

NO. 1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

FAN ART SPECIAL

FUTURE
ISSUE 264

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Welcome to...
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Each of us has our favourite characters, creatures and worlds that we lose ourselves in, and what better way to celebrate them than putting brush to paper and developing a unique and creative version of them.

This issue, we take a look at the ever-popular fan art scene to see how it can not only be fulfilling, but can be put to good use to further your career, expand your audience, or simply boost your skill set.

Our news feature examines how you can use fan art to expand your audience, while James Clarke looks at the wider industry to see what pitfalls and opportunities creating fan art can expose.

If you're looking for insight into how you can improve your own fan art, then head over to our training section, where five artists share their tips to help you up your game, putting your own spin on your chosen character reimaginings.

Plus, we show you how to use Blender to guide your painting, create serene environments, prep a model for 3D printing and much more.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

Rob

Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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

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Historically fantastic

Discover how to bring medieval fantasy to life in this issue's development sheet, covering a stylised character.

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Guided narrative

Learn why concept artist Greg Danton starts with a story and lets it inform his fantasy creations.

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First Impressions

We sat down with artist Jan Buczny to get all the details on his journey from movie fanatic to leading 3D artist.

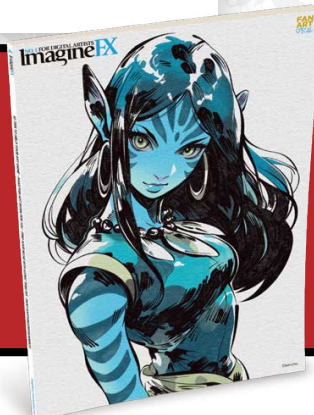
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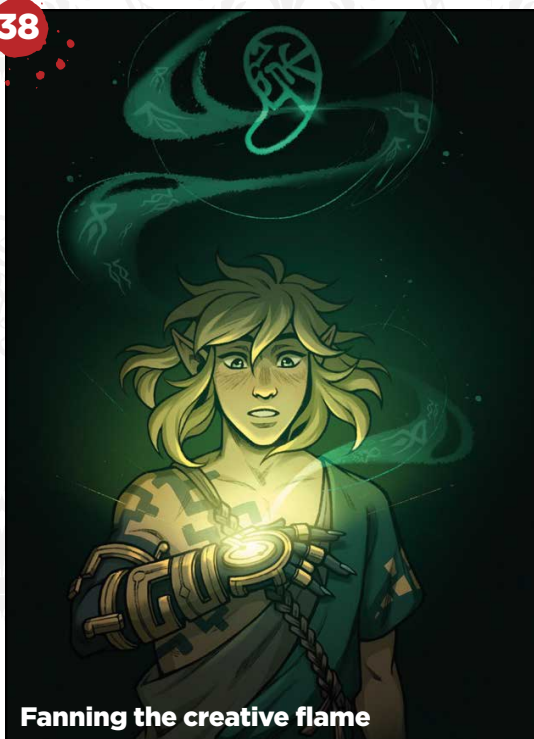
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Fanning the creative flame

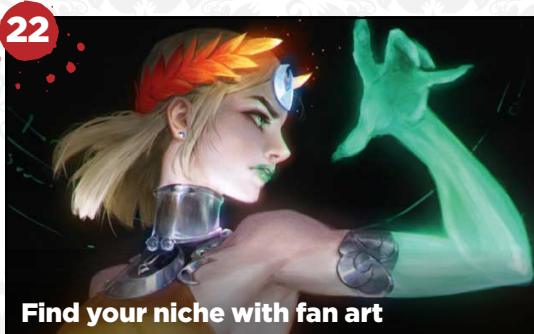
FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



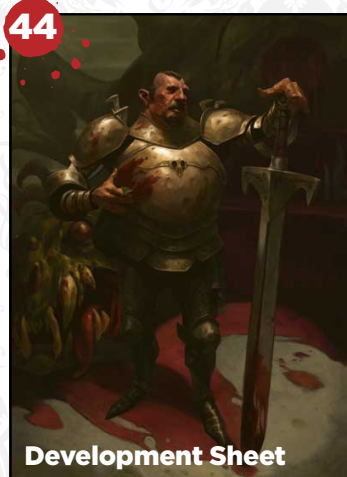
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Find your niche with fan art

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Development Sheet

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**Artist in Residence:
Shinn Uchida**

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Sketchbook: Joseph Gronow



ImagineFX

FANTASY SCI-FI DIGITAL ART
ImagineFX
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Advice and techniques from pro artists...



52 10 tips to make fresh fan art

Pay homage whilst keeping your unique style in place.



58 Let the story guide you

Greg Danton on why putting the story first can help you.



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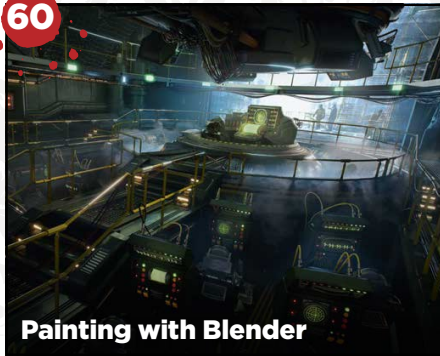
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72 Create strong contrasts

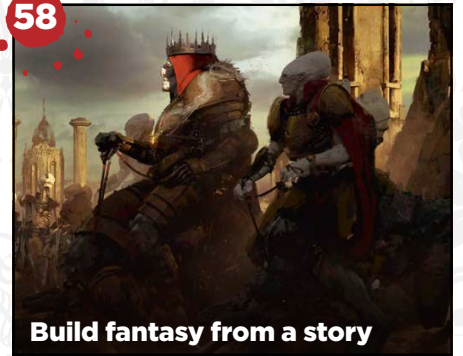
How Mark Zhang creates contrast in his work.

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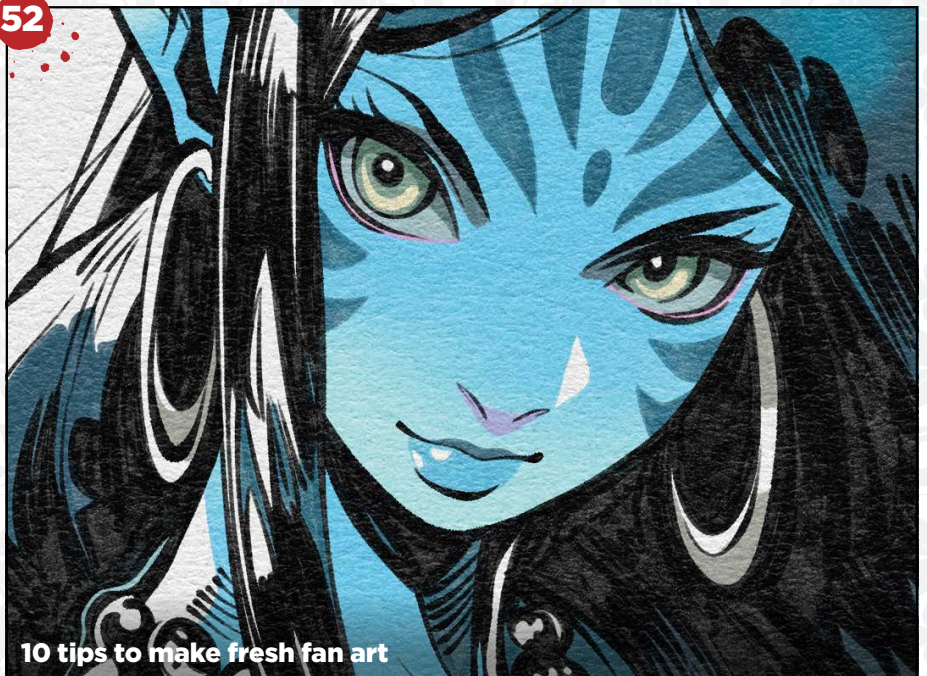
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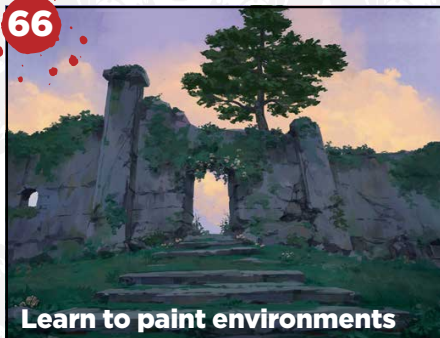
Push boundaries

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Five minutes with Jan Buczny

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Learn to paint environments

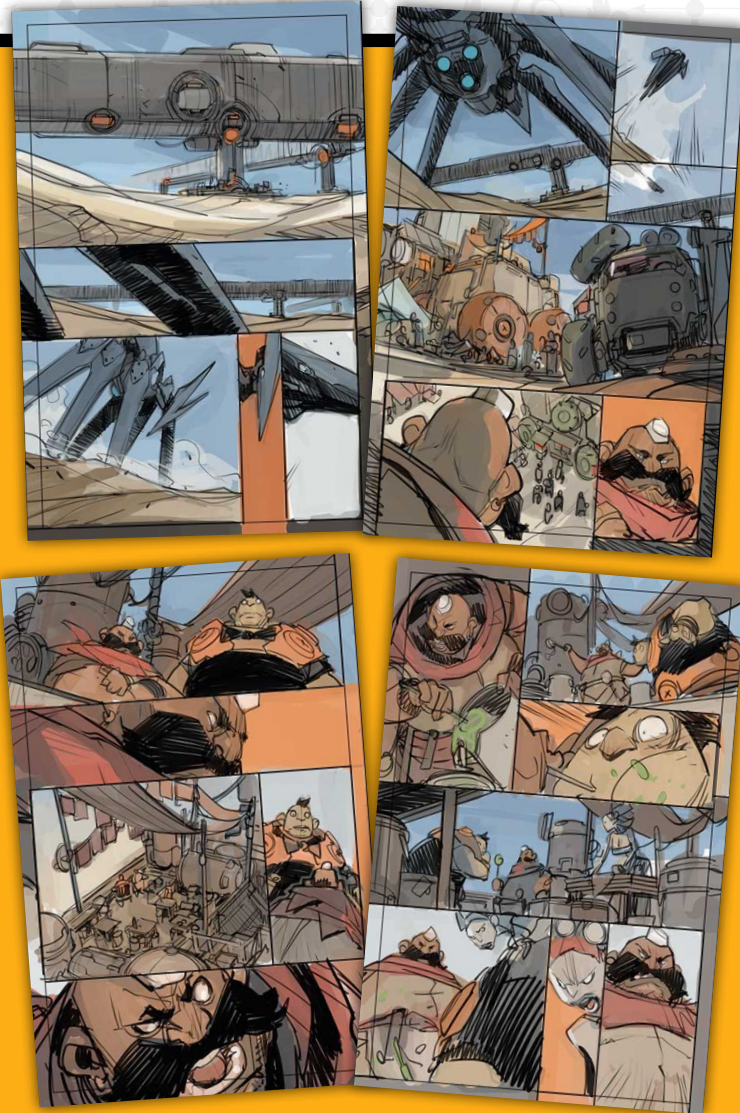
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Next month

Artwork: Ludo Lullabi



Next month in...
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YOUR COMICS, YOUR RULES

Get started in the world of **indie comics** with industry insights and expert workshops

Explore rich and vibrant concepts
Follow along with Eddie Mendoza as he crafts a striking cyberpunk scene

Discover brooding fantasy creatures
Miro Petrov opens up his sketchbook to reveal his twisted myths and monsters

Draw engaging panels in a flash
Ghost Pepper artist Ludo Lullabi shows you how to build up your skill set

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IN PRINT & DIGITAL

Content of next issue is subject to change

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ImagineFX

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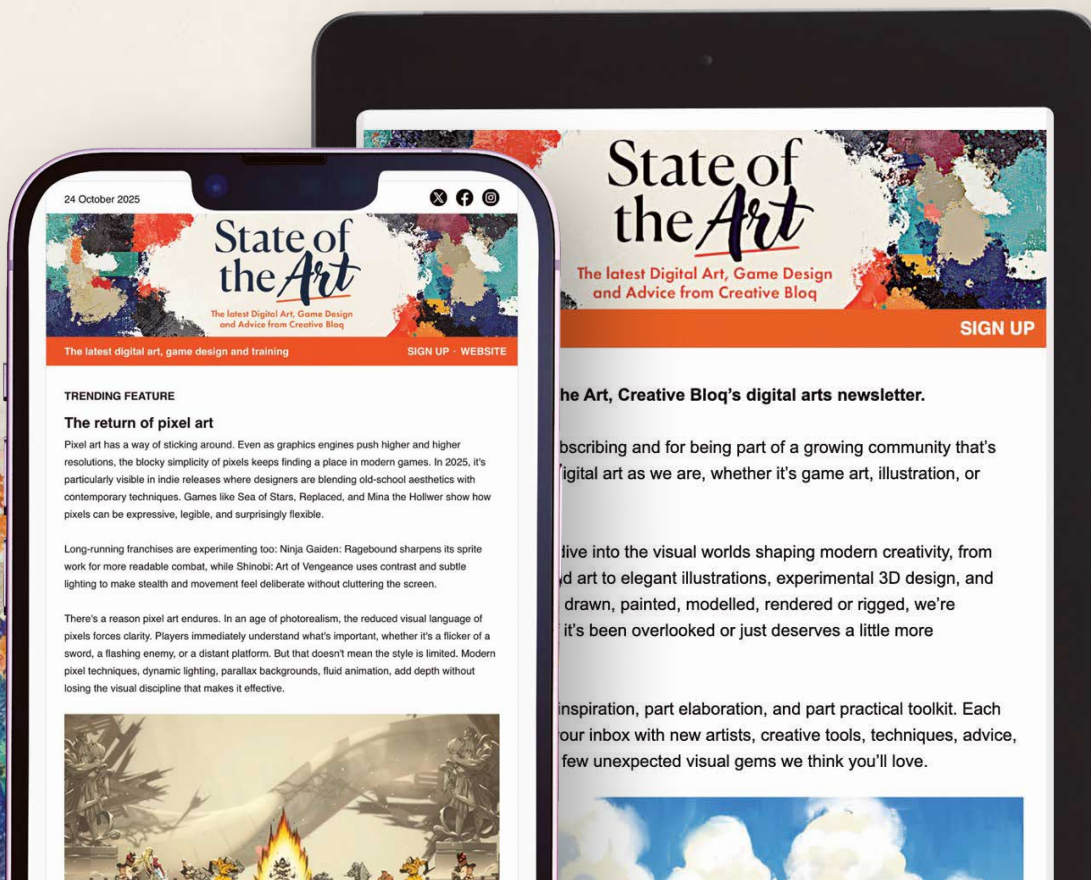


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THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



Pierre Deschamps

LOCATION: France **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Blender, ZBrush, Octane

WEB: www.artstation.com/pierredeschamps

Pierre is a concept artist for video games and films. He has worked for various studios – including Unit, Mathematic and Mood – and been involved with IPs such as D&D, Jurassic World and Destiny. His biggest passions are storytelling and retro-futurism.

1 INSECT ANGLERS

“A planet where people are angling for insects for their protein. The angler’s speeder was built from found objects, and fishes for insects with ropes and pulleys.”

2 CARBON DIOXIDE COLLECTOR

“Here, I modelled assets and rendered them in Blender, before photobashing the environment. Then I painted smudges on top to give the whole piece consistency.”



3 WHISTLE CITY

“This project depicts an ancient civilisation powered by windy magical tech. Castle In The Sky was a big influence, as was the Roman empire and ancient Greeks.”

4 THE SLEEP

“This image mixes various influences, from Napoleonic costumes to samurai armour. I wanted the composition to evoke old, mythological paintings.”



ImagineFX

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Liubov Komarova

LOCATION: Kazakhstan **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/amorina

Liubov is a worldbuilder and illustrator whose work explores ritualistic and atmospheric storytelling. She is developing a large-scale science fiction universe, and her inspiration comes from immersing herself in other worlds.

1 THE MANIFESTATION OF KATHARIVOR

"A luminous portrayal of an apocalyptic god. Katharivor forms by devouring the world, merging seductive beauty with cosmic horror in order to evoke divine inevitability and destruction."

2 BRUJA SJÁANDI

"A seer witch from an ancient Inol order. Her presence suggests omnipresent awareness, ritual secrecy and the sensation of being watched."

3 BRUJA HVÍSLA

"A witch of the Hvist order, whose whispers infiltrate minds as personal thoughts. She nurtures violence and despair, harvesting human darkness for ritual power."



2



3



4

4 LÁVARÐUR HÖGVÖRLD
“Lord of a feared northern house, rumoured to bear a boar-spirit within his blood. After fraternal betrayal, he swore silence. Twin daggers crown his helm as a warning.”



1



2

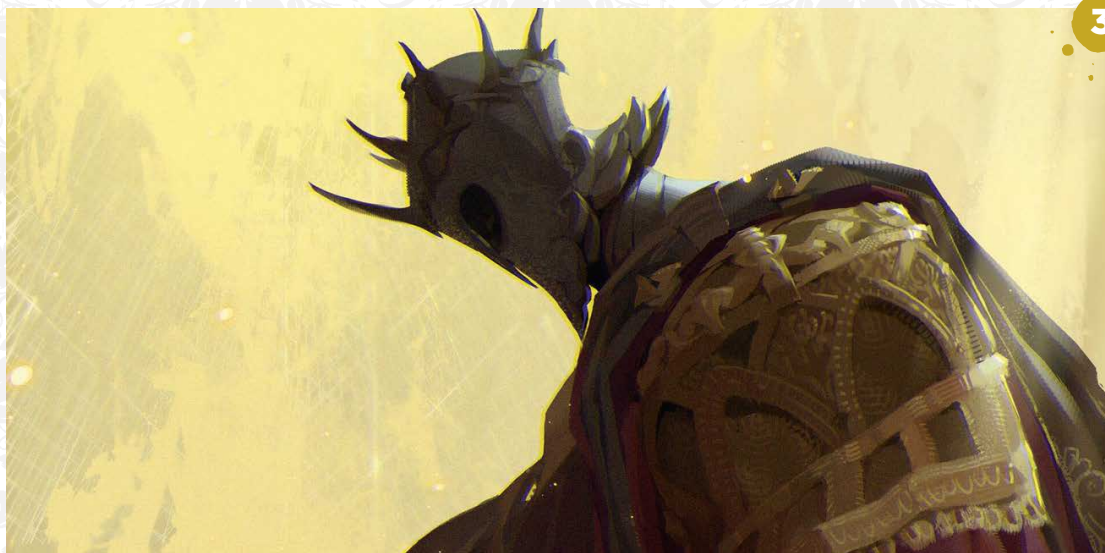




Jin Dongyu

LOCATION: China **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/chaoskin

Jin is a concept artist who currently works full-time at Lilith Games. The worlds of D&D, The Lord Of The Rings and Game Of Thrones are his biggest inspirations, and in his daily practice he enjoys drawing images that tell a story



1 BLACKFYRE REBELLION
 “Here is the first of two pieces that are based on the world from the novel of A Knight Of The Seven Kingdoms. This one here depicts a possible scenario of usurpation taking place.”

2 URIEL
 “This piece is a stylised exercise based on the angel of death, Uriel, as depicted in the recent film adaptation of Frankenstein, directed by Guillermo del Toro.”

3 THE TARNISHED
 “This practice piece is based on Elden Ring, one of my favourite Souls-like games. It depicts the Tarnished overcoming numerous trials to become the Elden Lord.”

4 CHILDREN OF THE FOREST
 “The second of two pieces based on the world from A Knight Of The Seven Kingdoms. Magical creatures are created in order to fight against the invasion of the First Men.”



Heonhwa Choe (Kilart)

LOCATION: South Korea **MEDIA:** Clip Studio Paint Pro, Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/kilart

Kilart is an illustrator who has contributed to major titles such as MTG. He likes to tell stories through the relationship between characters and environments, in particular worlds shaped by female figures and objects.

1 RABBIT, WOLF SKIN

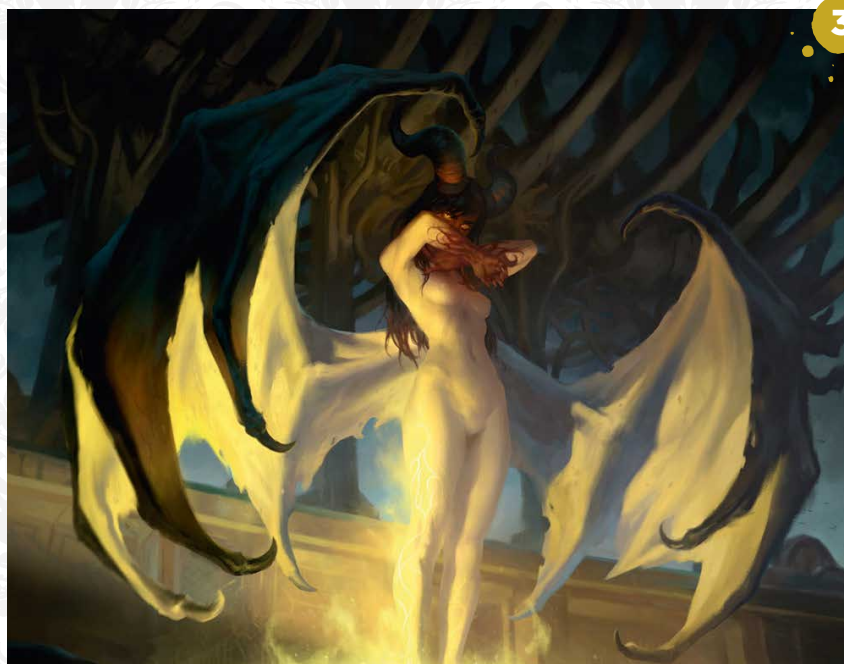
"I started this piece with the intention of creating an artwork centred around cold tones. It playfully expresses a slightly fairy-tale-like joke: a rabbit wearing a wolf's mask."

2 SHAMAN: A SHRINE WHERE SPIRITS LINGER

"Inspired by sacred trees in Korean shamanism, I focused on the colourful cloths hanging on the trees. The shaman meets spiritual entities through dance and music, blending ritual with a mystical atmosphere."

3 PATHWAY TO OBLIVION

"A succubus appears at a ghostly station in a dream. I used contrasting yellows and blues to define the mood."



4 EMPEROR'S SHAPE

"The contrast between massive objects and figures creates a sense of grandeur. Sculptures connect naturally to past cultures, inspiring visions of ancient civilisations."

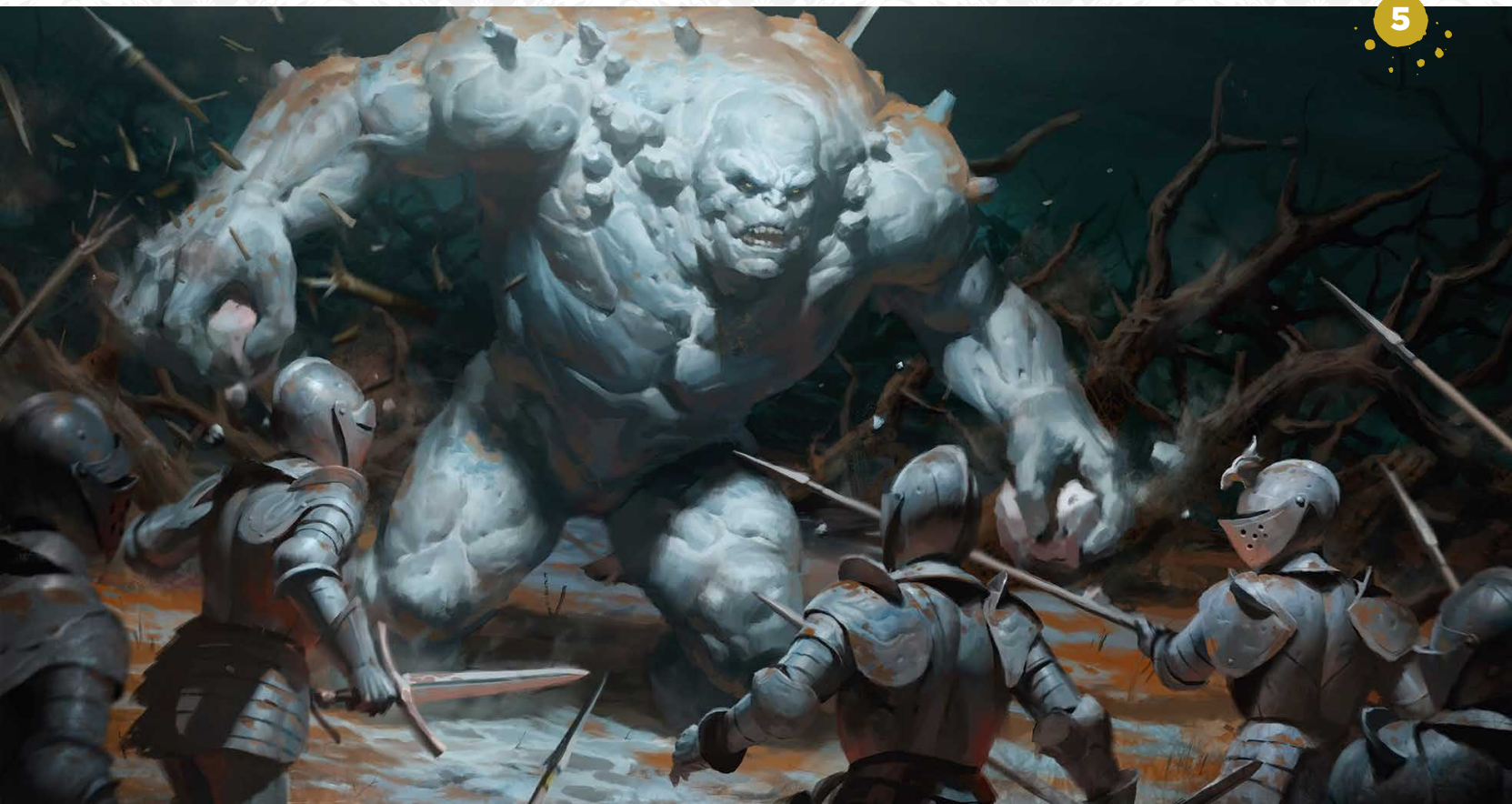
5 ENCOUNTER

"In the swamp, knights encounter a white golem. Here I explored the contrast between dark backgrounds and the bright monster, while also experimenting with armour designs."

