue this journey, always striving to improve and learn new techniques.

What character or scene you've painted do you most identify with? I identify with *The Traveler*, who is a character my daughter created ➡



Mike Butkus

AGE OF THE APE

My most recent full-colour painting, made for the Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes movie poster.



KINGDOM OF THE
PLANET OF THE APES

NOW PLAYING
ONLY IN THEATERS

PG-13
DOLBY ATMOS
IMAX
STEREOPHONIC
DOLBY DIGITAL
DOLBY DIGITAL EXPLORER
DOLBY DIGITAL EXPLORER EX



Traditional Artist Interview



CHARACTER SKETCHES

This is a sketch page with a selection of characters from my new book, which is coming soon.

» for a new book that we're collaborating on. His sole purpose is to document extraordinary events across the universe using no more than his sketchbook. Unfortunately, I can't travel to the extent that he does, but I've always preferred creating art traditionally. For me, there's nothing more satisfying than drawing with pencil and paper.

What are your painting rituals?

My painting rituals are simple. I get up in the morning, shower, have coffee, go to the gym and shower again. Once in the studio, I lay out my paints, organise my materials, blast some music, and get to work.

Is creating art as a career all you thought it would be?

Initially, creating art as a career had been what I predicted. It's been both competitive and challenging, yet also exciting and fun. I love making my own hours and choosing what to work on. However, the landscape has dramatically changed over the last few years due to AI.

What does the future hold for you?
As for the future, my fellow artist, Otto Stürcke, and I have started Mad Monster Company, where we'll produce board games reminiscent of the ones we grew up playing as kids.

“Creating art has been both competitive and challenging, yet also exciting and fun”



SCHOOL WORK

A piece made during a class demo I did for Associates in Arts many years ago.

Our first one, Mad Monster Bash, will be released on Kickstarter towards the end of this year.

Otto did a brilliant job coming up with gameplay that will engage little kids, teens, parents, grandparents; you get the idea. So between that and the insane illustrations I'll be doing for it, we're hoping to bring families together to act a little ridiculous, complete some funny challenges, ponder over some crazy artwork, and have a good time!

Another thing I have in the works is a new book I've been working on with my daughter, Amelie. It's called The Traveler's Guide to Drawing the

Extraordinary Creatures of the Universe Volume 1: Aetherin. She's the storyline's creator and author, and I do all the illustrations. This book has been in the making for some time due to my horrendous work deadlines, so we're grateful to those patiently waiting. Ultimately, I'm excited about this new direction as an artist and can't wait to see where each step takes me.

Mike Butkus is an award-winning concept artist who has worked on over 5,000 games, films, TV series, books and toy designs for the likes of Netflix, HBO and more. To learn about Mike and his artwork, visit www.mikebutkus.pro.



URGENT APPEAL



Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine is not just a humanitarian crisis for the Ukrainian people; it's a child protection emergency.

Up to 100,000 children warehoused in Ukraine's vast orphanage system – a network of over 700 buildings – risk being forgotten. Left to face the dangers of war alone as staff flee. As families are torn apart or forced from their homes, many more children are at risk of being separated from the love and protection they desperately need. Worse still, they are at risk of trafficking, or being placed in overcrowded, understaffed and poorly resourced orphanages in border countries.

We must act now.

Born out of the Balkans conflict 30 years ago, we've championed the vital importance of family and community-based care of children and our teams are on the ground in Ukraine, Moldova and Romania to ensure this war does not rob children of the love and protection they need now more than ever. Across all three countries, we're directly supporting displaced families and unaccompanied children with material and emotional

support. We're working closely with authorities to keep families together when they are at their most vulnerable and to fight for the safe tracking, monitoring and care for children without parental care. And we won't stop when the fighting stops.

Will you help us by donating?

With your help, we can avert a child protection crisis of epic proportions and ensure children are protected and kept in families. Never orphanages.

To help protect vulnerable children, donate online at: www.hopeandhomes.org/donate. Or call 01722 790 111 Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm.

Please quote **FP22 - Tec** when making your donation.

In the event that funds raised exceed what is needed to deliver Hope and Homes for Children immediate and longer-term response to this crisis, we will use donations where the need is greatest.

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I enclose a cheque for £ made payable to Hope and

Homes for Children or please debit £

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Start date Expiry date Issue no. Maestro only Security no. on signature strip

Signature Date

I want to Gift Aid my donation and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years to Hope and Homes for Children. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. Gift Aid will be used to fund Hope and Homes for Children's general work.

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