4



5

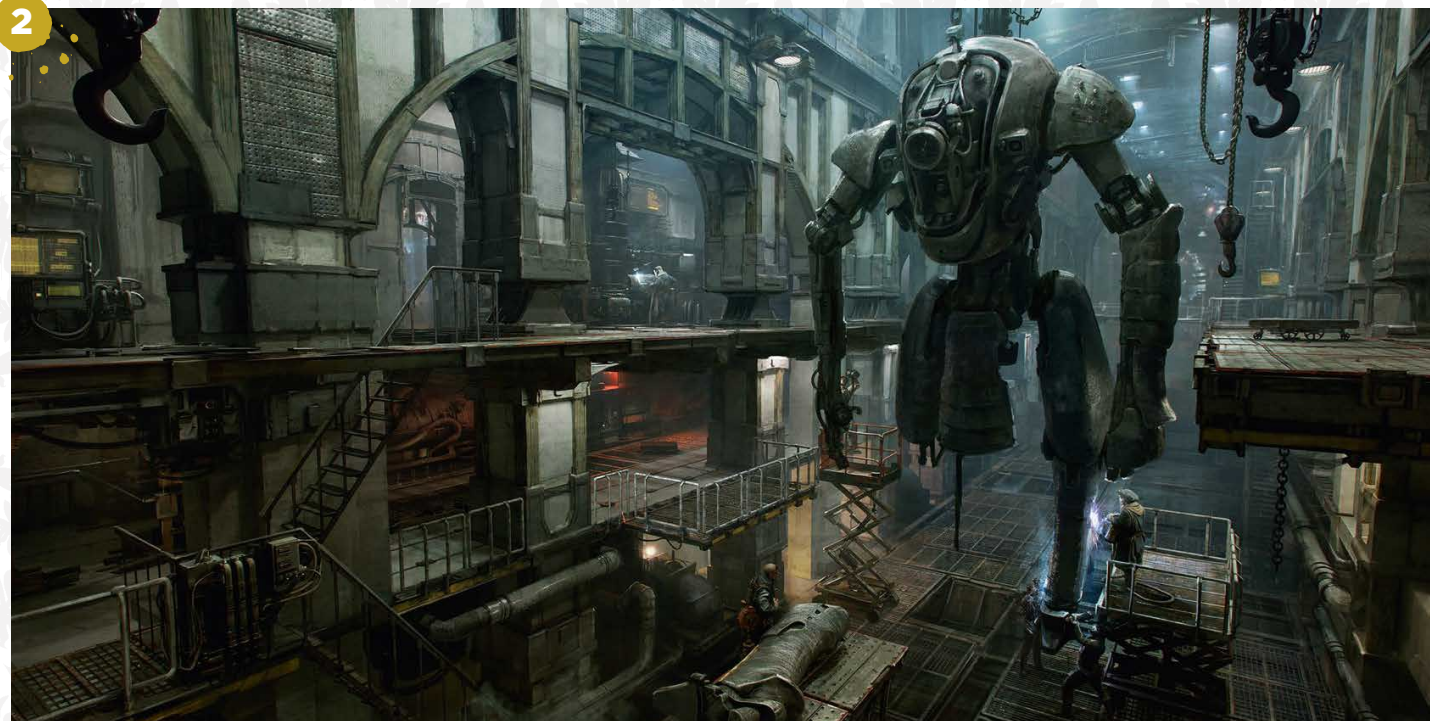




Sergey Vasnev

LOCATION: Belarus **MEDIA:** Photoshop, 3D Coat, Blender **WEB:** www.artstation.com/sergey_vasnev

Sergey started his CG career as a promo artist. He's an environmental concept artist and has a love of post-apocalyptic scenes. He credits Jama Jurabaev and Anthony Eftekhari for helping to shape his skills.



1 QUIET DAY
“The ship was originally supposed to be in a swamp! Most of it is drawn, but the 3D was primitive. And a lot of it differs from the 3D model.”

2 CITADEL GUARDIAN, HANGAR
“I tried to explore a mix of settings: industrial, medieval and sci-fi. I'm not a mech expert, so there's a lot of compilation here.”

3 HUNTERS
“I took a photogrammetry scan of driftwood I bought for my aquarium and used it to create a scene. This was using my own photogrammetry.”

4 QUIET COAST
“The inspiration for this piece was a simple sitting figurine of a ‘gopnik’. The inscription is also a reference to a Yuri Gagarin meme.”



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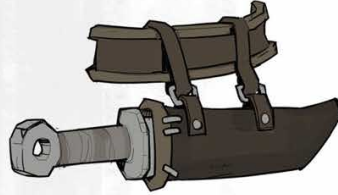
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Hildegarde

Born into a secluded lineage of powerful mages, she knew magic not as a tool, but as a legacy. Her village, was a place of learning, ritual, and quiet reverence for the forces beyond comprehension. But that sanctuary became a tomb.



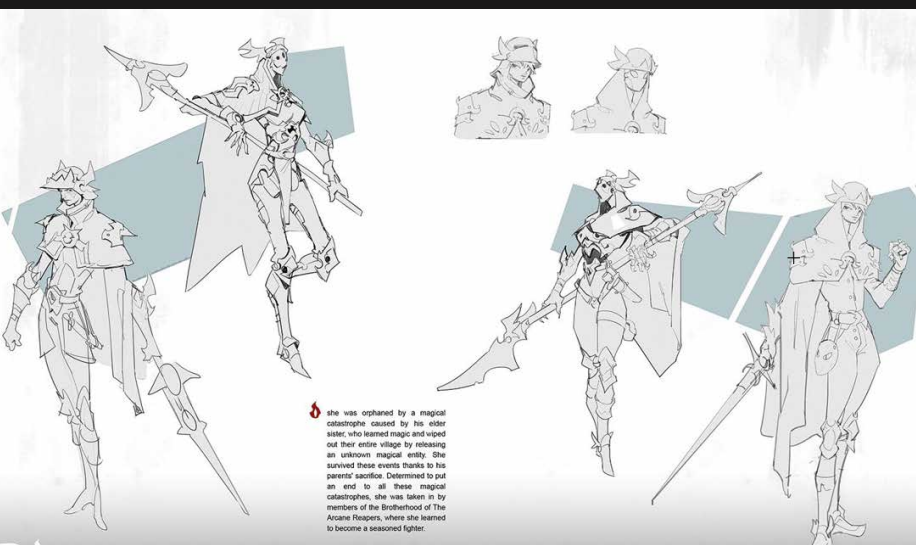
Hildegarde

YEAR CREATED: 2025 MEDIA: Photoshop

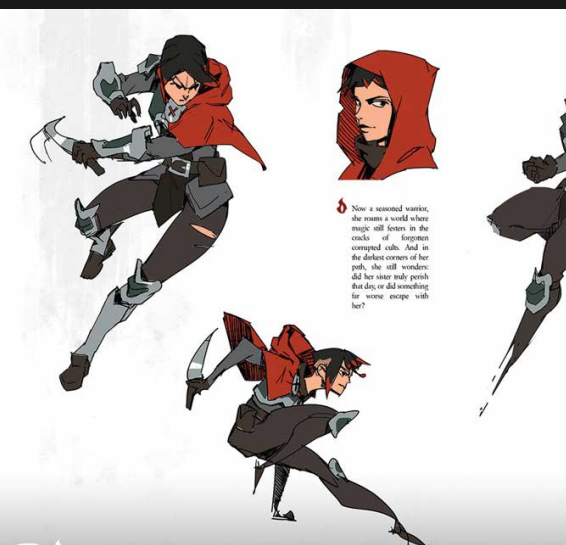
“Hildegarde is a mercenary and member of the Brotherhood of the Arcane Reaper. She defends the world from malicious magical attacks. This is a design for a top-down game, so I focused on the upper part of the character. For example, the red colour on top makes her easily recognisable when viewed from above.”

Grimvil

Tom Saccardo



she was orphaned by a magical catastrophe caused by his elder sister, who learned magic and wiped out their entire village by releasing an unknown magical entity. She survived those events thanks to his parents' sacrifice. Determined to put an end to all these magical catastrophes, she was taken in by members of the Brotherhood of The Arcane Reapers, where she learned to become a seasoned fighter.



Now a seasoned warrior, she roams a world where magic still sears in the cracks of forgotten corrupted souls. And in the darkest corners of her path, she still wonders: did her sister truly perish that day, or did something far worse escape with her?

Artist PROFILE

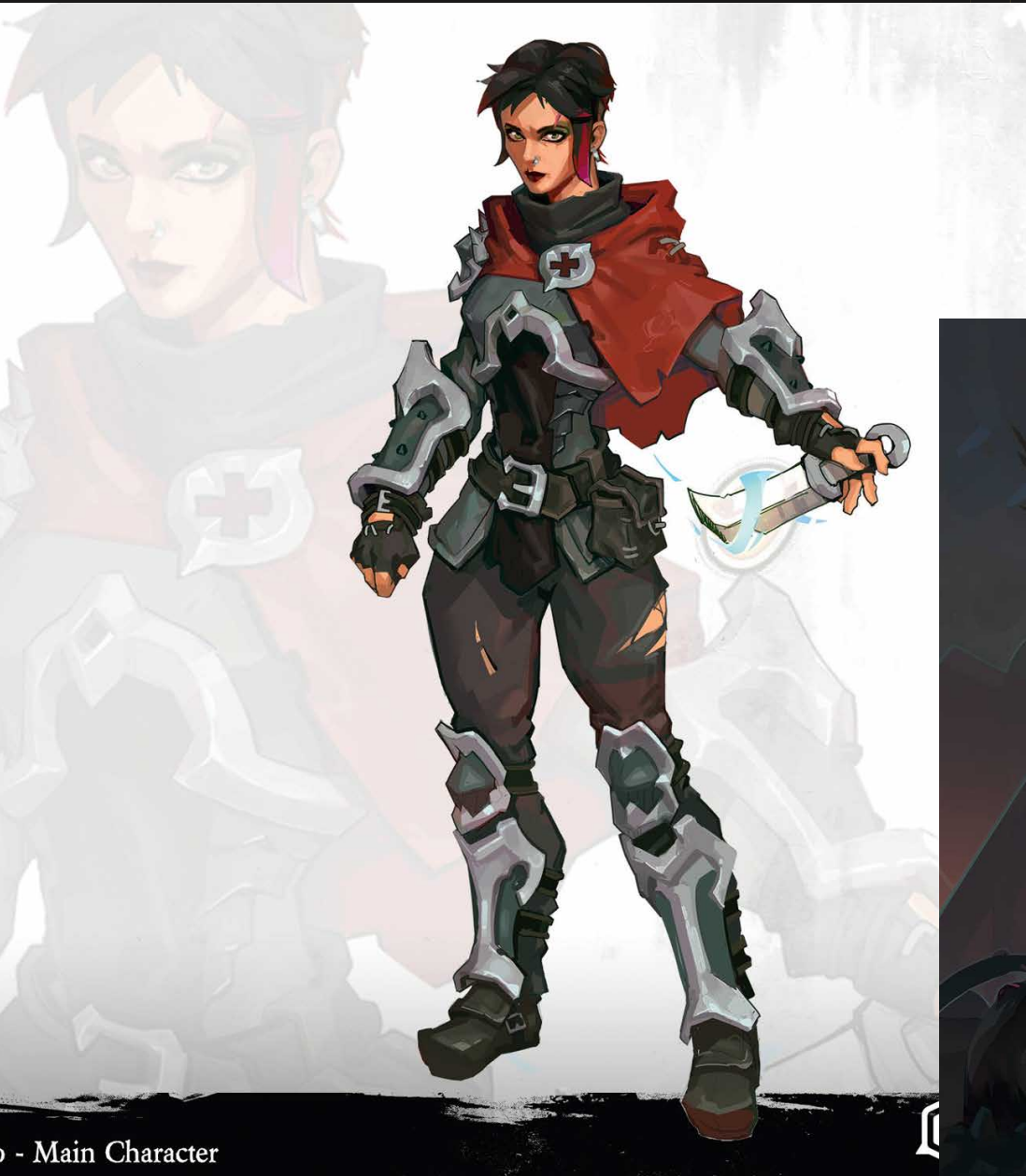
Tom Saccardo

LOCATION: France

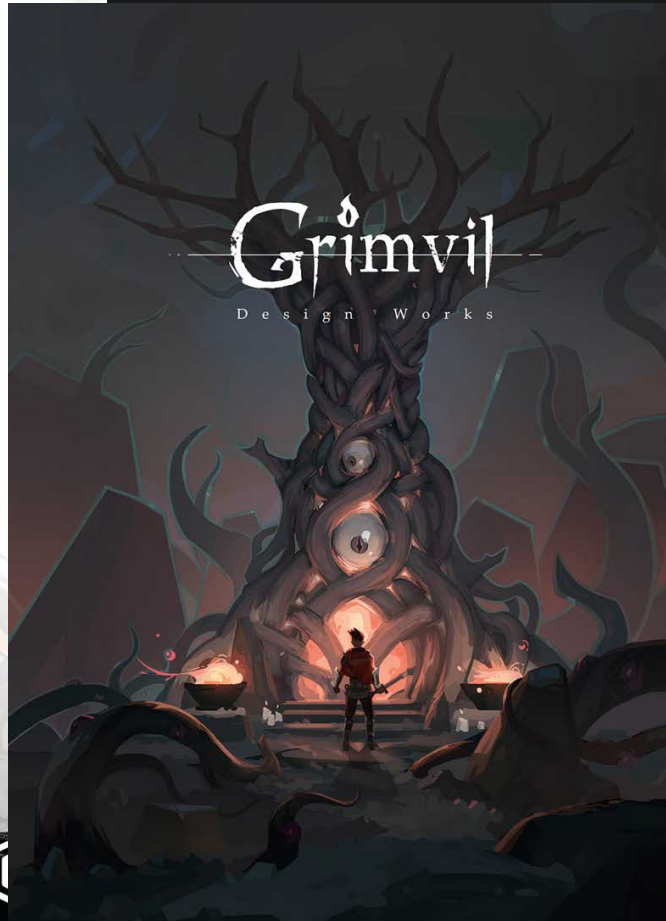


Tom has recently graduated after studying concept art at Artside. Besides drawing, his passions include sport, business, the outdoors and manga.

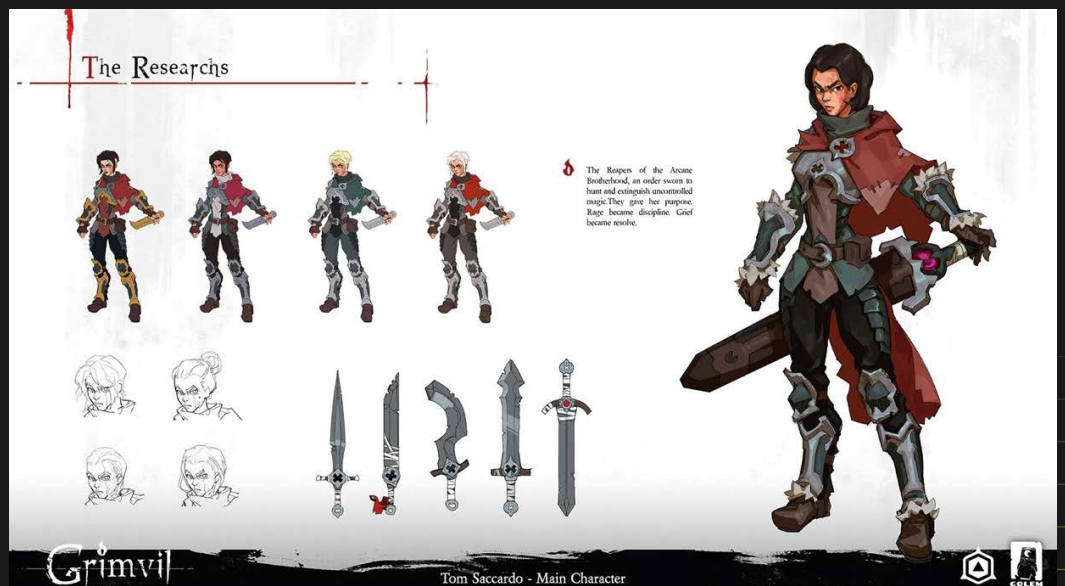
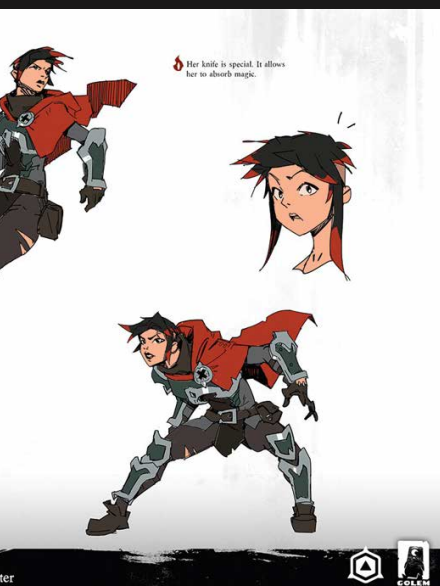
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o - Main Character



Grimvil
Design Works



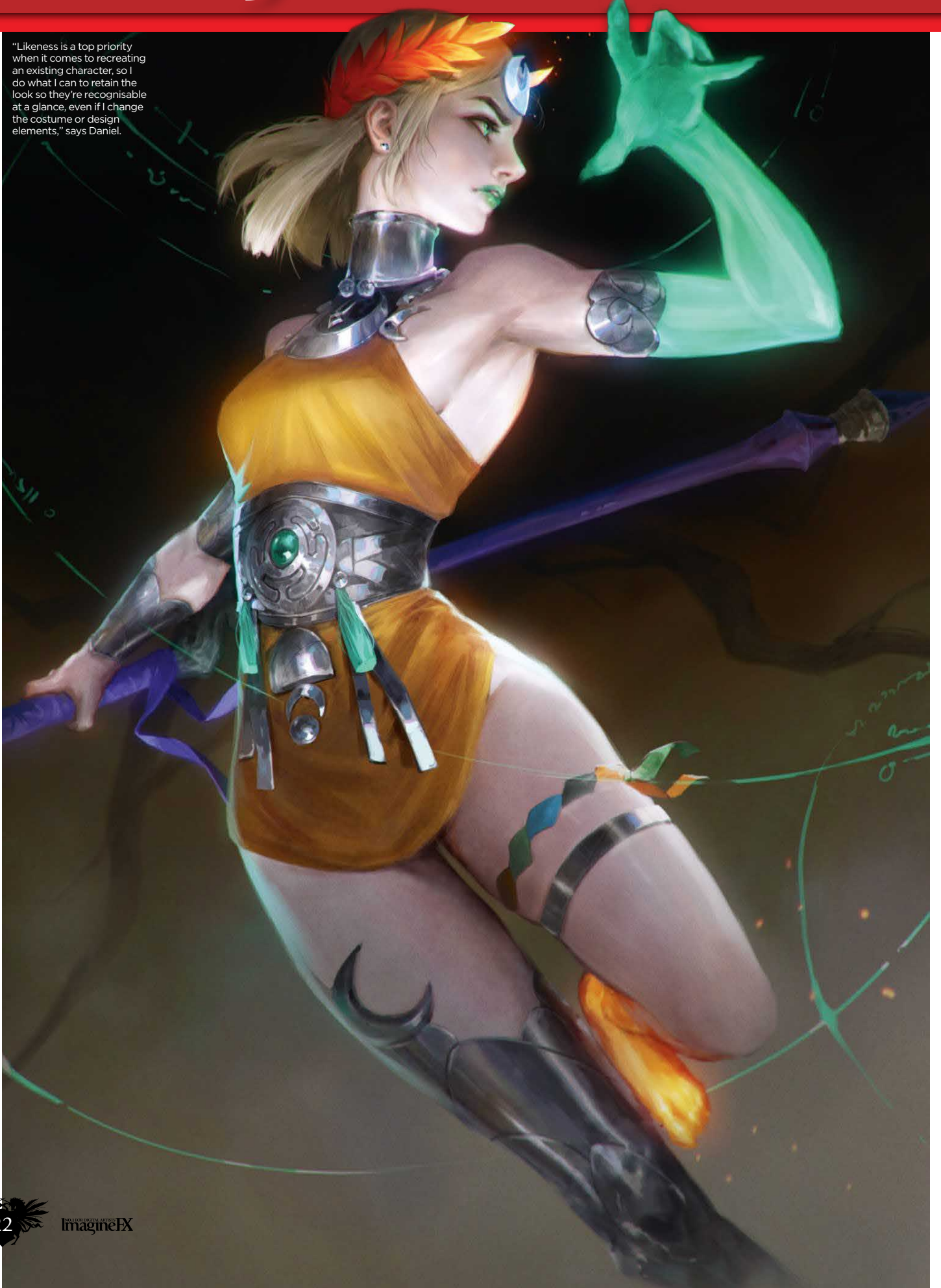
Tom Saccardo - Main Character

ARTIST NEWS, SOFTWARE & EVENTS

ImagineNation

AT THE CORE OF THE DIGITAL ART COMMUNITY

"Likeness is a top priority when it comes to recreating an existing character, so I do what I can to retain the look so they're recognisable at a glance, even if I change the costume or design elements," says Daniel.





LETTING IN THE LIGHT

Shinn Uchida shows us around her workspace, with dedicated areas for large-scale art, analogue and digital work, and a whole lot of natural light. **Page 28**



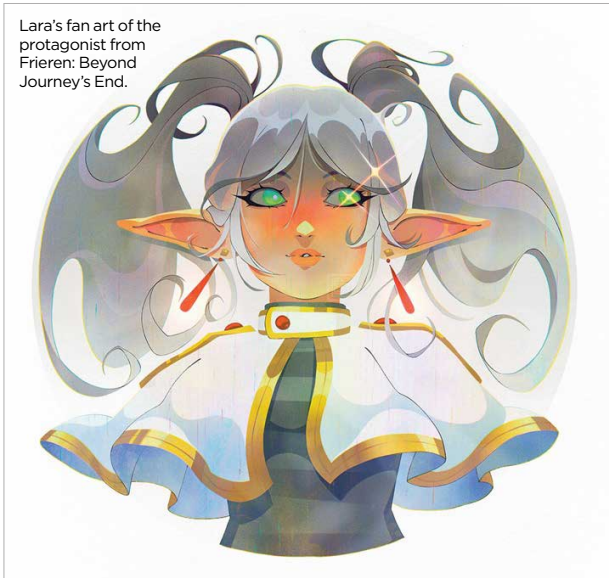
REACHING AN APEX

Concept artist Jude Smith talks us through their journey, from learning to paint as a child in Virginia to working for Respawn Entertainment. **Page 34**



OUR READERS FEED BACK

Your views on some of our recent articles, including one reader who was fascinated by the inner workings of ILM from art director Jason Horley. **Page 37**



Lara's fan art of the protagonist from Frieren: Beyond Journey's End.

"I consider the character's personality, aesthetics, and the themes surrounding them," says Natalia.



INDUSTRY INSIGHT

LOVE LETTERS

Natalia Klimczak on feeding her fan art infatuation

What motivates you to create fan art?

Fan art is a love letter to the characters and the piece of media they're from. It's also easier to draw inspiration from things that already exist than coming up with ideas entirely on your own.

Has it opened up any career opportunities for you?

Definitely. There's nothing more exciting than getting to work on a project related to a series you love. But it's not the reason I do it. You can spend years drawing fan art of your beloved characters and never get noticed. It is nice when you do though!

What role has it played in your growth as an artist?

Getting obsessed with a piece of media and feeling inspired to draw characters I love definitely played a big role in me becoming the artist that I am today. It kept me motivated and also made learning how to draw more enjoyable for me.

What does it mean to you to reimagine beloved characters in your own art style?

I love adding little pieces of myself and my taste in aesthetics to characters I like. I think drawing fan art of book characters is probably my favourite thing to do. You often get a rough description of what the characters look like, but the rest is entirely up to you.



Natalia Klimczak is a UK-based painter and illustrator, creating work inspired by fantasy and fairy tales.

<https://cara.app/taungrove>

Discover your niche in fan art

Fan favourites **Tanya Combrinck** discovers how putting a twist on popular IPs can help you meet audiences that resonate with your art

Finding your tribe, the people who deeply love your artwork and truly get what you're doing, is one of the most fulfilling and joyous aspects of being a creator. Fan art is a clever and efficient way to do it, because it gives you access to a ready-made community of like-minded people. And, if you're lucky, it can result in work opportunities, or sometimes even the chance to make art in an official capacity.

"Creating fan art connects people who enjoy the same things, and it helps me reach people who wouldn't



normally see my artwork," says **Lara Georgia Carson**, a senior designer at the production and animation studio WildBrain.

"When I post fan art, it inserts me into different groups of people who might not normally follow artists, and I love being able to 'fangirl' over things that are mutually enjoyed."



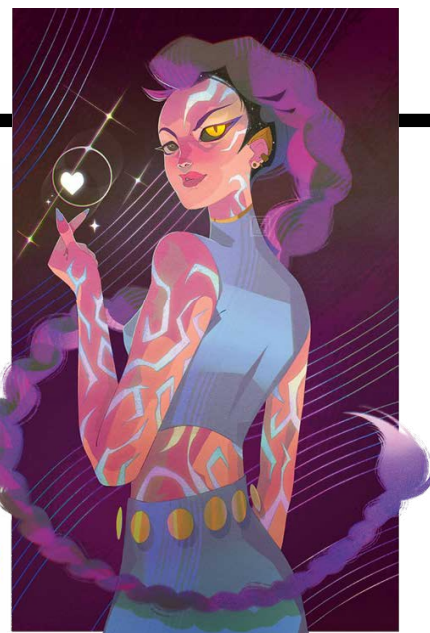
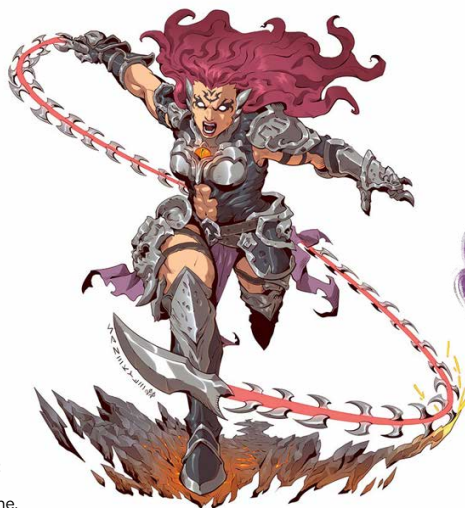
Putting your own spin on beloved characters from various works of fiction and emphasising the features that matter to you most is a surefire way to enrich everyone's enjoyment – yours and the audience that you're sharing them with. **Daniel Kamarudin**, an illustrator who also designs statues

“It's like speaking to your community and the fandom in a voice only you have”

and collectibles for both original and existing franchises, tells us: "Making artwork of your favourite characters is like speaking to your community and the fandom in a voice that only you possess. Your art style is unique to you, and painting characters your own way is your contribution to both the particular fandom and the art community as a whole." ➔



Sean's version of Raziel from Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver, a 1999 video game.



"Fan art lets me express admiration for the things that I enjoy in a tangible way," says Lara.

➔ Daniel sometimes chooses subjects that are relevant in popular culture, but more often than not, he likes to stir up nostalgia by drawing from something he watched or played when he was younger. He tells us that experimenting with different fandoms is key to finding your people.

"Eventually, you'll attract people who fall in the same section of the fandom Venn diagram," he says. "For example, I found a particularly fun niche of Hololive fans who enjoy the members painted in a more classical style like mine, as opposed to the 'purist' approach where they're more in line with their original art style."

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

As well as finding kindred spirits, it's also a way to grow your following.

"Fan art attracts the most people,



and creating pieces for specific IPs is sure to get you an audience," says artist and comic creator

Sean Kyle Manaloto.

"Consistency is key, and it helps to post your art on IP-specific places like Facebook fan groups, and also using a few hashtags and tagging accounts related to the fan art."

Lara tells us that taking community requests and participating in trending fan art challenges can be a great way to get your work seen. "Recently there was a Frieren art challenge, and years ago there was a Sailor Moon one; they both had huge reach in both the art and fan communities. When new content comes out that has buzz around it, it can be good to strike while the iron is hot, and trending fan art posts can then bring people to your page."

As you get more eyes on your art, there's always the chance you'll get spotted by people who want you to

"Since a lot of the fan art I create is from games and shows, I watch a clip or two to see the characters in action, and I take inspiration from certain frames before I start to compose the piece," says Sean.

Daniel's fan art of the virtual YouTuber Mumei from Hololive.



“Fan art attracts the most people, and is sure to get you an audience”

work for them. Some of Lara's fan art has become licensed to its original IP and used as promotional material, and she has created official art for Disney Lorcana. Daniel got his start in the industry this way, and Sean has been asked to work on projects ranging from tabletop campaigns to video games and artbooks.

MAKE IT FOR YOURSELF

Despite the success that fan art can bring, it's good to remember that it's just one string in your bow; there can be pitfalls to relying on it too much to grow your following. Comic artist, illustrator and background designer



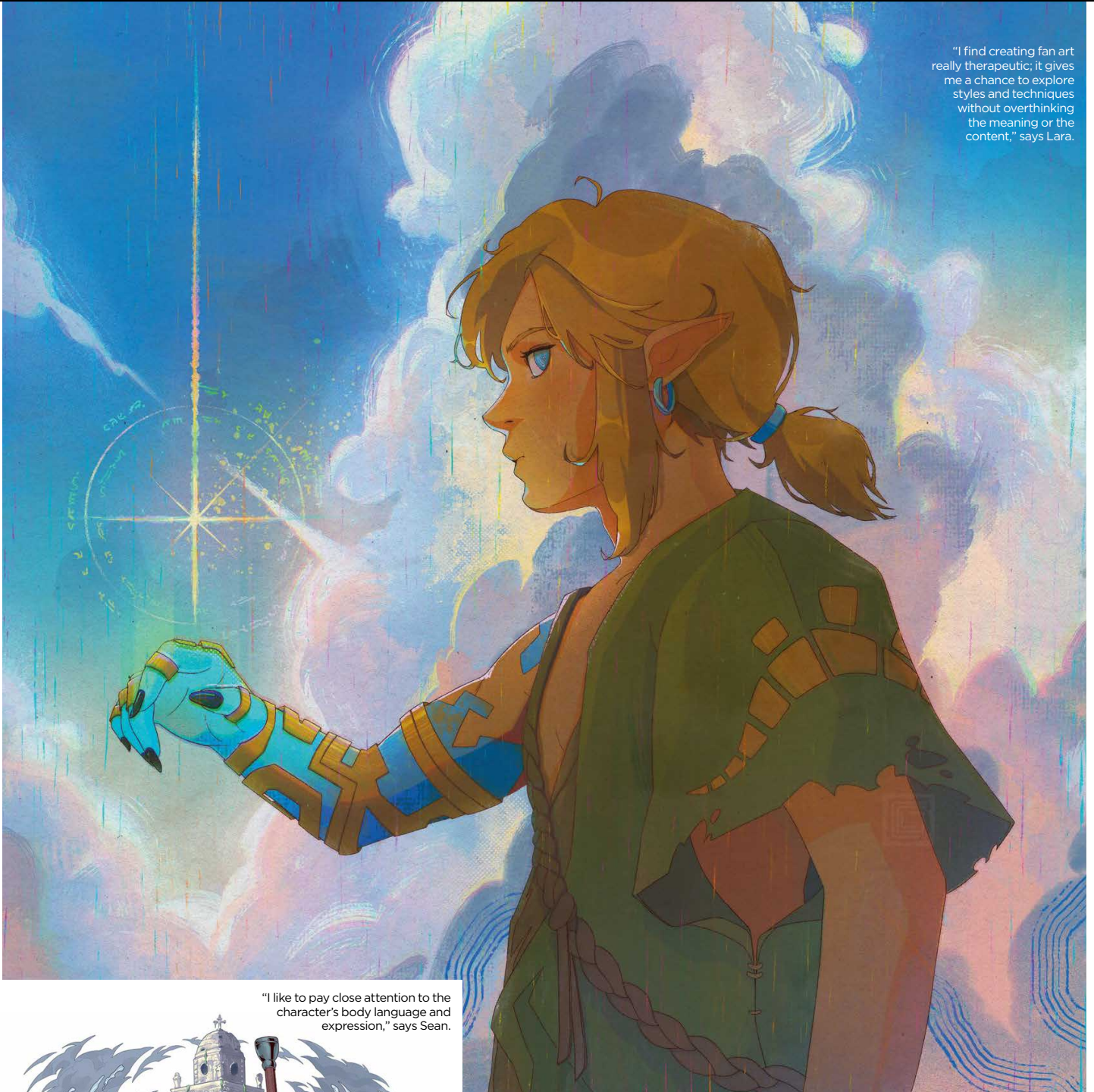
Bailie Rosenlund tells us that building an audience should be a side effect, not the goal. "Creating art based on what you think your audience wants is going to make you feel miserable and ➔"



Bailie says: "Sharing fan art has helped create a really nice community I never expected to have, and I am very grateful for everyone who follows and enjoys my work."

Artist news, software & events

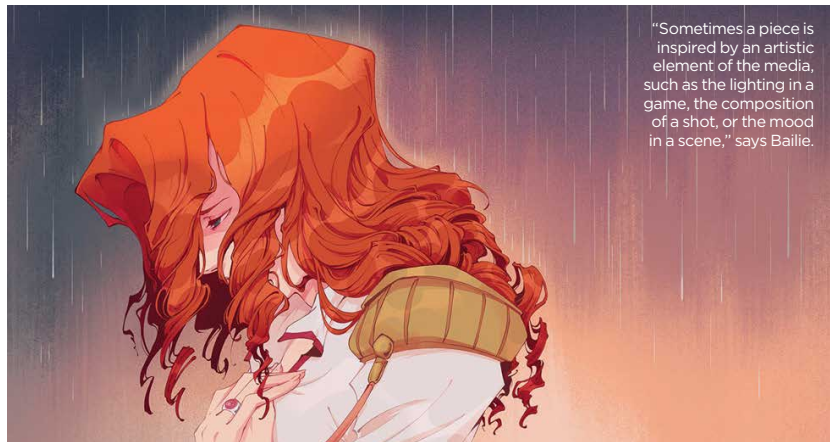
"I find creating fan art really therapeutic; it gives me a chance to explore styles and techniques without overthinking the meaning or the content," says Lara.

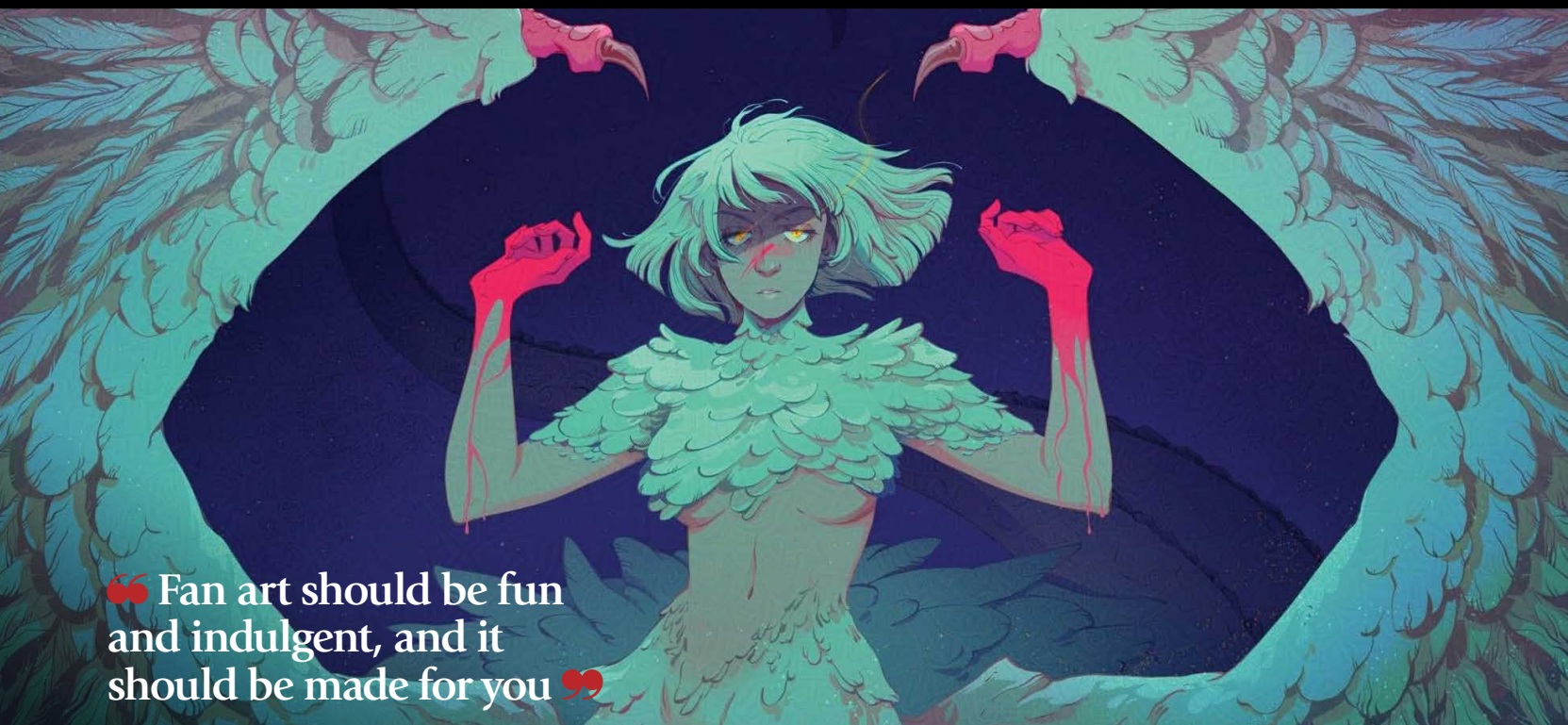


"I like to pay close attention to the character's body language and expression," says Sean.



"Sometimes a piece is inspired by an artistic element of the media, such as the lighting in a game, the composition of a shot, or the mood in a scene," says Baillie.





“Fan art should be fun and indulgent, and it should be made for you”

“burnt out,” she says. If one piece of fan art does really well, you may feel pressure to make another similar artwork. “Truly, if you don’t want to do that, then just don’t. Fan art should be fun and indulgent, and created first and foremost for yourself.”

Bailie also advises a thoughtful approach to using fan art in your professional portfolio. “Different artists and art directors have varying opinions on whether or not fan art should exist in a portfolio,” she says. “I do have fan works in my portfolio, but the majority of it is original. The fan

works I’ve included are ones that I’m particularly proud of – ones that show off my compositional, lighting or colour sensibilities. Also, as my job as a comic artist does at times require me to draw existing IPs, it allows a client quick insight into how I may interpret their IP into my own style.”

On top of helping you to reach people, creating fan art is also a good way to hone your art skills. Bailie tells us she often learns something new that she didn’t expect from her close study of the design decisions she sees in the media she’s referencing. “It’s a

“Creating fan art, for me, has always been self-indulgent. Sharing it on social media allows others to also indulge,” says Bailie.

“Fan art allows me to express my admiration for the things I enjoy in a tangible way,” explains Lara.

great opportunity to learn from other artists,” she says.

LEARNING CURVE

Lara tells us that as well as helping her push her style, be more experimental, and engage with media in a more critical way, making fan art has been great preparation for working in production environments. “When I’m working on a TV show as a designer, I have to be able to match the style and create inside of the established world, which is a little bit like making ‘official’ fan art. So the unofficial art is good practice for that.”

Daniel uses fan art to practise fundamentals and experiment with his techniques. “Having a familiar character or subject matter you can practise on makes it easier to focus on the things you want to learn from a particular piece you’re painting,” he says. “Learning how to clean up my lines, create more appealing compositions, render a certain way, and so on all came from painting characters I like.”

Sean has also seen a benefit to his art practice. “The process of making fan art has greatly expanded my visual library and has taught me a variety of lessons, such as how to improve form, making textures more believable, and honing attention to detail,” he says. “Creating fan art is always challenging, and will always teach you something new you can apply to personal art.”



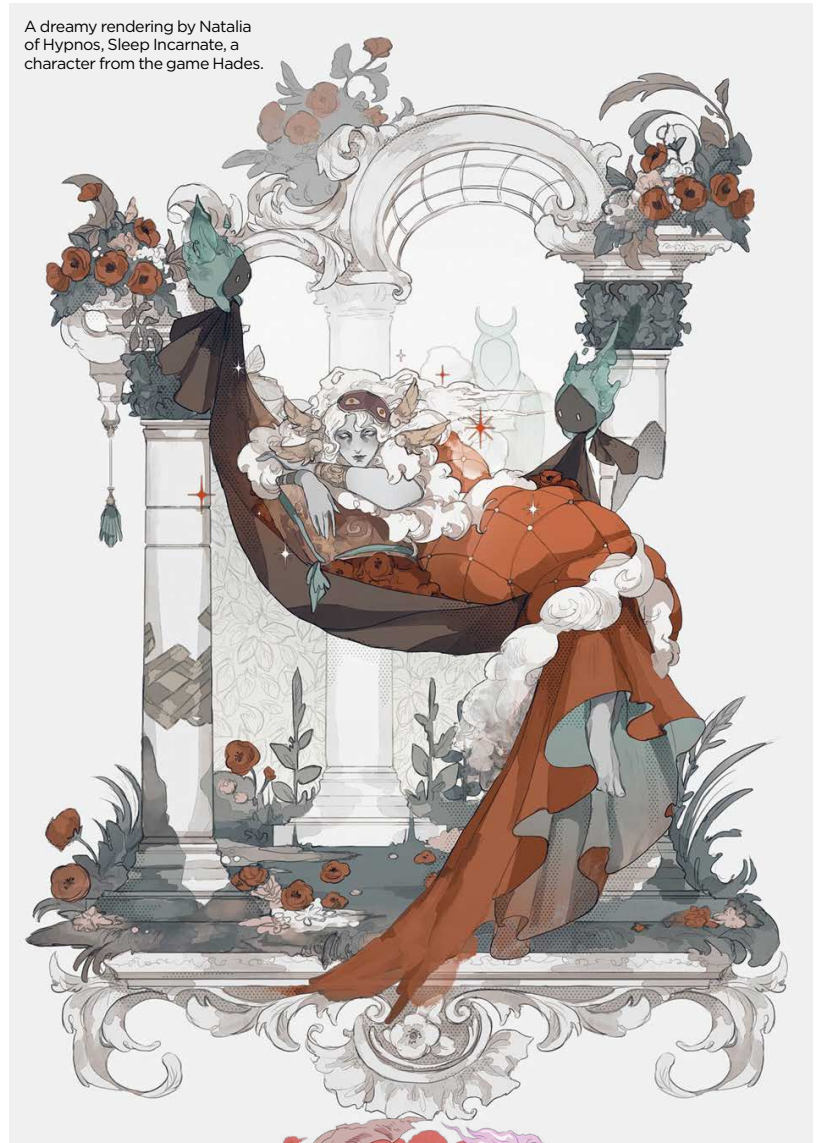
セレス・ファウナ

Daniel's version of Ceres Fauna, a Hololive virtual YouTuber who encourages humans to return to nature.





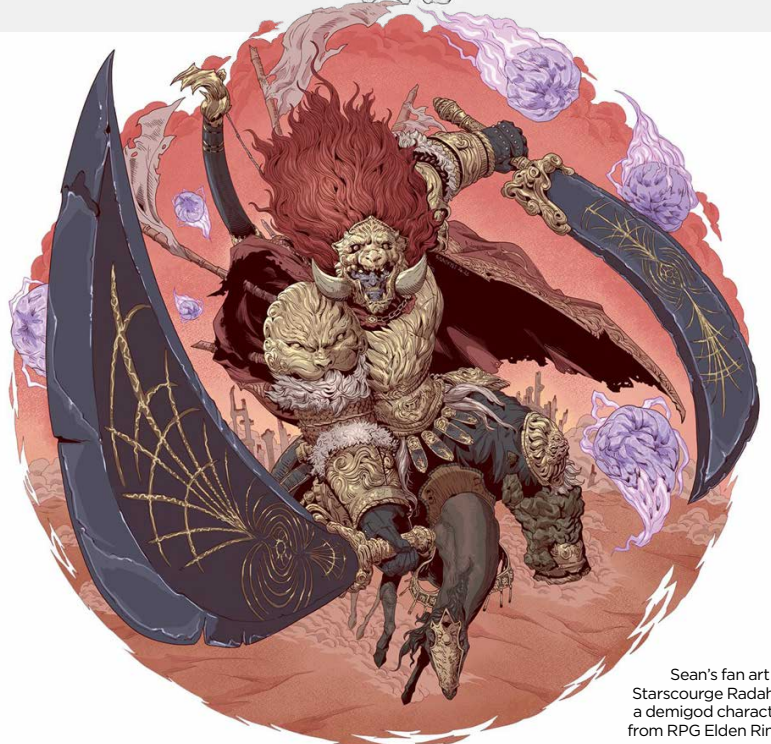
Daniel says: "I like to add Easter eggs, so if I feel that I can squeeze in a relevant detail to the character or story, I will. I'm not too sure if people pick up on these; they're mostly for my own enjoyment."



A dreamy rendering by Natalia of Hypnos, Sleep Incarnate, a character from the game Hades.



Natalia's imagining of the faerie prince Cardan Greenbriar, from The Folk of the Air fantasy book series by Holly Black.



Sean's fan art of Starscourge Radahn, a demigod character from RPG Elden Ring.



Shinn Uchida

Design for life This place is designed for large artworks, focus and an art-first daily routine



My studio has three areas: a wall for drawing large-scale artworks, a height-adjustable desk for analogue illustration, and a PC desk for video editing and digital work.

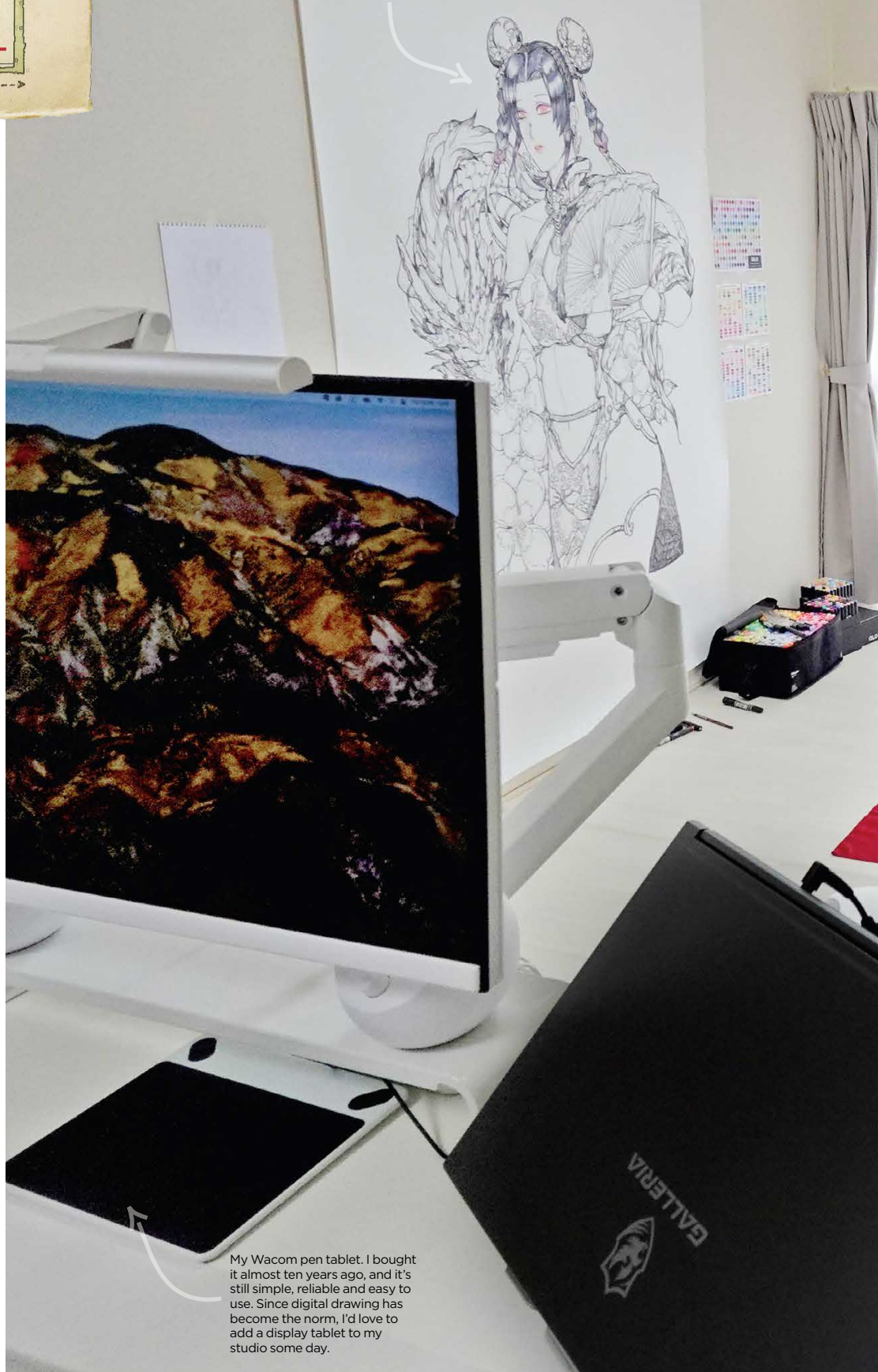
During the day, when there is plenty of light, I work on the large drawings on the wall. As it gets darker, I move to the desk for PC work.

I moved into this place last September. It's a 1LDK apartment, and I use the entire living room as my studio. Because it's a south-facing corner unit, it gets lots of natural light during the day, which I really love. ➔



I take part in anime and manga conventions around the world. This photo is from a live drawing session at Nijigen Expo in Malaysia in 2025. I completed a six metre-long manga artwork over three days.

I'm getting ready for an event in Hong Kong this January, so I'm working on a large illustration inspired by Hong Kong vibes and the New Year. I plan to create one big piece each month themed around that time of year, and I film the whole process to post making-of videos on social media.



My Wacom pen tablet. I bought it almost ten years ago, and it's still simple, reliable and easy to use. Since digital drawing has become the norm, I'd love to add a display tablet to my studio some day.

A camera stand with a ring light. This is a must when I livestream on YouTube while drawing and filming my hands! The built-in light also works as a desk lamp, which makes it super convenient.

The smaller plants moved with me from my previous home. The one on the stand is a kokedama (moss ball), which I happened to find while visiting a shopping mall. I fell in love with it instantly and bought it on the spot.

After moving, the desk no longer matched the colour of the floor, so I remodelled the tabletop myself. I've only just moved in and don't have many items yet, so that's about it for now.

A friend who came to help with the photos brought this tea set. She's really into tea. This time, we had matcha with roasted rice. Enjoying tea while looking at my own artwork is a wonderful experience.

My main workhorse: a MacBook Air. It's the 13-inch model with an Apple M3 chip (8-core CPU, 10-core GPU, 16-core Neural Engine), 24GB unified memory, and a 1TB SSD. I usually connect it to an external monitor and mainly use it for video editing and final illustration tweaks. I also love its clean, simple design.



My alcohol marker colour charts. I build colour combinations in my head while looking at these, so I would be lost without them. I rarely do test swatches - I usually just colour based on my instinct in the moment.



An interior shot of Tsuen Wan Ramen Taifu in Hong Kong, where my large manga artwork is on display. I created it with the hope that this ramen brand, born in Japan, will expand to Hong Kong and even to space some day. I even drew the ramen I ate there.

(Below) The process behind the artwork shown left. I stayed in Hong Kong for ten days to complete the mural. Interior construction was happening at the same time, so at first there wasn't even air conditioning - it was brutally hot! But now it's a great memory.



My collection of soothing houseplants. They moved with me from my previous home. I found the moss ball by chance at a shopping mall and couldn't resist buying it. I'd love to add some bigger plants once the weather gets warmer.



A glass ornament from Niijima. I bought it while travelling alone after quitting my job to pursue becoming a professional artist. I was still nobody back then, but this piece reminds me of the moment my life truly changed.

My PC desk and drawing desk. In my previous place, I only had one desk, so setting up and putting away paints every time was a hassle. Now I finally have them separated. Since I tend to sit too long, my drawing desk is height-adjustable, and I often draw while standing.

“ My drawing desk is height-adjustable, and I often draw while standing ”



I turned an entire living room wall into a giant drawing space by taping paper directly onto it. So yes, there's no sofa, TV or table! But this is exactly what I wanted, and I love it.



A dip pen and pen holder that I've been using since my aspiring manga artist days. Although I work digitally more often now, I want to continue drawing analogue line art as well.



I have a sweet tooth, so I always keep snacks around. When I attend events overseas, I sometimes receive sweets as gifts. Interestingly, they're sometimes Japanese snacks.

➔ (Unfortunately, it was cloudy on the day these photos were taken.)

MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY

Before moving here, I lived in a very small apartment (Japanese rental apartments are really tiny!). Whenever I needed to create large-scale works, I rented a gallery in Harajuku, Tokyo, to use as a workspace. Being able to finally create big pieces at home makes me incredibly happy.

“ Being able to create big art pieces at home makes me incredibly happy ”

The plush toys shown were purchased in countries I visited for live drawing events. I make it a habit to buy one each time I visit a new country.

The kitchen is directly across from the studio area, which is convenient because I can get back to work immediately after eating. Although a living room is usually a place to relax, I intentionally didn't put in a sofa or anything like that. I eliminated any kind of 'relaxation space'.

Eight years have passed since I quit my office job, and I've finally been able to get my own studio. While I currently work as a performer, I want to start drawing manga again to fulfill my dream of publishing my own book. *Shinn Uchida is an illustrator who depicts slightly strange, colourful inhabitants of a world surrounded by wired devices. She is also active as a live drawing performer, creating massive manga artworks in front of audiences. Her work can be found at <https://linktr.ee/mangalivepaint>*



I use it to play Fitness Boxing, since I tend to get a bit out of shape. I actually want to play Ring Fit Adventure, but I still haven't opened it yet.

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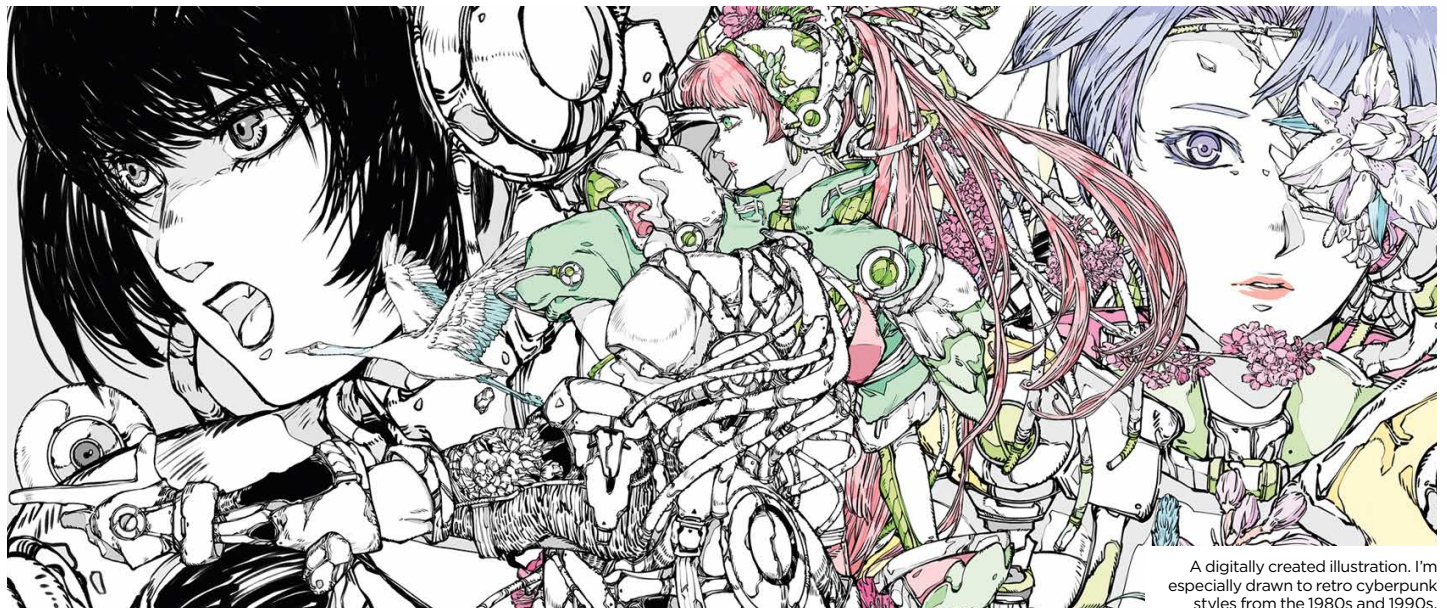
I mostly use alcohol markers (OLO and Ohuhu) because they're easy to handle and don't drip on the floor. That said, the ink runs out quickly, so not many people use them for large-scale works.



The works that have influenced me the most.



These are some of my favorite things, including an Akira poster and art books by Katsuhiro Otomo.



A digitally created illustration. I'm especially drawn to retro cyberpunk styles from the 1980s and 1990s.



Kira (The Crow) was heavily inspired by the tabletop RPG Degeneration, created by concept artist and SIXMOREVODKA founder Marko Djurdjević.

The path of... Jude Smith

Artistic apex Jude reminisces on his growth as a games concept artist

Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?

I was raised on a small peninsula in Virginia called the Eastern Shore, where there's a small community of painters who mainly focus on wildlife and the landscapes by the water. During my childhood, I frequently took painting lessons from local artists and learned to work with various mediums, such as oils, acrylics, watercolour, and pastels. I believe this had a significant impact on how

Sparrow, a character concept for Sparrow of Apex Legends.



I approach art today. People often mention that my digital art reminds them of traditional paintings.

What, outside of art, has most influenced you through the years?

Music has always influenced my taste and style. I grew up playing in a band with friends, and that creative outlet taught me a lot about self-expression and storytelling. I no longer play music, but I still listen to a lot of albums, and sometimes it sparks ideas, especially when I connect with it on an emotional level. It helps me imagine stories that I want to tell.

Is there a painting that you saw in your formative years that changed everything? What was it?

I can't recall a specific painting, but I vividly remember seeing Ryan Church's concepts in the Art of Star Wars books for Episodes II and III, which amazed me as a kid. I'd been into drawing and painting since I was young, but I never realised that art was actually used to create movies and games. That realisation made me decide from then on I wanted to become a concept artist. My parents thankfully even bought me a copy of

Photoshop and a Wacom tablet for me to practice with.

Tell us about your first paid commission, and does it stand as a representation of your talent?

My initial paid job was a pretty cheesy illustration for a zombie indie game. I had just graduated from college and was grabbing every chance I could to build up my resume. Although that piece doesn't quite represent my portfolio now, it was certainly a leap forward for my technical skills, and I was finally reaching a point in my career where I felt my work was beginning to align with the industry's talent standards.

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

Lately, when I'm working on art, like my recent piece, the Artificial Hunt, I've been concentrating more on what I genuinely want to convey as an artist. Initially, it was all about pursuing opportunities and creating a portfolio that would catch the attention of studios. Now, with nearly a decade of experience, I try to stress less about my creative skills and following trends. Instead, I focus on trusting my

“ I'd been into drawing since I was young, but I never realised that art was used to create movies and games ”

Artificial Hunt: a depiction of the future where we lost ourselves in the pursuit of the advancement of AI technology.



surprises me the most is how fast and consistently the industry changes. I thought that once I got my foot in the door, I would finally feel like a 'professional'. But honestly, I still feel the same as I did when I started, and being a good artist to me means always striving for growth.

What advice would you give to your younger self to aid you on the way?

I'd advise my younger self to stop worrying about being a generalist, trying to prove I can fit in everywhere, and instead concentrate on creating a specialised portfolio that showcases the kind of work I genuinely want to pursue. Once I made that shift, my career really started to take off.

Has digital art changed for good since you've been working in it?

I believe that it has changed a lot, especially for people looking to learn and build their skills or expand their reach as independent artists.

Nowadays, there are so many online resources out there that can help guide you in perfecting your techniques or promoting yourself to the right audiences, no matter your educational background or studio experience, and achieve success.

What character or scene that you've painted do you most identify with?

Probably the Artificial Hunt piece. With all the worries about artificial intelligence taking over creative jobs, I felt the need to express my thoughts on the topic. So I painted a really dramatised picture of what I imagine our future might look like if we get too caught up in our technological advancements.

What is your next step in art or life?

Lately, I've been feeling the need to expand beyond just concept art and start doing more illustrative work, focusing on more of what it is I really want to say with my art. I think these days it's more prevalent than ever to develop your personal style if you want to stay relevant in the industry.



Jude is a senior concept artist at Respawn Entertainment who began their career at Kabam in Vancouver. They worked for Blackbird Interactive as a concept designer for Hardspace Shipbreaker, and now works on the core Apex Legends team at Respawn. www.artstation.com/jude_smith

Nero is a personal character design that blends my love for anime and sci-fi influences.



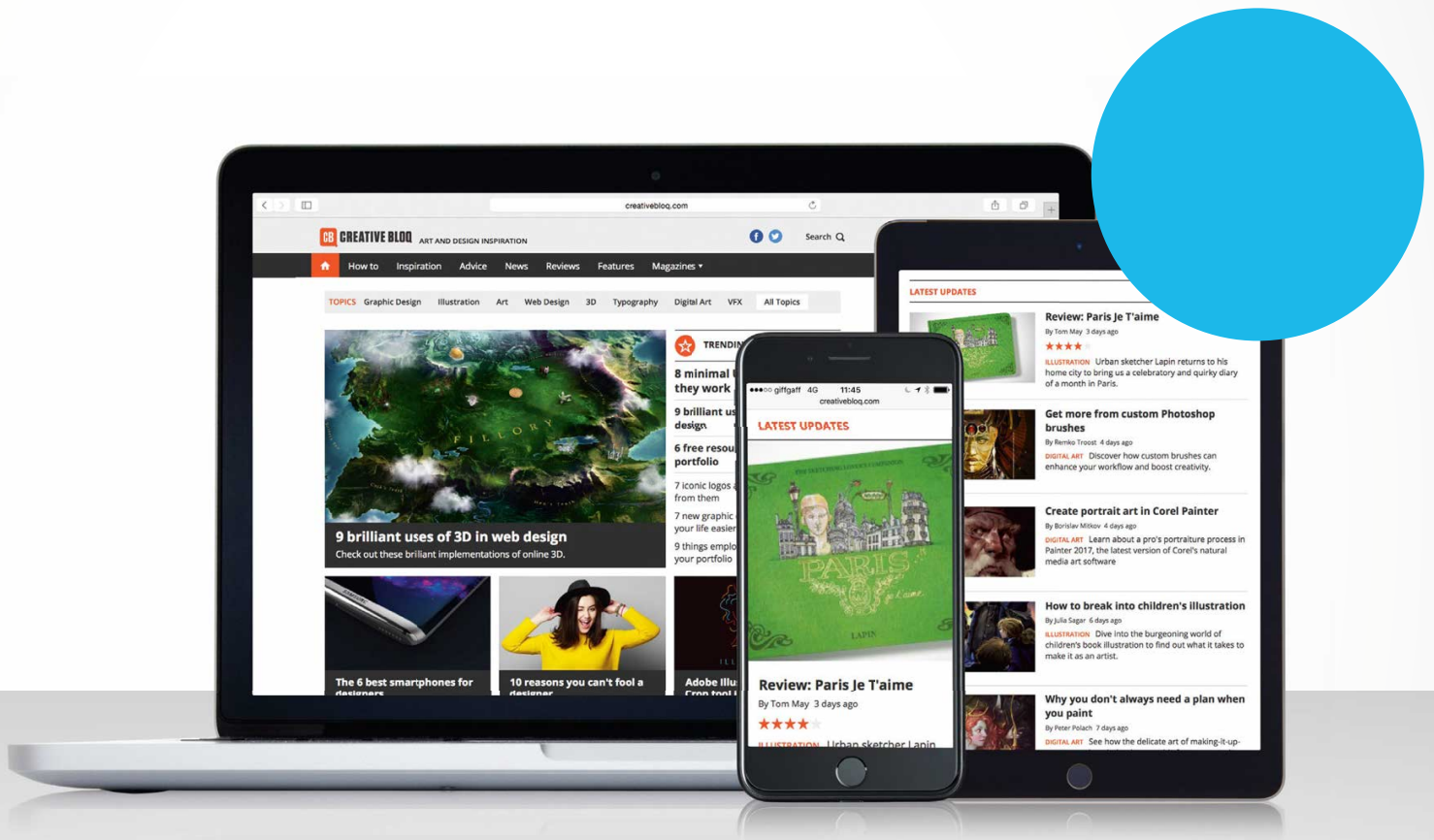
Another piece from my Mononoke re-imagined series, depicting Ashitaka in my personal sci-fi style.

instincts and producing work that I find personally engaging, and I feel doing this has significantly improved my art over time.

Is making a living as a digital artist all you thought it would be?

Overall, I feel that this career has been incredibly rewarding. Working on the projects I've been a part of and being surrounded by like-minded artists has taught me so much, and I've really grown from these experiences. What

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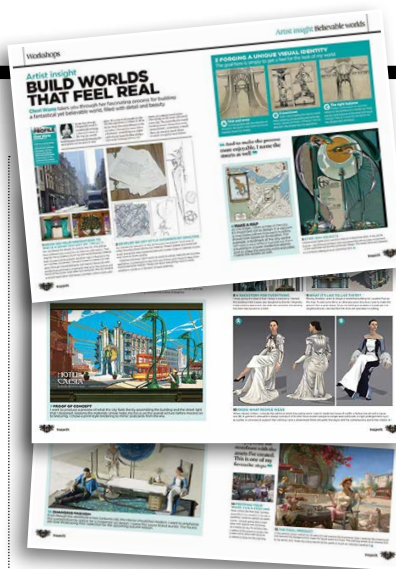


Contact the editor, **Rob Redman**, on mail@imaginefx.com or write to ImagineFX, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, England

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Cheri Wang inspires and informs in her in-depth look at world building.

improve how viewers interact with our art, and Cheri knows exactly how to add just the right details to make her images believable and feel lived in. We look forward to having her back in the mag.

Twisted creatures

Hi Rob. Please, please, please feature more artists like Cole Eastburn. His drawings in your latest issue were stunning. He created creatures that felt so believable.

Becca, via email

Rob replies Hi Becca. Thanks for getting in touch. Cole is very much a master of his craft, and it was a pleasure to feature him in the magazine. I totally agree with you. His creatures are brimming with character and personality. We do like to mix up styles, but rest assured, we will feature other top artists every issue.

3D planning

Hello Rob and the team. I tend to mix 3D and 2D, so it has been really good to see a bit of 3D in ImagineFX. I was interested to read the short tutorial on planning a scene in 3D last month. It had just the right amount of info and helped me reassess how I go about mapping out my renders, which is something I have struggled with. This has really upped my game.

Derick, via email.

Rob replies Hey there, Derick. Thanks for reaching out and your kind words. I get exactly where you're coming from. Knowing how to plan out a 3D scene can feel different to working in 2D, especially with cameras that can be moved around. That freedom can sometimes cause a fair bit of choice paralysis. Stefano very simply showed how you can think about these things up front.



ILM magic

Just a quick note for you guys. I loved the last issue, especially the interview with Jason Horley. It was fascinating to get some insider information from someone at such a loved studio. I'd like to see more of these please!

Stan, via email

Rob replies Jason's insights were a great read, weren't they. It's rare to get behind the scenes at somewhere as prestigious as ILM, but we will absolutely be looking to find our way into some others to see what they do and how they do it.

Building worlds

Well, Cheri Wang is rather good, isn't she? I picked up so many little tips and tricks that I'll be making use of in my own work. I'm a big fan of her rendering style too, which matches exactly what I like.

Steff, via email

Rob replies She is indeed! World building isn't just fun, but can drastically

Our chat with Jason Horley opens the eyes as to how ILM's art department works.



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New works that have grabbed our attention



Instagram Helgean @helgeann_



Instagram Sandra Winther @sandrwintherart



Instagram Jarosław Bojdyś @jaretsky

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

Feature

FANNING THE CREATIVE FLAME

ImagineFX takes a bigger-picture look at fan art and the challenges and possibilities that it poses for creativity



THE GREEN KNIGHT

Berenice Nelle's enthusiasm for Legend of Zelda is finds expression in this image of Link.

Writer and pop-culture maven, Ray Bradbury – one of the original heroes of fandom and, indeed, one of the first self-proclaimed geeks for all things science fiction, fantasy and horror across all media – offered this rallying cry for fandom: “Imagination should be the centre of your life.”

That spirit of devotion and affection, and a vivid sense of just how cool a particular story and its characters are, lies at the heart of fan art and its culture. From the gaming world of *Fable* to the anime world of *My Neighbor Totoro*; from the comic Gothic of *Batman* and the bittersweet whimsy of *Peanuts*, fan art that responds to existing, copyrighted material expresses the investment of significant creative and emotional energy. It can also function as a showcase for emerging and established talent.

MAINTAINING ORIGINALITY

There’s an existential question in all of this, however, and that centres around issues of authenticity and originality. It’s a discussion that perhaps feels particularly acute at this moment in time.

Considering the bigger-picture ideas around fan art and its cultural variations are a handful of useful questions, of which the following is perhaps key: how can a fan artist maintain some degree of authenticity and originality in their work when it’s explicitly using existing character design, visual style and aesthetic as its basis? Well, it’s complicated.

Other questions also bear mulling over: how can an existing character



HORNET

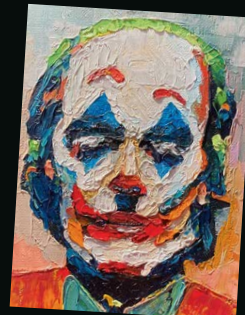
Fan-artist Kassini works in Photoshop to express his fascination with Hornet from *Hollow Knight*.

design be rendered to fit a given fan artist’s own style? Is this fundamental point a hindrance or a motivator? Why does fan art thrive and hold such a valuable place in illustration and image-making culture?

Perhaps one observation that ties together these questions is this observation made by M. Manifold in their essay, *Fanart as Craft and the Creation of Culture*, in which they write that the creation and consumption of fan art allows for a situation in which an “Appreciation of local and global aesthetic is quickened, and a desire to develop a high level of skill is inspired.”

That development of creative skill is evident in the works of artist

“Exploring fan art opens you up to a vast library of ideas to draw from”



Shayleen Hulbert, whose fan art has often been a creative response to game characters. Shayleen’s interpretation of Sheik from *Overwatch* was a collaboration with artist Jack Hamilton, and also prompted a workable rig that was made freely available for personal projects and education.

Meanwhile, Shayleen’s depiction

of Sakura from *Cardcaptors* was inspired by their long-standing fandom for the game.

“Whenever I am lost and unsure what I want to create, I will turn to other pieces of existing fan art for inspiration,” says Shayleen. “Exploring fan art opens you up to a vast library of ideas and concepts to draw from, heavily reducing the fear caused by the ‘blank page’ problem many creatives face.”

“Knowing what to make can feel quite paralysing at times,” Shayleen continues, “but finding inspiration in media that excites you serves as a clear a jumping off point to further develop your design and technical skills. I always recommend putting your own spin on it by introducing something fresh, rather than merely replicating what already exists.” ➔

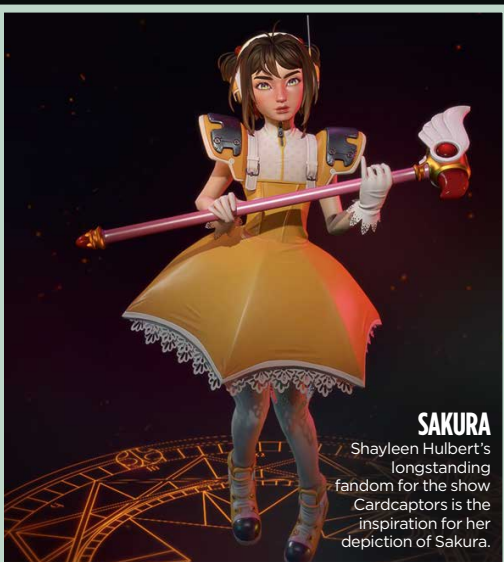
KILLER PORTRAIT

Cody Taylor, an animation student at Birmingham City University, captures the ghoulish menace of *The Joker*.



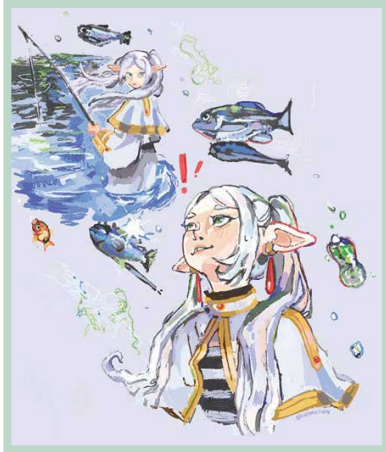
WARRIOR PRINCESS

Kassini honours the heroism of *Wonder Woman*.



SAKURA

Shayleen Hulbert’s longstanding fandom for the show *Cardcaptors* is the inspiration for her depiction of Sakura.



WITH THE FISHES

A piece by Sebrina Stain, a student at Birmingham City University, illustrated using Procreate.

➔ The various dynamics around fan art culture can manifest themselves in the work of aspiring illustration students who may decide to include fan art in their portfolio submissions for a given course that they wish to pursue. For illustration tutors, the complication arises when they have to explain that those images don't qualify as true illustration, even though they have likely been rendered with devotion and great enthusiasm.

HELPFUL STARTING POINTS

With so much reference material available for fan artists, how can they leverage it to improve their own work in terms of accelerating skills and engaging with the demands of form and composition?

As **Neil Hadfield**, Course Leader of the BA (Hons) Illustration & Animation course at Hereford College of Arts, notes: "We see many, many portfolios of bad fan art and have to painstakingly call out that the course does not condone it as true illustration. That said, it is



useful to be challenged to find positivity in its existence, similar to our wrestling with AI. Working with pre-existing characters can free up the illustrator/designer by providing a fully formed cast, omitting the need to begin from scratch. It then becomes possible to place them in new situations by modifying and further developing their idiosyncrasies such as facial expressions, gestures and costumes to help create new narrative, further evolving the characters."

BIRD AND THE BAT

Hannah Berry deploys Batman for a charitable cause.



useful to be challenged to find positivity in its existence, similar to our wrestling with AI. Working with pre-existing characters can free up the illustrator/designer by providing a fully formed cast, omitting the need to begin from scratch. It then becomes possible to place them in new situations by modifying and further developing their idiosyncrasies such as facial expressions, gestures and costumes to help create new narrative, further evolving the characters."



FINE TIP

Illustrator Nicholas Stevenson in discussion with a student at Hereford College of Arts.

“It’s a way of feeling part of their creation by offering my own perspective”

For illustrator and concept artist **Kassini**, the realms of superheroes and gaming offer inspirational starting points for his fan art that celebrates Trench Crusade and Silk Song.

Kassini says: "Being able to draw the characters I love is like waving to my childhood self, who did the same when watching a film, seeing an animation, or reading a comic. It's not just a personal satisfaction, but also a way of feeling part of their creation by offering my own perspective on a character, just as their creators did."

This confluence of originality and working with an existing aesthetic is a point that **Hannah Berry**, comic writer and also former UK Comics Laureate (2019-

© Ran Petherbridge



DESIGN SCHOOL
Hereford College of Arts.





NEGOTIATING COPYRIGHT COMPLEXITIES

Fan art walks a line between free expression and copyright infringement.

As a fan art creator, it's time well spent familiarising yourself with the nuances of copyright and fair usage. Certainly, there's a range of detail readily available in print and online about what artists should know and be aware regarding (potential) copyright infringement. Originators of characters and story-worlds (across various media) can vary in their acceptance and openness to fan art. It's also useful to note that British copyright law differs in various ways to American copyright law.

Here's a listing of useful resources that might provide you with information about issues around copyright:

The Graphic Artist Guild:
<https://graphicartistsguild.org/>

The UK government website details copyright issues here: <https://bit.ly/4aMPQvV>

The annually published handbook The Writers and Artists' Yearbook contains guidance in relation to copyright law: <https://bit.ly/4cuFqnx>

The Comics Creators network is a membership group that operates as part of the work of The Society of Authors: <https://bit.ly/4cQNFtU>

21), also has a view on, stating: "For mainstream comics there is a fairly distinctive artistic style – which is not to say that artists can't bring their own voices to it, but that there is a way of drawing, inking and colouring that is very recognisable. I largely work in the indie comics side of things, where the majority of comics are self-published and there are very few gatekeepers. This means most creators are writing and drawing exactly the kinds of stories they enjoy and become known more for their 'voice', and while having an income is important, artistic expression is usually the drive."

"For someone interested in working in this area, learning the ropes by taking known characters and, basically, having fun reproducing them, can be a good way to challenge yourself artistically, but can also build a portfolio that may help you with approaching these publishers in the future," believes Hannah.

"Professional opportunities in mainstream comics are very

competitive, and being able to demonstrate that you know a particular publishers' canon inside out, and that you have a good grasp of their style and tone, can help you get a foot in the door."

For Neil, the tension between original expression in the context of fan art requirements (that it's recognisable and familiar) is one that is negotiated by illustration tutors and their students.

"Fan art characters, at their best, already follow many of the principles of good design, including proportion, anatomy and pose, which provide a solid, classical template on which to base new characters," he says. "There are also principles which help define staging or background/environmental art as scenes or locations for action. These principles can be learnt and used as a basis for original creations in set design in a wide range of media."

LEGAL ISSUES

In thinking through a set of ideas ➔

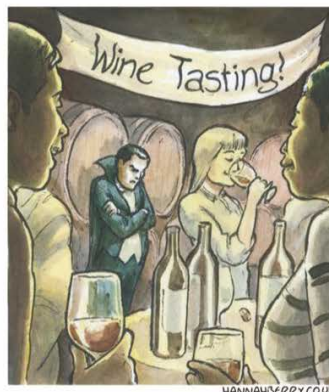
➔ around creative expression and fan art, there's another dynamic to be mindful of; namely the ever-present issue of copyright law.

To some degree, a balance is understood to exist: fan art created solely as an expression of enthusiasm for a given character or story is permissible. The problem will arise for the fan artist if they decide to sell their fan art of characters (properties) that are protected by copyright law. Different companies may utilise different strategies and responses to fan art: they may send a cease-and-desist letter or a takedown notice or eventually initiate a lawsuit. The AI context intensifies this further.

Indeed, during the writing of this piece, Disney sent out a cease-and-desist to AI company ByteDance for infringement of their copyrighted characters. All of that said, some high profile companies, such as Marvel and Sony, recognise that fan art amplifies awareness of their output.

Beyond the considerations of style and aesthetics, fan art also taps into a broader cultural landscape that might see it placing established characters into a kind of stylistic stew that has the potential to produce something more inclusive.

Hannah says: "When I see fan art at comic conventions or shared on social media it's never a direct replica; it's always creators riffing on these



NOSFERATU THE VAMPYRE

Hannah Berry pays homage to the classic movie adaptation of Dracula.

characters or stories – sometimes from other comics, but more often from video games, cartoons, film and TV – to make their own fanzines, comics and prints. Rather than hindering creativity or self-expression, known characters and settings can provide a kind of jumping off point – not unlike using the specific tropes of a genre within a framework that the reader immediately recognises – in order to explore particular themes. I was sure somewhere on my shelves I had a neat little comic musing on the mundane pressures of secret relationships featuring Luigi and Bowser, but I can't find it now..."

THE 'WHAT IF' POWER

Fan art, then, can be thought as having the potential to occupy a place



GRIMDARK

Kassini's art relishes the doomladen world of Trench Crusade.

text and feel compelled to take on its characters, icons and images to create new narratives through their art. Yet these visual stories should not be dismissed as frivolous activities by over the top participants, but rather they can be used as vital evidence that helps to map the trends, desires and fantasies that surround beloved cultural products."

He continues: "Fan art can rework the classics just as much as it can recover things we have forgotten, whether this is providing characters with elaborate futures or generating new backstories and scenarios. The 'what if' power of fan art is necessary and lively precisely because it hinges on an indirect relationship between fan and text – there are, after all, so many positions and perspectives from

“Fan art should not be dismissed as frivolous; rather it can be used to map trends, desires and fantasies”



THE PIRATE HUNTER

Berenice Nelle's One Piece art celebrates the character of Zoro.

in a diverse artistic mix; in a kind of cultural gumbo. For **Dr. Christopher Holliday**, fan art's power and possibility lies in the ways that "the culture of fan art is driven largely by control, ownership and participation."

He explains: "Fan art gives an indication as to the ways that fans and fan communities immerse themselves into their objects of fascination, and, by extension, how they consume and re-negotiate popular culture. Yet fan art does not just enthusiastically respond to a particular artefact in playful and inconsequential ways, but it in fact helps shape the many ways that we can and do think about cultural products.

"This feedback loop is vital," believes Dr. Holliday, who offers that "fans are devoted to a specific media



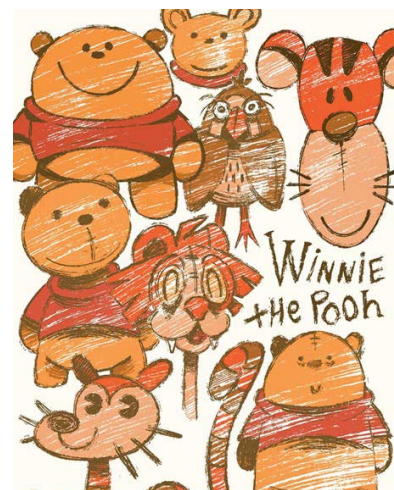
THE ANTAGONIST

Berenice Nelle's portrait of Silco from Arcane.



FINAL GIRL

Kassini reimagines Serah Farron from Final Fantasy XIII.



BEAR NECESSITIES

Cody Taylor reimagines the whimsy of Winnie-the-Pooh and his friends.

which fans can engage with their objects of fascination."

PERSONAL CONNECTION

For **Berenice Neale**, who worked as the illustrator of the graphic novel



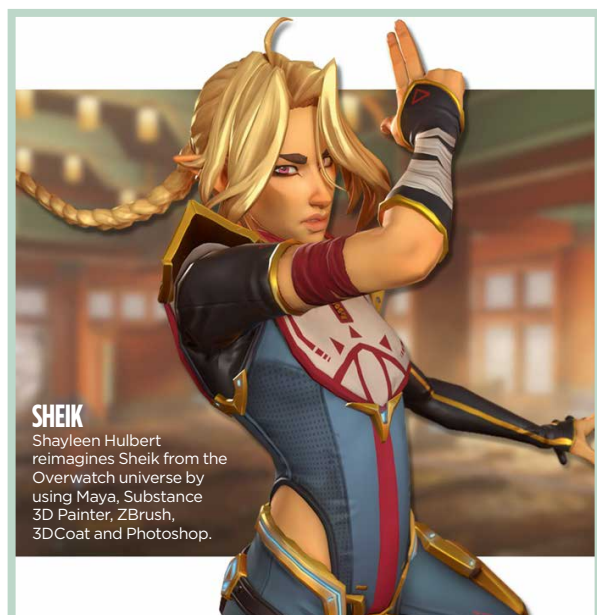
Hollow (2022) that reimagined the story of Sleepy Hollow, creating illustrations in the fan art space has real personal value to her as an artist.

"Fan art, to me, is a playful way to interact with the characters or stories that have moved me. It allows me to stay within a world and explore it further, even after the movie ended. To process a piece of media beyond pure consumption and to create something new from the inspiration it gave me. As a creative myself, it's also

a way for me to express my admiration for the hard work of other creatives and study it in each and every detail."

Berenice's work has recently included creative responses to the animated TV show Arcane and also to the worlds of Zelda and of One Piece.

Fan art is a complicated space that honours enthusiasm for a given piece of existing media, but that might also prove challenging for artists who want to express their own creative identity. And yet, looking at fan art from another perspective, we might well be able to recognise fan art's capacity to make connections across diverse creative voices and audiences. In doing so, fan art might also empower consumers of media to reinvent and reimagine it as a central point in their own creative lives. ●



SHEIK

Shayleen Hulbert reimagines Sheik from the Overwatch universe by using Maya, Substance 3D Painter, ZBrush, 3D Coat and Photoshop.

Development sheet

Artist PROFILE

Ilker Serdar Yıldız

LOCATION: Türkiye



I've been illustrating my favourite subjects, fantasy and medieval themes, for years. During this time, I've had the opportunity to work on projects like MTG, Gwent, and Mount & Blade II. My background is in classical art, but I've been working in 2D/3D programs for a long time.

<https://ilkerserdar.com>

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PROJECT TITLE: CLEAN CUT

Ilker Serdar Yıldız brings medieval fantasy to life in his artwork. He guides us through the process of creating stylised characters who feel right at home in a fantasy world



Pick a subject

I chose a character sketch I had previously made in Procreate to use in the composition. The posture gave me the idea of a painting depicting a knight who has just completed his mission.

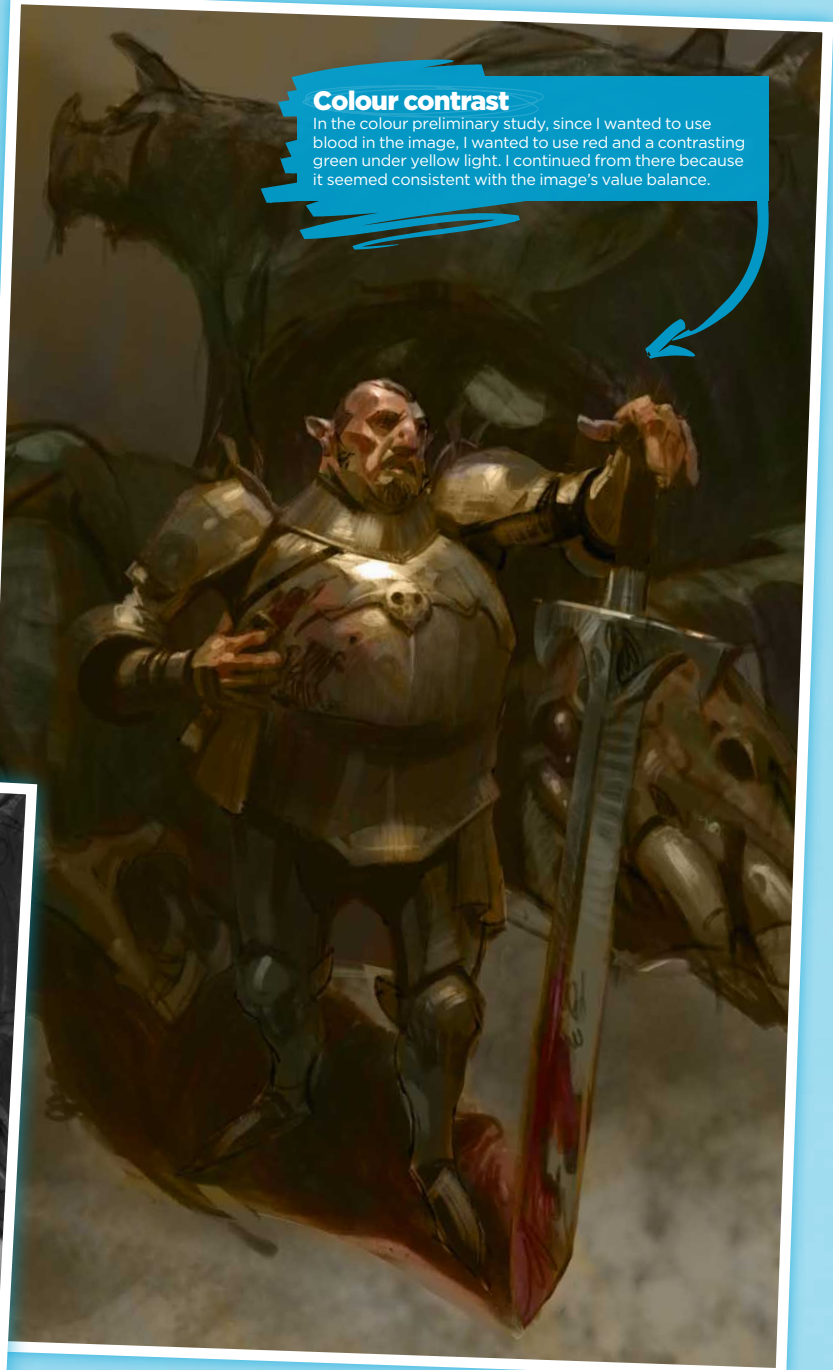


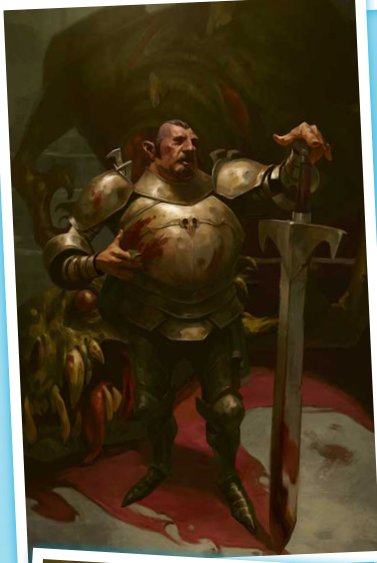
Adding values

During the sketching phase, I roughly detailed the main character and the monster. After this stage, I tried it a few times in the value sketch until I achieved the atmosphere I wanted.

Colour contrast

In the colour preliminary study, since I wanted to use blood in the image, I wanted to use red and a contrasting green under yellow light. I continued from there because it seemed consistent with the image's value balance.





Reworking

When I reached the final stage of the painting, I realised that the monster wasn't fully understood, so I reworked different versions. After the first version, I eliminated two more versions before arriving at the final one.



Final tweaks

In the final stage, I added the details I wanted. I further optimised some colour and shadow and finalised the image.

SEND US YOUR CONCEPTS!

Are you working on a fresh project or doodling your own development sketches that you'd like to share with us?

LET US KNOW! Email your WIPs and final images to mail@imaginefx.com

Sketchbook

Joseph Gronow

This artist likes to take a reference photo and run with it – changing elements here and there, and having fun in the process

Artist **PROFILE**

Joseph Gronow

LOCATION: England

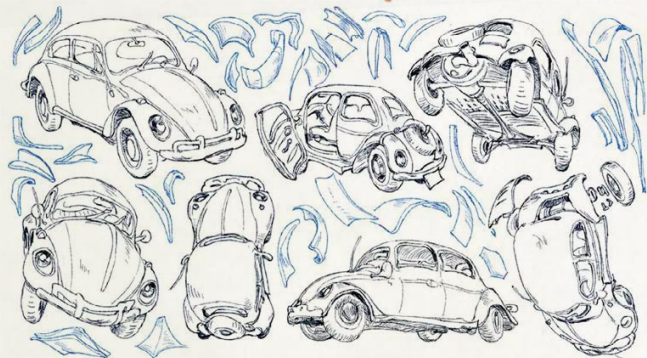


Joe is a freelance concept artist who lectures at the University of Staffordshire. He loves to fuse traditional painting and drawing methods with digital tools, creating characters and worlds that remind him of the Ghibli films he watched as a kid. His drawings aim for charm and whimsy, rather than technical awe.
www.artstation.com/joegrnow

BUG HELMETS

"Sometimes, it's helpful to abstract the information away from the subject itself. Here, I've taken the same kinds of shapes/forms, but reappropriated them for a different purpose. It forces me to extract useful information instead of just copying shapes."

“The more confident I am with a subject, the more wacky it becomes”

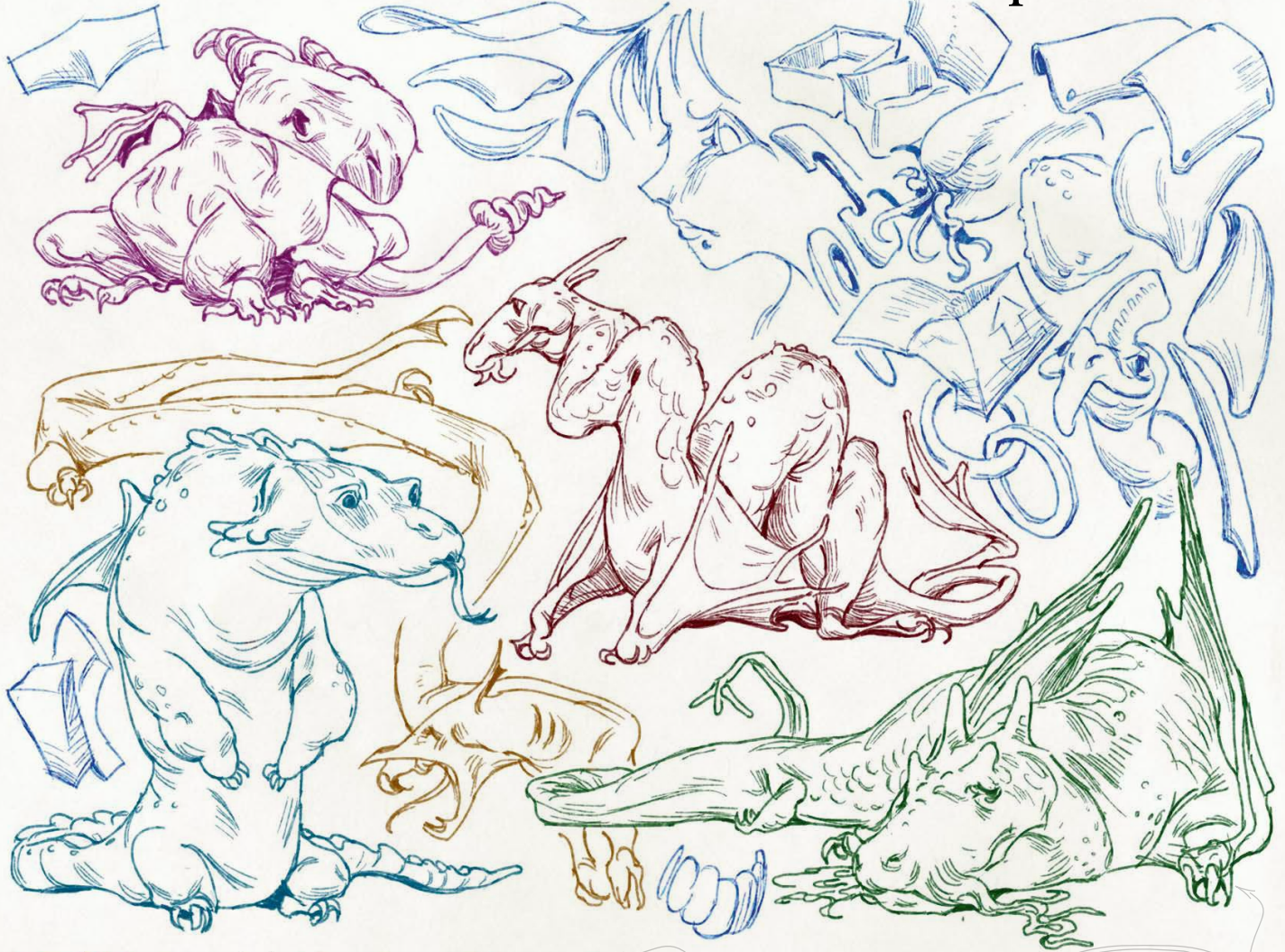


PIGEONS AND PILOTS

"Have your drawings belong to a time and a place! Here, I'm blending a World War One British Army uniform with their pigeon counterparts. They have more appeal when in context!"

ROTATING THE BEETLE

"I loved drawing these Volkswagen Beetles! They're cute and rounded – both things I pushed when drawing these. If you can't tell which one is from reference then I've done a good job."

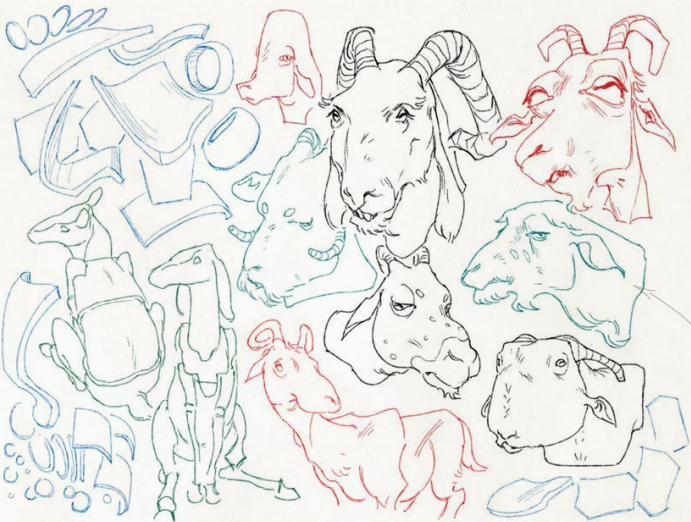


RV MADNESS

"Black holes, krakens or superhero-related insurance claims - pick your poison. Taking something mundane and putting it in absurd situations lets you play with your subject in interesting ways."

STYLISTED DRAGONS

"I'm taking information from lizards and repurposing them to create fantastical dragons! Again, the focus is on exploring personality and how it links to shape design."



STYLISTED GOATS

"Once I'm comfortable moving around 'default' forms from any angle or pose, I try to see how far I can push proportion. The more confident I am with a subject, the more wacky it seems to become."

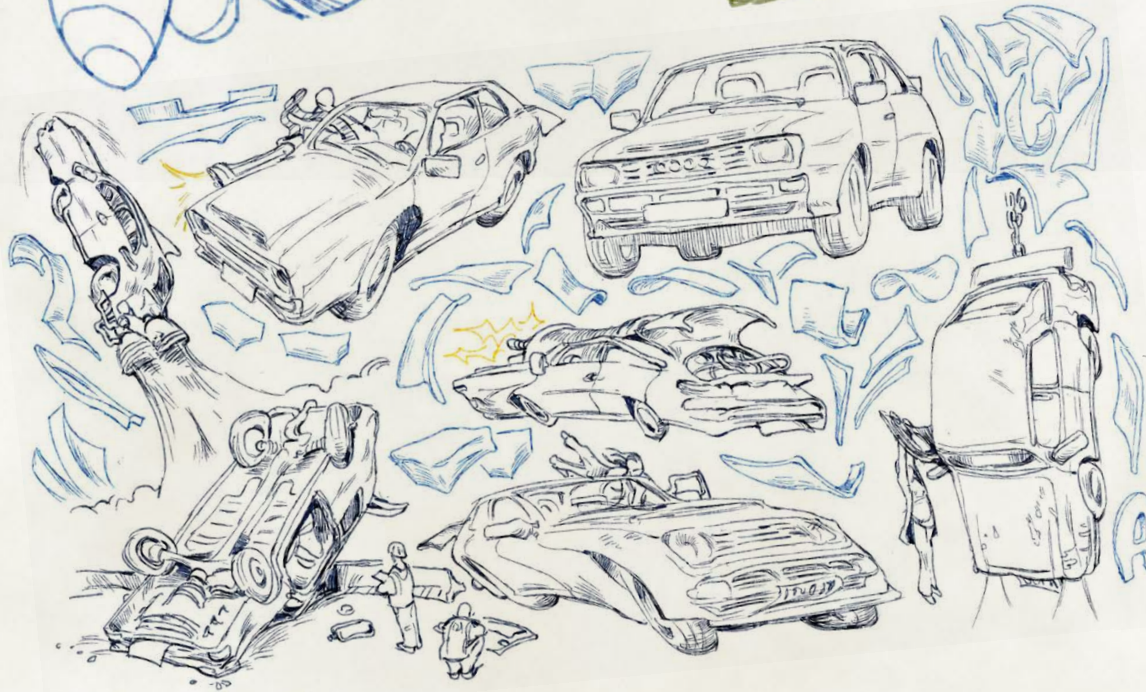


CEREMONIAL BUG DRUMMER

"Other than 3D form, I'm looking for texture and pattern that I can re-use in my design work. Nature really is the best art teacher out there, so you'd best pay attention!"



CROC CONSTRUCTION
 "It doesn't take much to turn an animal into a creature - here, I've taken the crocodile's jaws and rotated them 90 degrees! The same visual information could just as easily be used for something alien!"

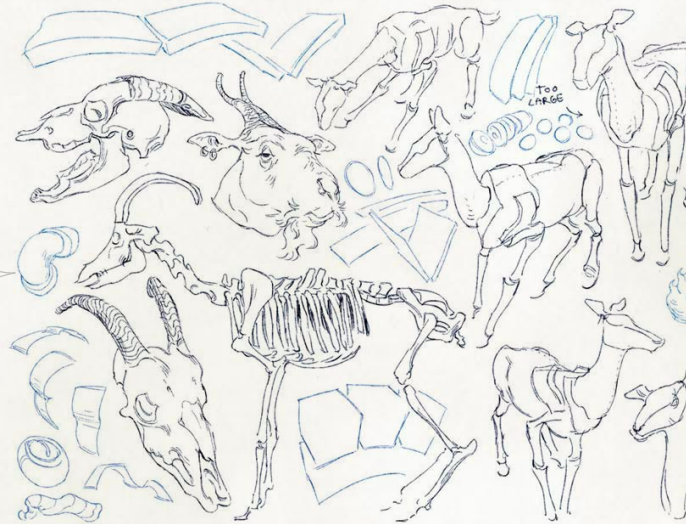


RALLY CARS
 "Rocket cars, minigun attachments - arc reactors?! I'm not just rotating forms like it's a chore. There's a kind of child-like glee I have while drawing sometimes. If you're not giggling to yourself, you might be doing it wrong."



EARLY FOR A FLIGHT

"The best challenge for your drawing skills is having multiple subjects interacting in some way. As soon as there is interaction occurring, you have a story! As that story develops, that gives you more ideas to lean into."

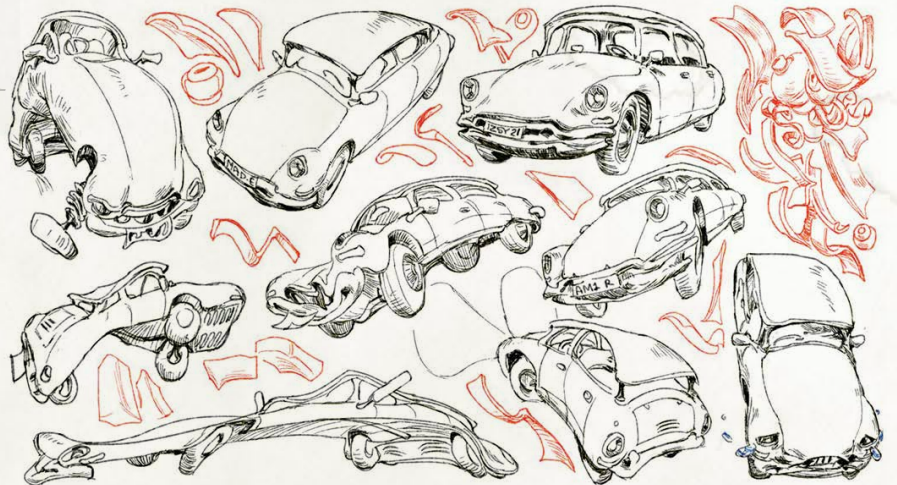


GOAT CONSTRUCTION

"When studying a subject, I like to deconstruct into primitive shapes, like cubes and cylinders. Then I reconstruct from as many angles as I can, without the reference. It's like a memory game you'd play as a kid!"

BENDING THE FORMS

"The tendency for artists is to draw hard-surface objects completely rigidly. I find that some bend and twist helps give the subjects interest, and lets you warp them to express elements of personality."



“As soon as there is interaction occurring, you have a story!”

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

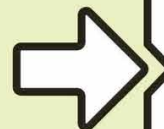
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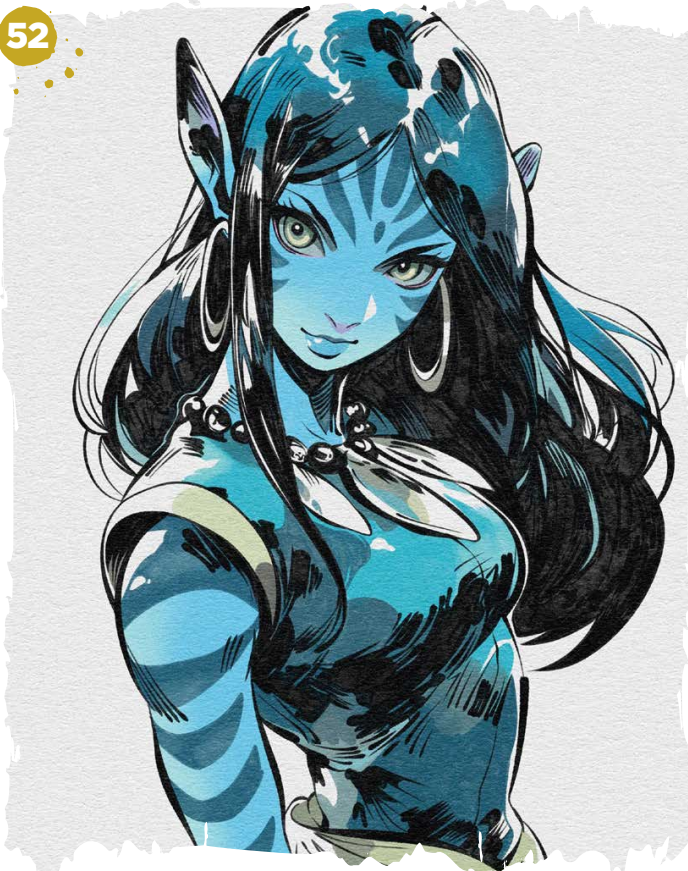
NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX Workshops



Workshop assets are available...

Download your resources by turning to page 5. And if you see the video workshop badge, you can watch the artist in action, too.

Advice from the world's best artists



This issue:

52 10 tips to make fresh fan art

Explore ideas to pay homage to your favourite characters while making sure your own unique style shines through.

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Greg Danton reveals how putting the story first can help inspire your artwork.

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Thomas Osbourne on how he uses Blender as a tool for professional production.

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Concept artist Killian Prevost on how to build matte paintings, from composition to colour.

72 How to create strong contrasts

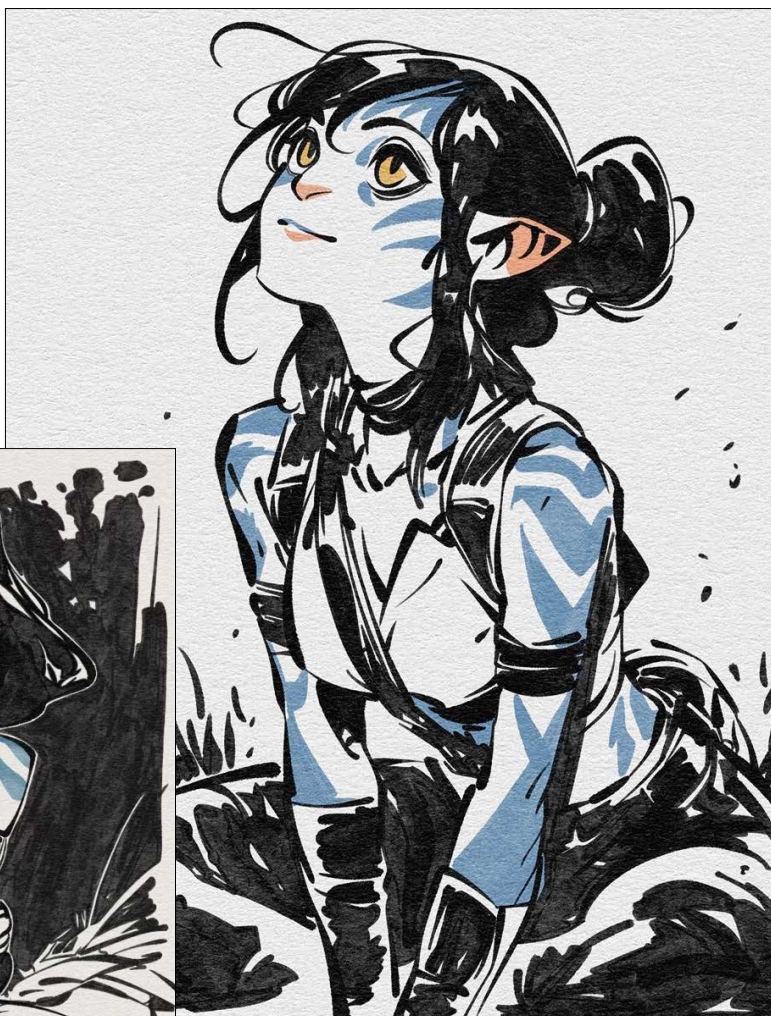
Mark Zhang explains how he contrasts spacecraft design against the cosmos.

Artist insight

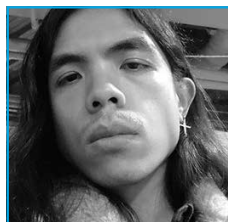
10 TIPS TO MAKE FRESH FAN ART

Explore ideas to pay homage to your favourite characters while making sure your own unique style shines through

It's easy to see why fan art is so popular. Familiar and much-loved characters are an easy win for artists both aspiring and professional. But it's all too easy to fall into the trap of simple reproduction, and nobody wants to be seen to be copying something directly. But why not take advantage of all the work that went into character design and use that to push yourself, learn some new techniques, and use it as an opportunity to put your own twist on a favourite hero or villain and add your own personality to what came before, creating something fresh and new. Our experts share their tips on how.



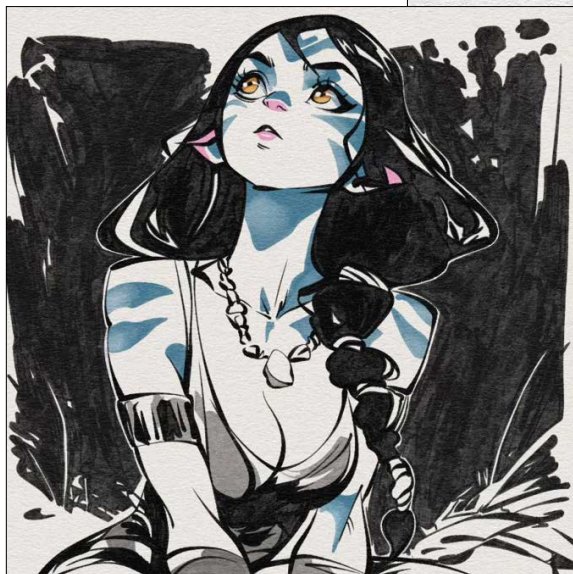
DJERICHO



Artist PROFILE

Djericho
LOCATION: US

Djericho is an independent illustrator focused on character, storytelling, expression, and visual impact. Their work emphasises the character's energy through line work and gestures to convey mood and narrative. Built upon through personal projects and experimentation, their practice continues to evolve.
<https://bit.ly/40gy8fx>



1 FEEL THE VIBE

What drew me in was the franchise's deep connection to nature and balance, which became the foundation of this piece. Rather than recreating a scene, I focused on translating that feeling into something personal and intuitive. I approach line work instinctively. I draw as if I'm using a palette knife, committing to each stroke and letting the drawing find its shape as I go. I rarely do fan art, but when I do, the world has to feel expansive enough to connect with my own characters. In this case, Avatar offered that openness. Its universe left me with questions that I explored and answered through my illustration.

2 KEEP IT LOOSE

Working through this piece taught me a lot and, to be honest, the part that was the most fun to draw was the hair. I used some references inspired by underwater shots looking up at sunlight from the ocean floor. This began as a loose sketch of what a Na'vi and human hybrid might look like. I got carried away and let it evolve. With certain hints from the new movie, it feels like something like this could exist, so I leaned closer to a human form for her. I have to remind myself that more rendering doesn't always mean better, and it's easy to fall into that sunk-cost fallacy mindset. ➔

Artist insight Fan art

“I draw as if I’m using a palette knife, committing to each stroke”



ARTHUR RANDOLPHO



Artist PROFILE

Arthur Randolpho
LOCATION: Brazil

Arthur is a Brazilian artist who has always loved drawing. He lives in a small town in Minas Gerais, but that's never stopped him from dreaming big. He's worked on comics, illustrated books, brand mascots, and games as a concept artist. He aspires to work as a character designer for animation. The biggest inspirations for his work are Carter Goodrich and Nico Marlet.
arthurrandolpho.com

3 MAKE IT YOURS

Even if you maintain the most recognisable and striking characteristics of the character you're going to represent, it's always interesting to bring something new to your fan art so it's not just a representation of something that already exists. Your unique selling point could be a different drawing style, a different context, a mix between two characters. The possibilities are definitely endless, so let your creativity work. In the case of the Penguin, I thought of him as an animated character, so I used simple shapes in the character's construction and a striking silhouette. I tried to make something that strongly resembled the penguin itself, because this would help to easily recognise him on screen among other characters.

The unique aspect in this case is the stylisation that I used on the character - the shapes and colours I used, the characteristics I exaggerated, everything counts. In addition, I thought of bringing something new and funny, such as his penguin henchmen with strong personalities, which further enriches the character's universe. Also, the scenes I depicted from different angles, expressions, and occasions invite you to imagine how the character would act on screen.



“The unique aspect in this case is the stylisation I used on the character”

4 IDENTIFY KEY ELEMENTS

Whenever I start a piece of fan art, I like to understand the character as completely as possible, whether by consuming works in which they appear, doing research, understanding their personality, most striking characteristics, other interpretations of the character, and so on. It's a first step that requires a lot of attention because it will make it easier to think about the character when you start sketching and making decisions regarding their design. No matter how crazy or alternative your idea for a character's fan art might be, it's important to have these points well-founded so that when you represent them, other people can recognise who the character you wanted to illustrate is. In the case of this Penguin fan art, even before I started drawing, I already had in mind that it couldn't be without classy clothes, preferably a suit or overcoat; an umbrella weapon, as it's super-iconic; a nice pointed nose; and obviously a roguish face - he'll definitely try to trick you.





Artist **PROFILE**

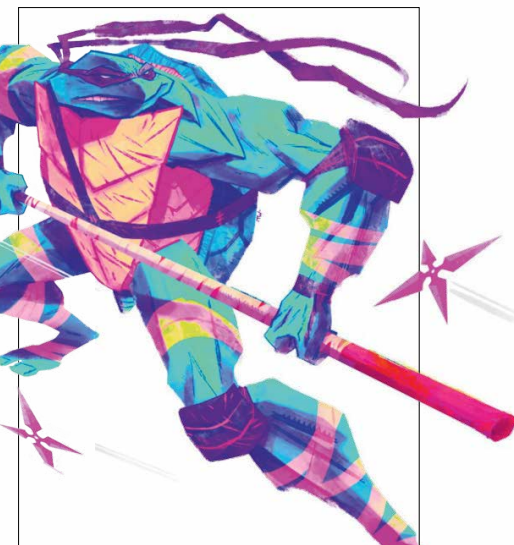
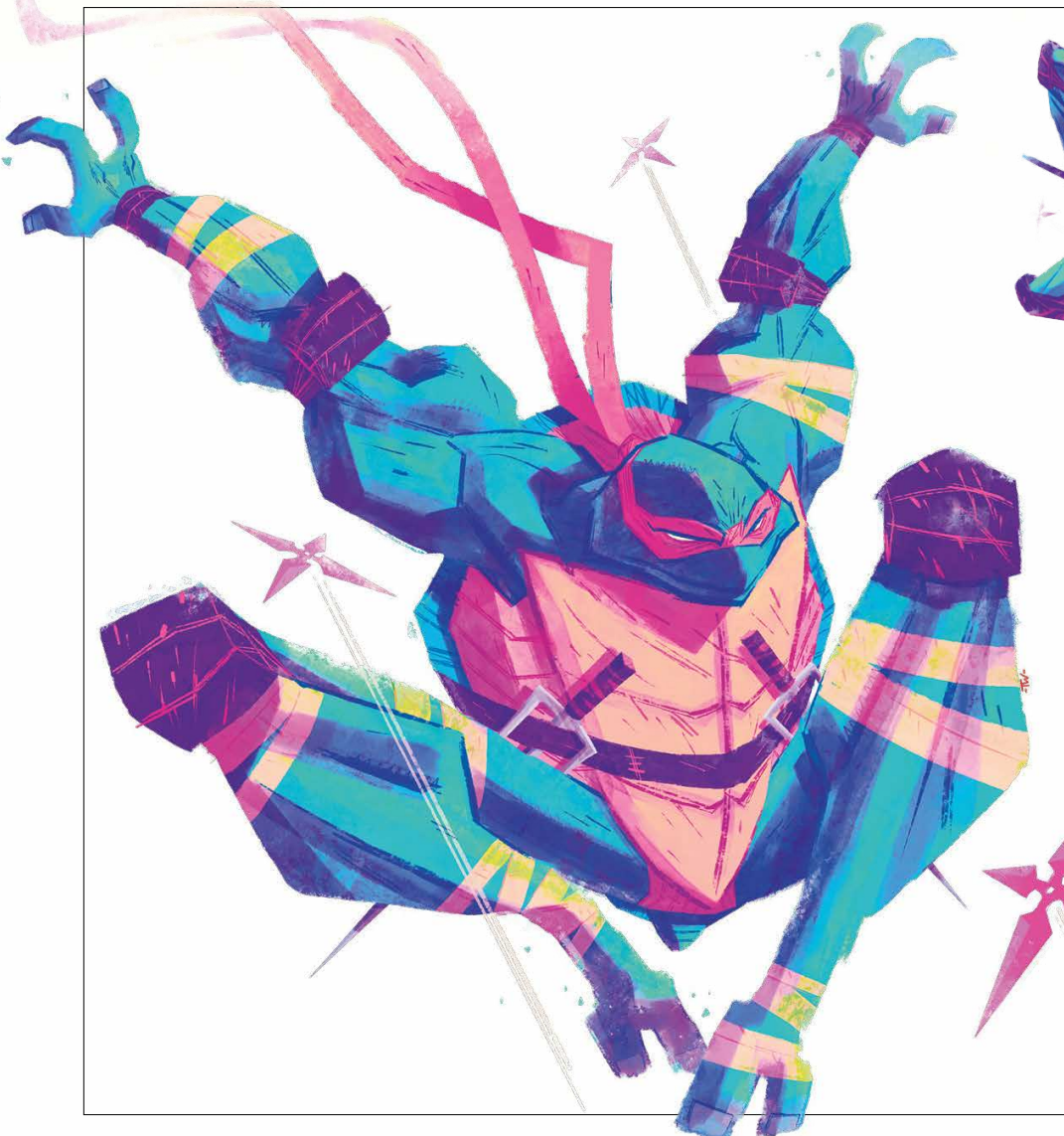
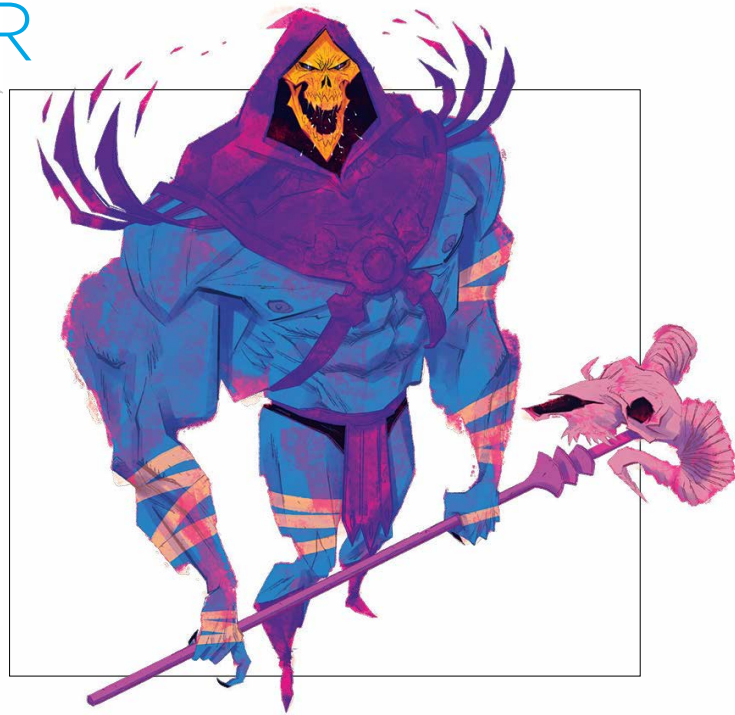
Tigh Walker
LOCATION: Canada

Tigh is a Toronto-based art director, character designer, comic book artist, and Gilmore Girls enthusiast who eats more grilled cheese than any person should. But don't worry, it's not, like, a ridiculously insane amount of grilled cheese... it's just slightly more than your average well-balanced adult. <https://bit.ly/404NuUB>

TIGH WALKER

5 KEEP THE ESSENCE

I think something to keep in mind is that no matter how much you alter an original design by adding your own flavour to it, the character's essence should still shine through. Whoever's looking at it should, ideally, be able to instantly recognise what character they're looking at, despite any alterations or stylistic adjustments you've added into the mix. Skeletor's shoulder bits don't curl up and break away how I drew them, he doesn't have fangs, he doesn't usually have any bandages on his arms and legs, and he doesn't normally have nipples (don't get me started...), but hopefully you still register that it's Skeletor at first glance, despite the nipples.



6 HAVE SOME FUN

For fan art in particular, I think the biggest thing to remember is that you're a fan of whatever you're working on. You're taking the time to work on someone else's character because you love it so much that you can't not... so don't forget to be a fan and have fun with it. Push the design, pull the design, inject your style into it as much as you can without breaking it. But, really, just have some fun along the way. I can't not love the Ninja Turtles, like, I just can't... and I hope that when you look at Raphael, you're seeing a small reflection of how they made me feel when I was a kid. Hopefully, that love shows. ➡➡

IBRAHEM SWAID

Artist PROFILE

Ibrahim Swaid

LOCATION: United Arab Emirates

Ibrahim, known professionally as Noobovich, is a UAE-based illustrator and concept artist with over 10 years of experience in the entertainment industry. His work spans across comics, games, and publishing, collaborating with leading studios such as DC Comics, Capcom, Tencent, IDW, Nacon Games, and many more. <https://bit.ly/4OfdBII>

7 STUDY THE SOURCE MATERIAL FOR ACCURACY

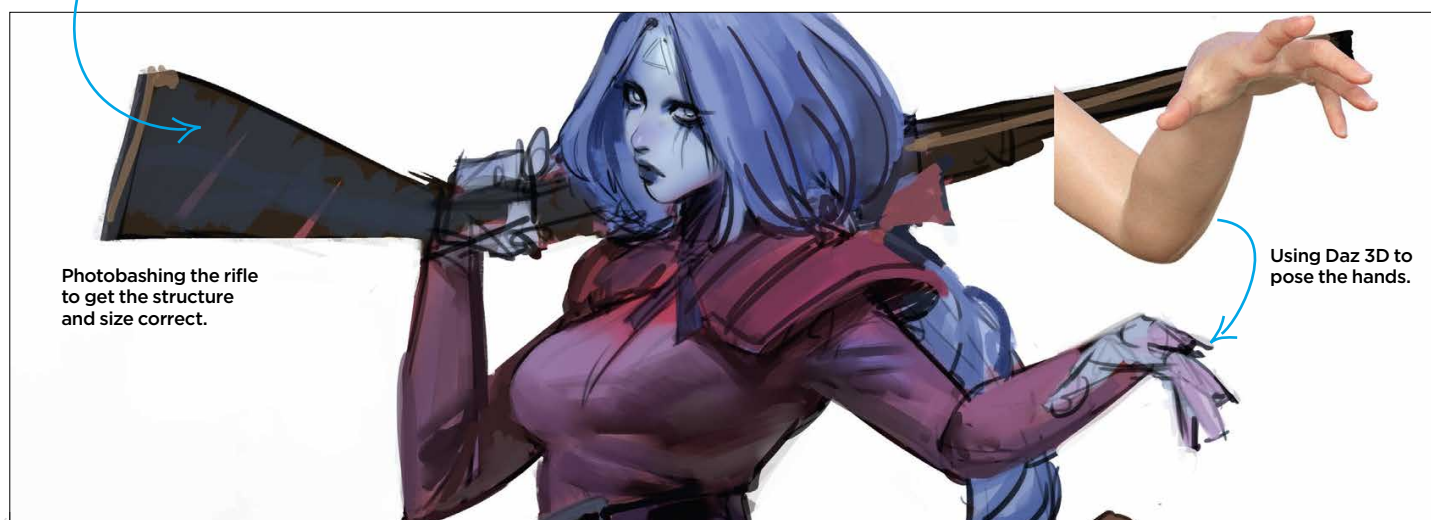
Valve is always at the peak of character design, and when the game Deadlock was announced, I immediately connected with the cast. I chose to create a quick fan art of Vindicta, focusing on understanding her visual language before drawing. Since I didn't have access to the game at the time, I relied on screenshots and YouTube footage to study the character from multiple angles. Every small detail contributes to her story, so observation became a key part of the process. The goal wasn't to draw a random girl in cosplay, but to capture the essence of the character faithfully.



“ Every small detail contributes to her story, so observation became a key part of the process ”



Alamy/INTERFOTO

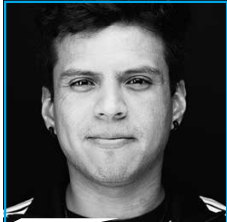


8 FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS

I planned this as a quick piece completed during a single livestream, so once the basic rendering was in place, I merged everything onto one layer over a white background and continued painting. It's risky, but it feels more like sculpting and keeps the process spontaneous. Since portraits are what I enjoy most, I invested most of my time

refining the face first. For efficiency, I used Daz 3D to pose the character and photobashed hands, fabric textures, and parts of the rifle before painting over them to unify the look. From there, I kept refining the piece until everything felt cohesive. I was told later on that this artwork made some of my friends start playing the game, so I guess its mission accomplished.

JUAN DIEGO LEON

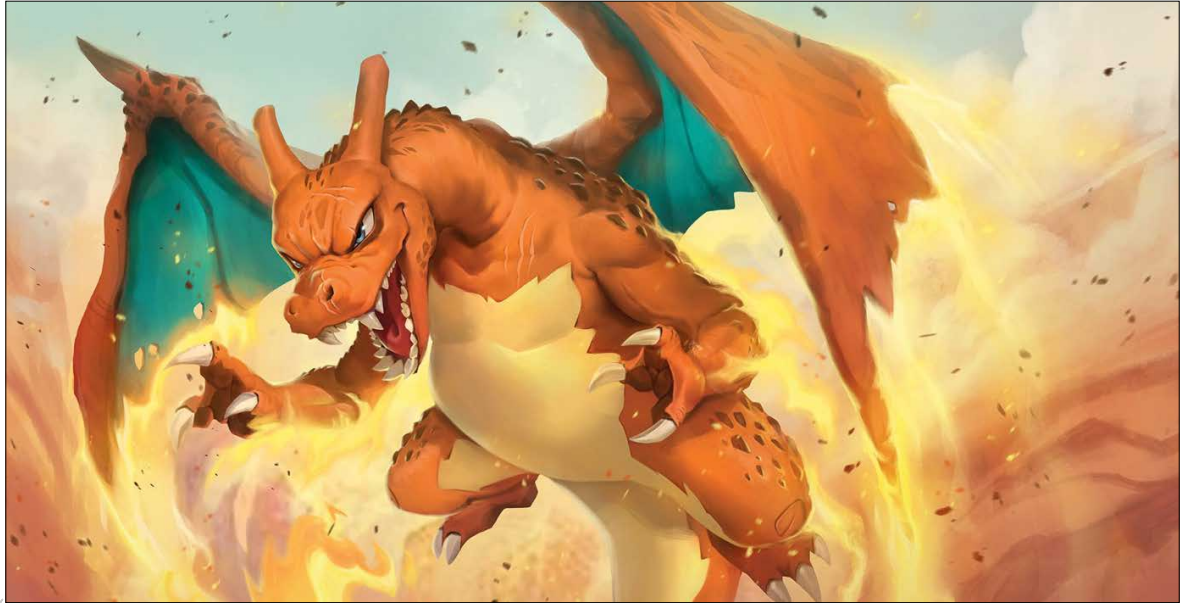


Artist
PROFILE

Juan Diego Leon

LOCATION: Peru

Juan is a Peruvian art director and concept artist with over 10 years of experience. Throughout his career, he has contributed to various animation and video game projects. He currently works as an artist at Disney Lorcana, Disney's collectible trading card game. <https://bit.ly/4aZ7Swi>



9 HIGHLIGHT DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

Always aim for a silhouette that clearly highlights your character's most iconic features and remains readable even in solid black. In this piece, I emphasised Charizard's wings, fangs, and intense gaze, building a dynamic pose with strong action lines to convey aggression and power.

A solid silhouette not only defines the form, but ensures immediate visual clarity and communicates attitude. Compositionally, I simplified the background to create a clear visual hierarchy and avoid distractions. Adding flames around the body enhances movement, contrast, and reinforces the impact of its powerful fire attacks.



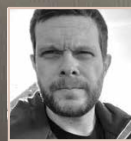
10 TRY TIGHTER FRAMING

Another important tip is not feeling obligated to draw your character in full body all the time. While wide action poses can be powerful, working with a tighter framing allows you to explore textures, lighting, and effects in greater depth. In the case of Spawn, I focused on the texture of his skin, the weight of his cape, the shine of the chains, and the energy of the magical fire he emits. This approach enhanced his facial expression and, using the rule of thirds, helped create a more intimate, intense, and mysterious composition.

Technique focus

LET THE STORY GUIDE YOU

Concept artist **Greg Danton** reveals how putting the story first can help inspire your artwork



"This picture is from a personal project I've been working on. I always try to start my work with a thumbnail and an idea of a story. After my initial thumbnail exploration, I created the assets and focused on the Orc king in ZBrush. I tried to keep the 3D somewhat loose to keep things moving quickly and to stop myself from getting too bogged down with texture detail or topology concerns. I find it's easy to get lost in the technical aspects in 3D. Having a strong focal point and a compelling story hook helps me to concentrate on what's important and what to get rid of. These details will ultimately guide the attention of the viewer." ●





How I create...

FANTASY BUILT FROM A STORY



1 Play with composition

Block out assets in 3D based on a rough thumbnail. Starting with a thumbnail helps plan out what you're going to build. Try to be loose with the camera to find something interesting with the characters and shapes. Keep a focal point in mind and a sense of story to help make composition decisions.



2 Block in lighting

Once you've established composition and a focal point, move on to materials and block in some rough lighting. Try to give the lighting something interesting to catch in order to grab attention or enhance a focal point. Keeping the materials flat lets you paint details where you want the viewer to look. High-resolution textures can make matching that fidelity unnecessarily difficult.



3 Picture the scene in context

It's time to layer in the atmosphere and separate the characters in Photoshop. Adjust contrast levels so that the focal point and the story are highlighted. Try to imagine a frame before and a frame after to help you think of where this scene may be leading. If you don't think of it, the viewer won't see it either.

Artist PROFILE

Greg Danton
LOCATION: Canada

Greg is a freelance concept artist whose clients include Microsoft and Blizzard. He is also a teacher at New3dge.
<https://bit.ly/4aUWVfa>

Photoshop & Blender

ORCHESTRATE A PAINTING WITH BLENDER

Thomas Osbourne reveals his approach to concept art, highlighting Blender as a tool for professional production.

Artist PROFILE

Thomas Osbourne

LOCATION: England

Thomas works as a Concept Artist at Atomhawk Design. He grounds his creative vision in observation, curiosity and a deep interest in the world around him.

www.artstation.com/thomasosbourneart



'The Vault' as a project spawned from a struggle I was having, which I think many professional artists face. Working as a concept artist in a studio, I couldn't count the number of times I have thought to myself, 'wait, I want to do that,' when I see one of my colleagues doing something cool and new (especially in Blender), only to then

go home and feel massively overwhelmed by the unnecessary need to create a whole world around this new drive.

Naturally, everything falls apart at the moodboarding stage, and the idea dies inside a folder on my PC, never to be opened again.

This is where 'The Vault' comes in. I committed myself to building a world, and every time a wave of inspiration washed over me, I

already had a world waiting at home that I felt confident with.

That thinking spawned this image: a culmination of many spur-of-the-moment interests I had, merged into one key image.

The story for this project is that there is an underground facility acting as the barrier between the real world and the creatures residing in the depths of Earth, and this piece is a look into the control room of it all.



MOODY FUTURISTIC ART

Include minor details

Part of the story is that the entire facility lies hidden underground within an old mine. When a piece contains many narrative elements, choosing what to show can be difficult, but even small visual details can be enough to communicate the story enough, like here with the nets over the rockface.

Stand out

In a concept piece, I am trying to find contrast in everything: In colour, in value and in shape. But also more subtly, like having the uniform of this character be clearly superior to everyone else in the scene. By doing this, you pay more attention to him, and where he is going and what he is doing. There are hierarchies in everything in art.

Use existing assets

I did a lot of work making a tileable kitbash set for this project, and I use the assets all over this piece. Being able to 'drag and drop' assets you know are approved designs allows you to focus on being more creative at this final stage.

Do a 'clown pass'

Whenever I am working from a 3D base, I always render out a 'clown pass'. I have to make a lot of selections to be able to paint over atmospheric effects, and this brightly coloured flat pass allows me to easily select objects with the magic wand tool in Photoshop.

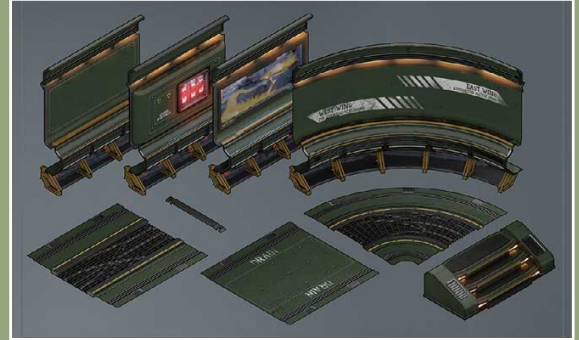


Keep design consistent

This rotating terminal was the first prop I designed in this project and was the driving factor for a lot of the design languages in the world. I did an animated concept of this too, which industry clients can find very useful.

How I create...

A CONCEALED CONTROL ROOM



1 Building your assets

Before creating a final image, I prefer to design all elements separately in advance. This clarifies how forms will look and allows thumbnails to closely reflect the finished image, which I find that clients increasingly value. This approach also mirrors industry workflows, where pre-approved designs need to be respected.



2 Thumbnailing

Once the scene is built, I render several greyscale angles. Using the compositor to establish strong values, I do a rough paintover of three to five options, and add any annotations I need. This stage is ideal for gathering feedback from colleagues and friends. I prioritise camera angles a human could realistically photograph, helping the viewer feel like they are within the scene.



3 Final paintover

Here, I am doing a once-over of the image and painting out any artefacts left over from the Blender scene. This could be anything from geometry that needs cleaning up, to adding reflections and highlights. I then go on to apply the same atmospheric effects and value adjustments as I did in the thumbnail stage.



Respect the boundaries

It was important to clearly separate the environments inside and outside the room using the thick glass barrier. I achieved this by adding scratches to the glass, and emphasising interaction with the barrier with a window cleaner, which helped reinforce the contrast between the two spaces.



RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: DYNAMIC RAKE



This brush I used for the streaks of water on the window, as it gives a nice pattern you can cut into with an eraser.

CLOUDS



This brush I always use for fog. I tend to find it works much better when erased into with a big soft round brush so you can art direct the fog shapes yourself.



GET YOUR RESOURCES

See page 5 now!



Technique focus

PUSH BOUNDARIES

Artist PROFILE

Xingkong
LOCATION: China

Xingkong works in game development and has contributed to titles such as Tencent's Honor of Kings and Monster Hunter Now. The most important aspects of an image for him are story and composition. <https://bit.ly/3OgOPVH>

Game artist **Xingkong** believes that pushing your art further at every stage achieves the best result



"My creative process usually begins with an image that flashes in my mind, often inspired by a scene from a movie or a game that I find particularly striking. To bring this piece to life, I first used Unreal Engine 5 to build the scene. I arranged the bamboo forest to form a pathway and placed a procession of riders at specific directions and

intervals. I then experimented with composition and lighting within UE5, adjusting until I found the most compelling setup. Once the foundation was set, I moved the scene into Photoshop for refinement. There, I boldly modify lighting and other details to enhance the overall atmosphere. My approach is to keep pushing creative boundaries at every stage. If the image doesn't feel right, I keep refining it until it does."

How I create... RIDERS IN A DARK FOREST





1 Establish key words

Select a few key words, such as bamboo forest, horse-riding warriors, and flower field. I believe these words can form an interesting scene. Then use 3D assets to build the general effect. This first step is mainly about determining the composition relationship. It's the foundation of the scene and determines its characteristics.



2 Light and composition

Next, design the lighting for the scene. I don't want an ordinary bamboo forest, so I changed the original lighting to create an effect where the plants on the ground are the main light source. When the flower field shimmers at night, and a group of warriors ride by with their horses' bellies illuminated, it seems as if time has stood still.



3 Focus on details

The third step is to add some falling bamboo leaves to create a dynamic feeling. The light reflector at the bottom of the bamboo pole and leaves unifies the light, while the soldiers also undergo some detail processing. The spatial relationship, hierarchy, and simple outline of the picture all help to make the details rich.

Photoshop

LEARN MATTE PAINTING STRUCTURE

Concept artist **Killian Prevost** on how to build matte paintings, from composition to colour

Artist PROFILE

Killian Prevost
LOCATION: France

Killian Prevost is a French concept artist with eight years of experience in video games and animation. He specializes in environment design, focusing on atmosphere, storytelling, and painterly techniques to create immersive worlds built on strong composition and light.

<https://bit.ly/4aZGr5C>



"In this workshop, I will walk through a complete matte painting workflow focused on structure,

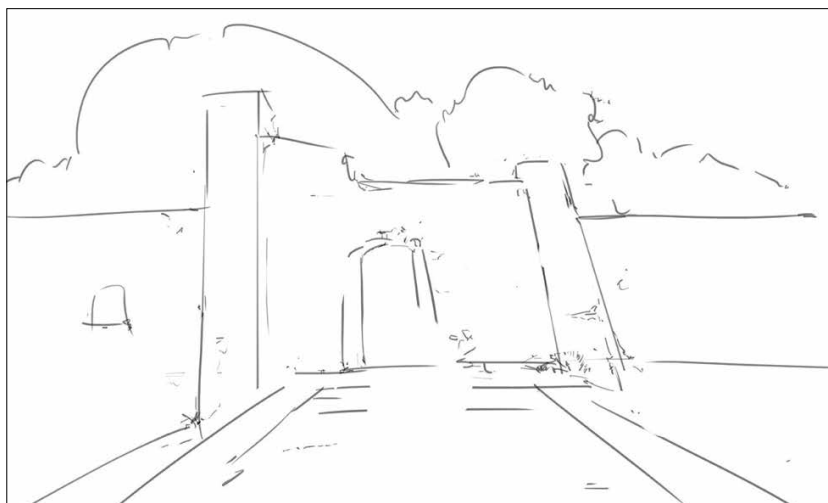
clarity and mood, rather than software tricks. The goal is to show how a strong image can be built step by step, starting with simple decisions and gradually adding complexity. We begin with composition, perspective and readable shapes, because these foundations determine whether an image works before detail is added.

"A key concept to keep in mind is working from general to specific. Early stages are about values, light direction and focal hierarchy, not textures. By keeping things loose at first, you stay flexible and avoid committing to ideas too early. Another important idea is separation: clearly distinguishing

foreground, midground and background through contrast, edges and atmospheric depth.

"As the painting develops, colour and materials are introduced to support the lighting and narrative, not to decorate the image. Every brushstroke should serve readability, scale or mood. Flipping the canvas, checking silhouettes and simplifying regularly are essential habits to maintain balance.

"This process is designed to be adaptable. Whether you are creating a cinematic environment, game concept or personal illustration, the same principles apply. By the end of the workshop, you will understand how to structure a matte painting efficiently, make confident artistic choices and push an image to a polished, professional result without losing control along the way in a production context."

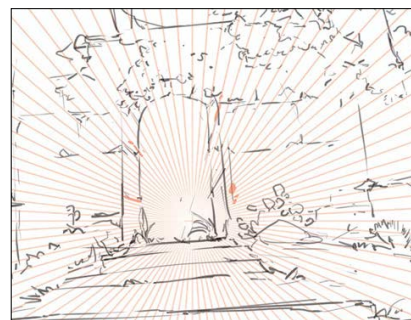
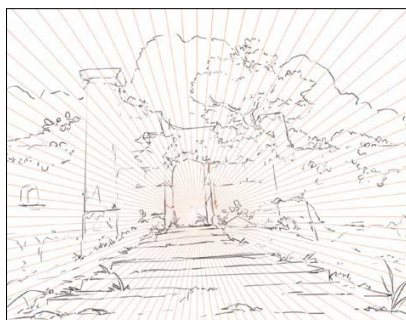


1 Rough layout

I begin with a very loose sketch to establish the main composition and camera angle. At this stage, the focus is on large shapes, perspective, direction and overall balance, rather than accuracy. Keeping the drawing simple allows me to explore ideas quickly and adjust proportions without hesitation. This rough layout defines the visual path and focal point of the image.

2 Clean sketch

Once the composition feels solid, I refine the sketch with clearer lines and more defined shapes. I clean up the architecture, foreground steps and main silhouettes while avoiding unnecessary detail. This pass is about clarity and structure, ensuring every element reads well. A clean sketch makes the next stages faster and more controlled.

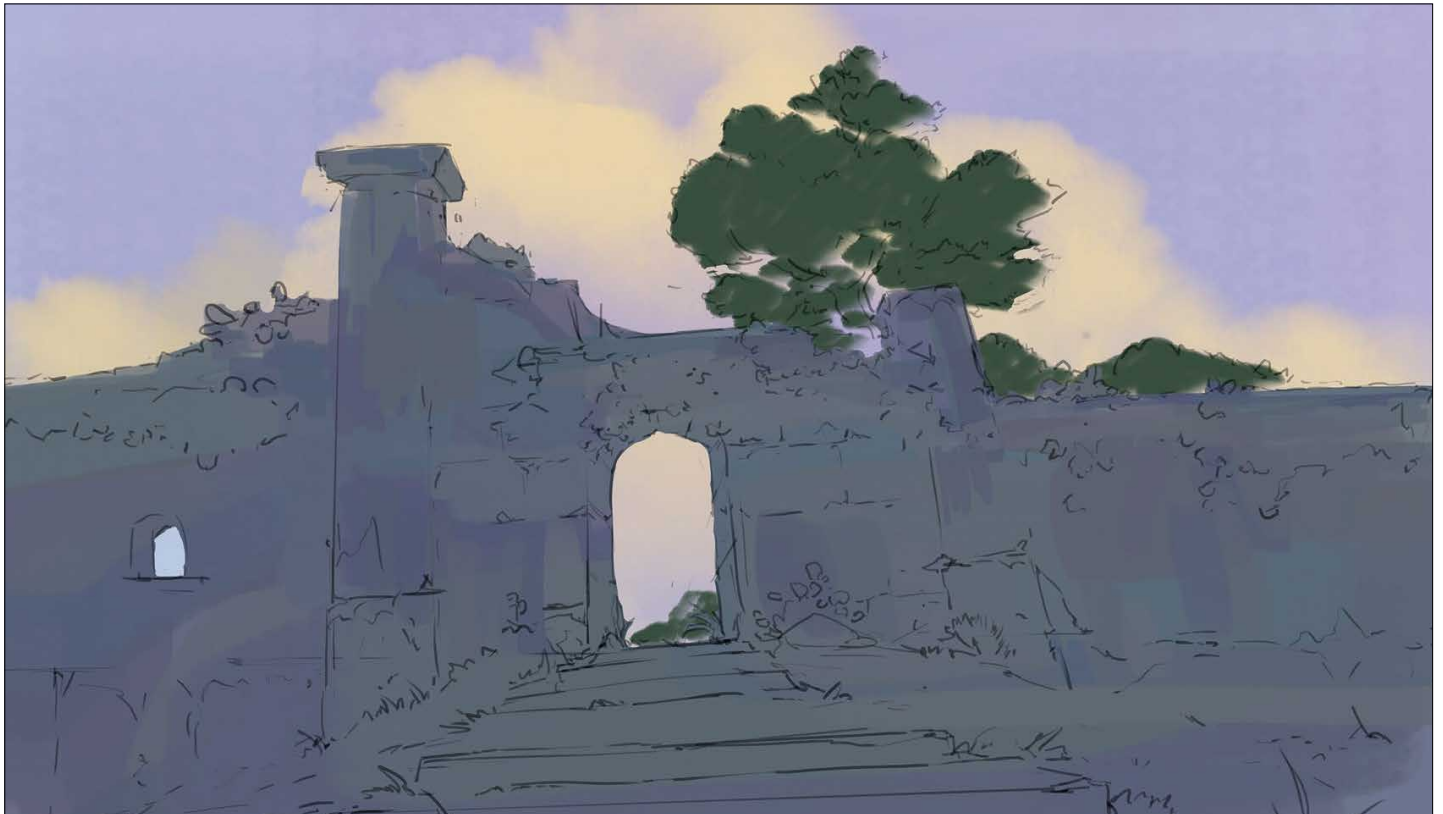


3 Perspective check
Before painting, I verify the perspective using simple guides. I align major architectural elements and ground planes to a consistent vanishing point, correcting any distortions from the sketch phase. This step helps anchor the scene in believable space and prevents perspective issues from appearing later. Strong perspective reinforces depth and scale throughout the image. ➤➤



4 Value block-in

I block in the main values using broad brushes, focusing only on light and shadow relationships. The goal is to define depth, lighting direction and contrast without using colour. Working in greyscale helps me to judge readability and hierarchy early on. If the image works at this stage, it will remain strong once colour and detail have been introduced.



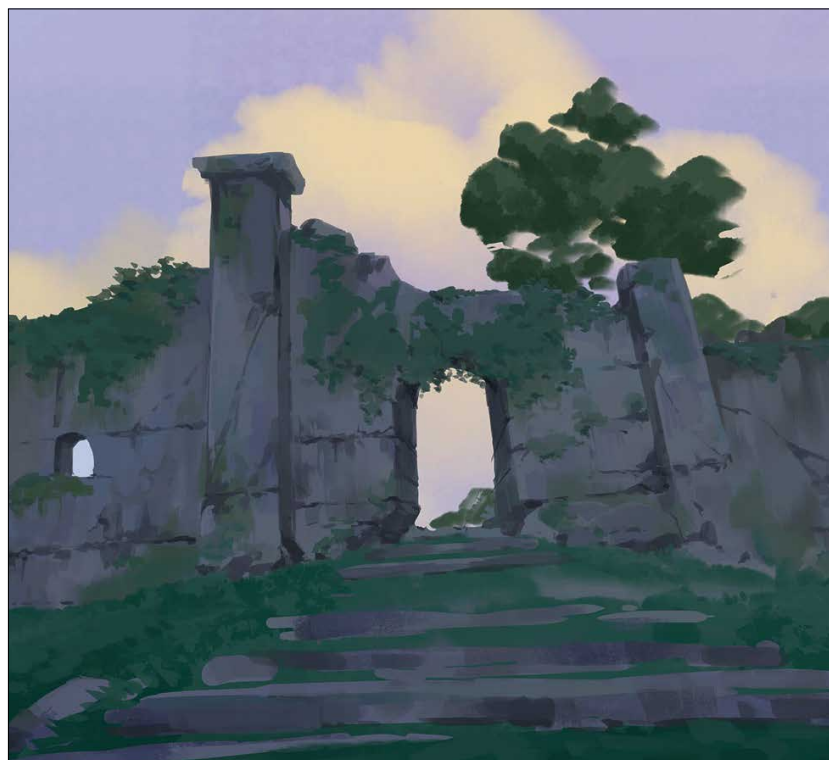
5 Lighting focus

With the values in place, I refine the lighting to emphasise the focal point. I push contrast around the archway and soften less important areas. This step is about guiding the viewer's eye through light. A clear light structure ensures the image stays readable as complexity increases.



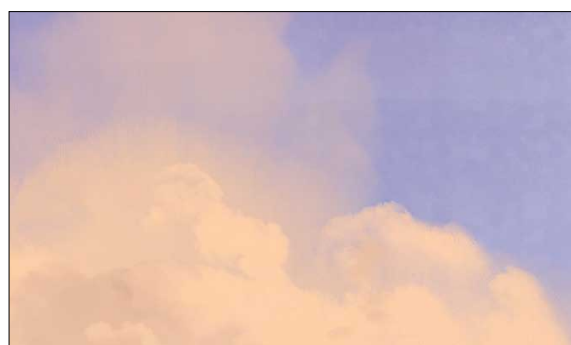
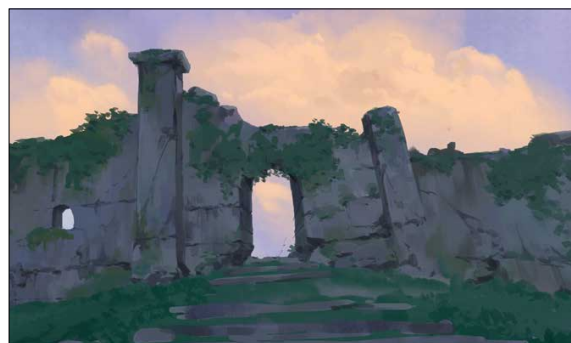
6 First colour pass

I introduce a limited colour palette on top of the value structure. At this stage, colours remain muted and simple, mainly supporting the existing lighting. I avoid saturation and detail, using colour only when it comes to separating materials and planes. This approach keeps the image cohesive and prevents colour choices from overpowering the composition.



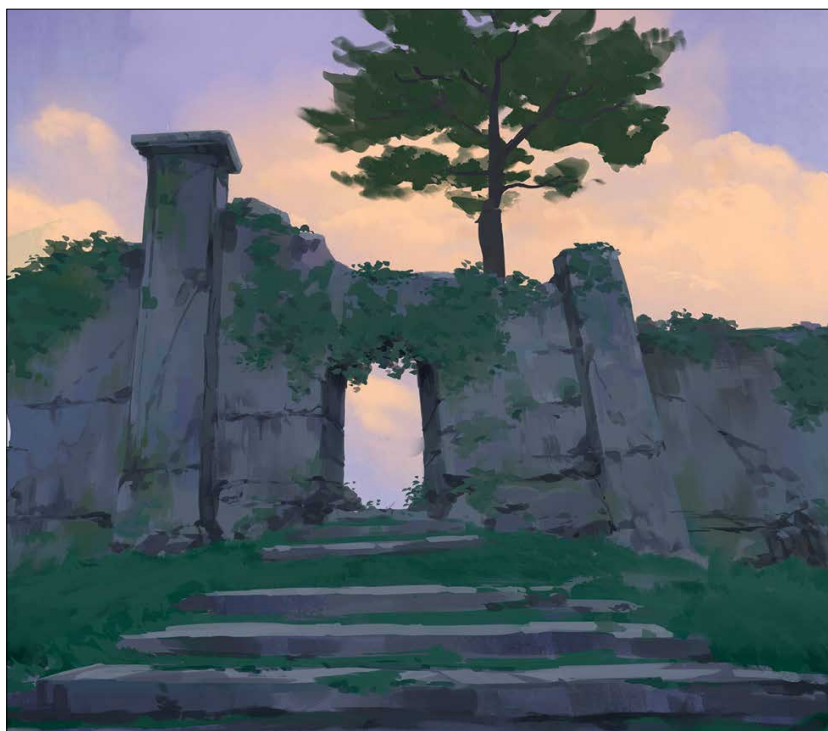
7 Colour refinement

I gradually refine colour relationships, adjusting temperature between light and shadow areas. Warm light contrasts with cooler shadows to enhance depth and atmosphere. I also define vegetation and stone tones more clearly. This brings the scene closer to its final mood while maintaining control over the balance.



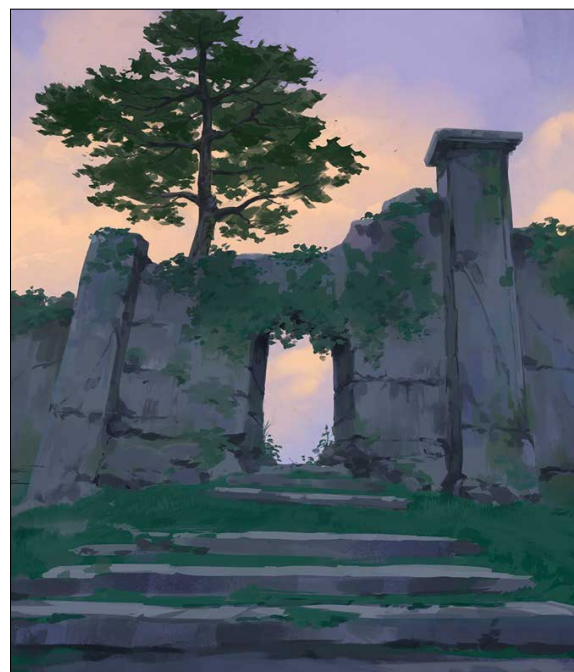
8 Sky and atmosphere

I focus on the sky and background atmosphere to set the emotional tone. Soft gradients and cloud shapes help frame the architecture and support the lighting direction. Atmospheric depth is reinforced by lowering contrast in distant areas. A well-handled sky adds scale and enhances the cinematic feeling of the scene. ➤➤



9 Structural details

At this stage, I add secondary details to the architecture and terrain. I suggest cracks, stone variation and foliage growth without over-rendering. Details are placed selectively, mainly around the focal areas. This keeps the image readable and avoids visual noise while still conveying age, scale and material richness.



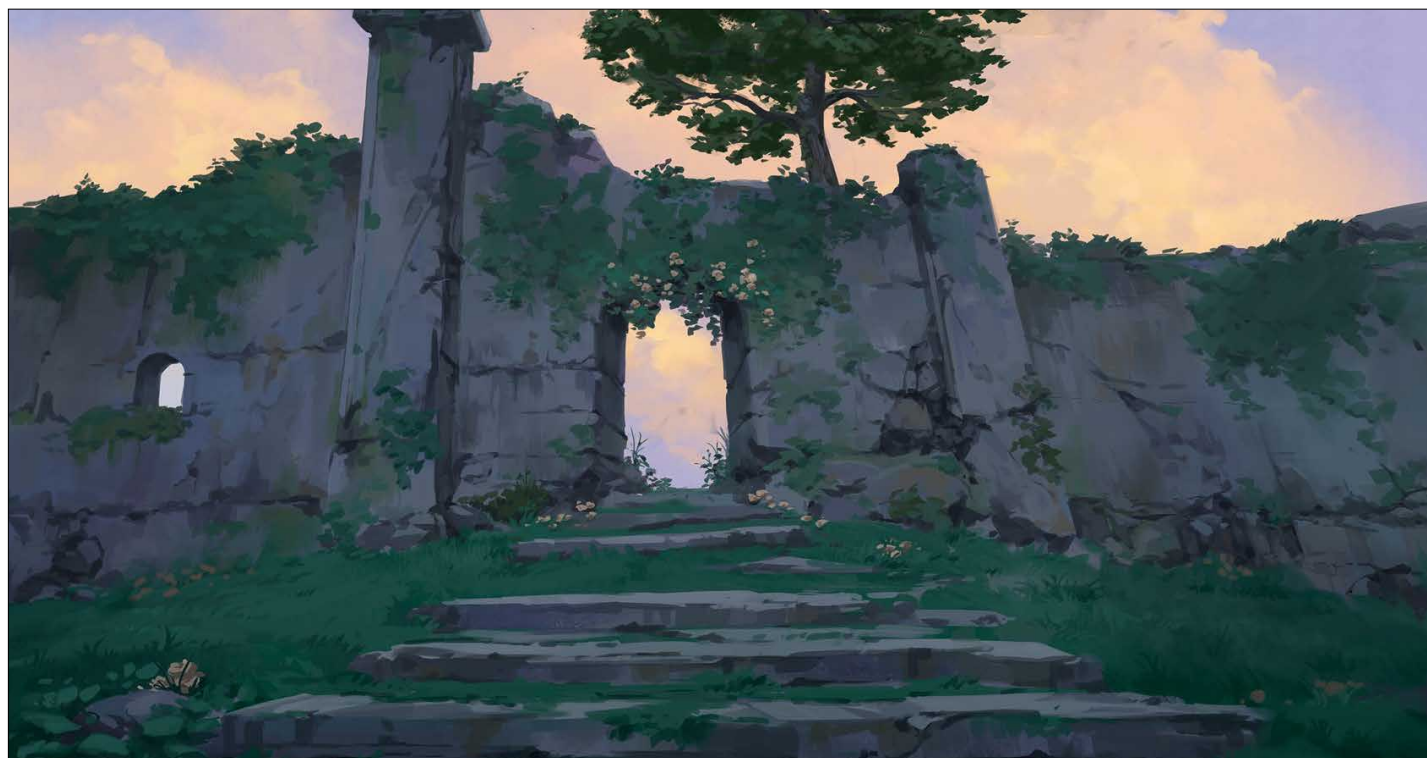
10 Major forms polish

I refine the largest forms, such as walls, steps and vegetation masses, ensuring clean shapes and consistent lighting. Edges are adjusted to separate planes more clearly, and values are subtly balanced across the image. This step prepares the painting for final detailing by locking in structure, depth and overall cohesion.



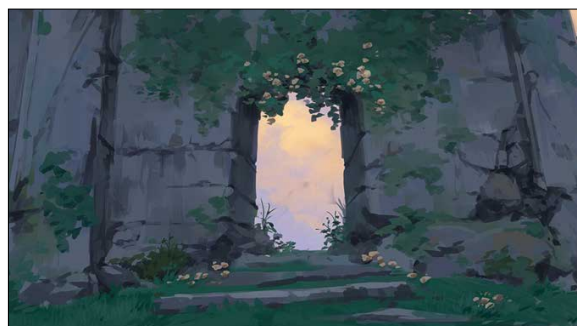
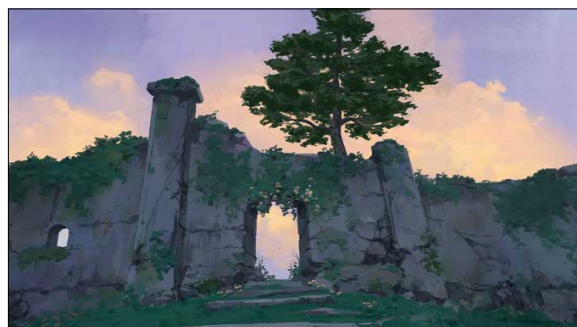
11 Vegetation pass

I focus on refining the vegetation to better integrate it with the architecture. By using varied shapes and values, I break repetition and suggest natural growth patterns along the walls and ground. The goal is to frame the focal point without overpowering it. Vegetation is treated as a mass first, with only selective accents added in order to suggest detail and depth.



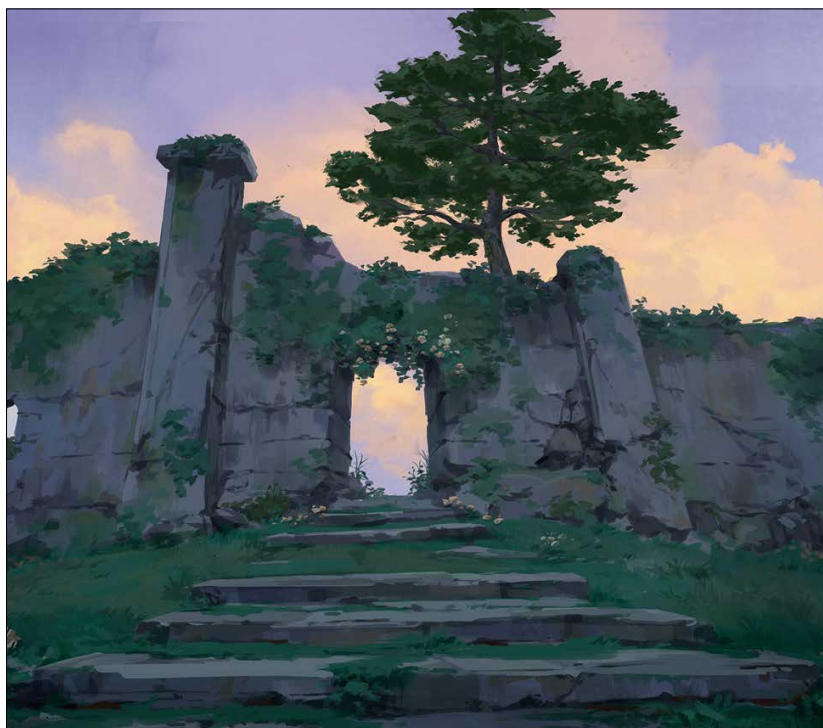
12 Colour balance

At this stage, I balance the overall colour harmony of the image. I adjust saturation and temperature to ensure that the environment feels cohesive and believable. Cooler shadows contrast with warmer light areas to reinforce depth and atmosphere. Small colour corrections help to unify materials and prevent any single area from standing out unintentionally.



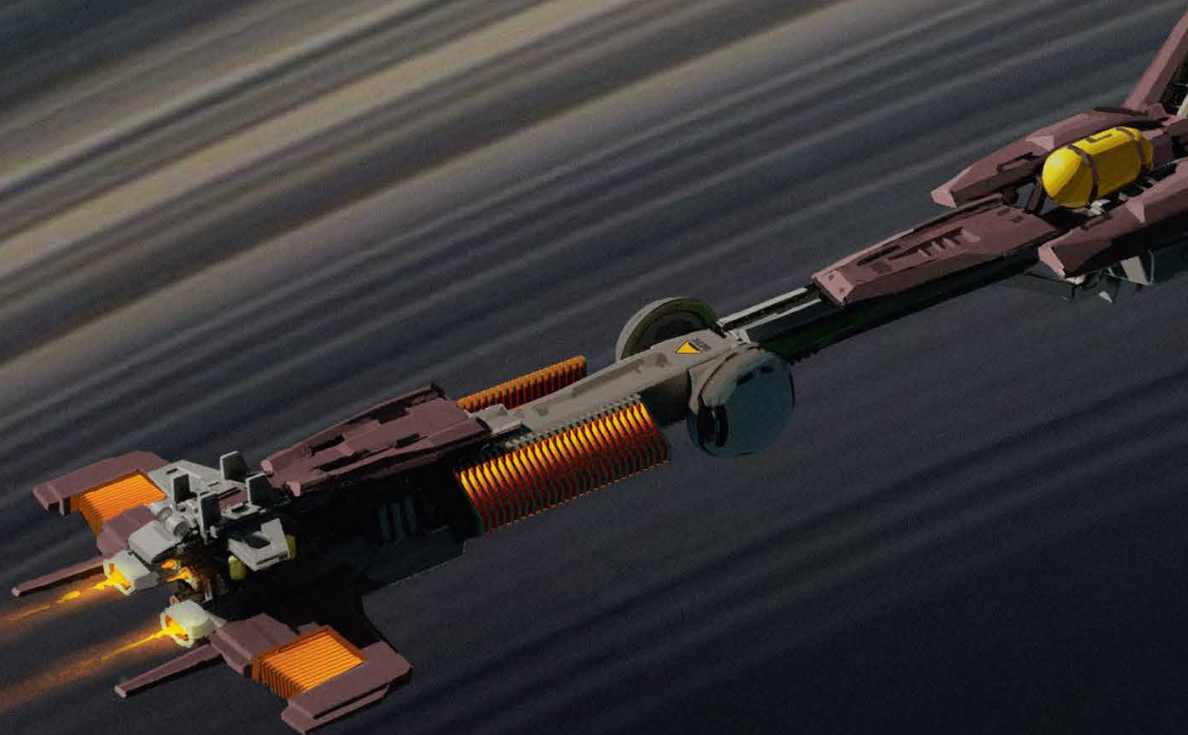
13 Final details

I add final accents and subtle details to enhance realism and mood. This includes small highlights, texture variation and selective edge sharpening around key areas. I avoid over-detailing by keeping most refinement near the focal point. These finishing touches bring clarity and polish while preserving the painterly quality of the image at the same time.



14 Final polish

For the final step, I review the image as a whole and make global adjustments. I also check values, edges and composition one last time, applying light colour grading if needed. Minor fixes ensure balance and readability across the frame. The image will then be ready for presentation, maintaining strong structure and a clean, professional finish. ●





Technique focus

CREATE STRONG CONTRASTS

Concept artist **Mark Zhang** explains how he contrasts spacecraft design against the cosmos

Artist PROFILE

Mark Zhang
LOCATION: China

Mark is a freelance concept designer who is passionate about science fiction projects, with experience in working with major video game studios.
<https://bit.ly/4qNyvsW>



"This is a key colour piece from a personal worldbuilding project of mine, featuring a large container ship. I've designed a series of cargo vessels in different classes, this being one of them. The illustration is based on a 3D render of a model built in Maya. I used parallel lighting with

subtle fill and rendered in Arnold, then brought everything into Photoshop for final touches. The goal in Photoshop was to contrast intricate mechanical design with a vast cosmic backdrop.

"I chose Saturn's rings for their extremely ordered patterns, creating a strong visual contrast with the ship's lengthy structure."

The Gallery

SHOWCASING THE FINEST
TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

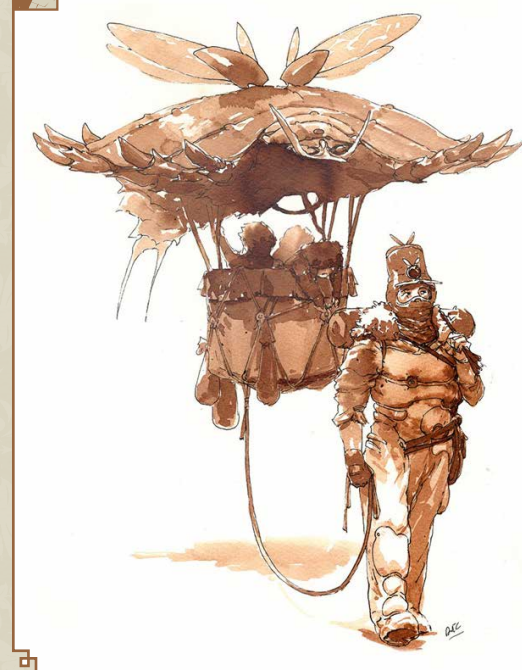
1



2



3



Ricardo Robles

LOCATION: Spain MEDIA: Oil, acrylic, charcoal, ink, watercolour WEB: www.artstation.com/ricardorobles

Ricardo is a seasoned concept artist and co-founder of Brainbug, a design studio. He fuels videogame and board game projects with visual direction, crafting striking environments, characters, and creatures.

1 COLEOPTERA RIG

"I imagined a world where insects and humans coexist in a kind of symbiosis. Orthoptera serve as transportation, while giant beetles are a labour force. At the same time, aggressive species pose a formidable threat in the outer wilderness."

2 THE CLAW CLAN

"Twisted, demonic beings inspired by Japanese folklore, though not intended to be historically accurate. I was influenced by '90s anime such as Patlabor and Ghost In The Shell, which have informed many aspects of my visual language."

3 SCHOOL BUS

"Here is another piece from the Bugworld series. I enjoy the process of portraying everyday scenes filled with mundane tasks and the presence of children, as they help me to reinforce the storytelling and add depth to the worldbuilding."

4 BELL ONI

"This is a kind of spirit or demon that is associated with the sound of zills. Once again, I draw from Asian folklore aesthetics, focusing on reinterpreting them in my own way in order to create something playful and intriguing."



鬼鐘





Roberto Gatto

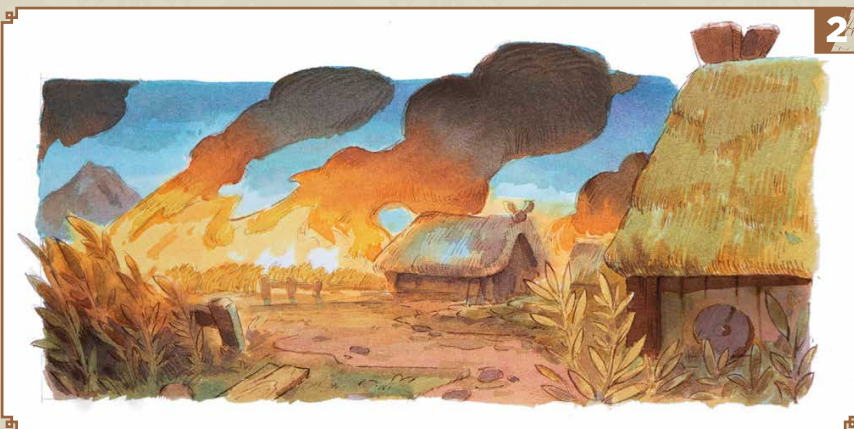
LOCATION: Italy **MEDIA:** Watercolours, acrylic, gouache, ink **WEB:** <https://studio.isshobi.com>

Roberto works in animation and is digitally trained, but has fallen in love with the feel of traditional mediums. His biggest influences are Hayao Miyazaki's watercolour sketches and themes of fantasy and nature.



1 SILVER KINGDOM OF ELDMIR
 "A look inside the Silver Kingdom of Eldmir from my RPG world Irydale. This is a place of wealth and peace, but it has a deep hatred for magic, as the kingdom was scarred in the Great Mage Wars."

2 FIELDS OF AURIEL
 "Here is a depiction of the place that Calienne runs into to save her knights. For this piece, I experimented with brush inking rather than manga nibs, and also used Ecoline watercolours."



3 PURPUREUS BEES
 "A really fun illustration out of my upcoming book Treasures Untold. These giant bees are very friendly and make for great fuzzy companions and pets. The combination of greens and blues here is something that I never tire of!"

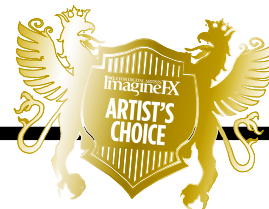
4 CALIENNE
 "This is an illustration of Calienne, the champion of the Rose Knights, from my Irydale world. I enjoyed contrasting her strength and beauty with this ominous, atmospheric lighting and background to create a striking image."





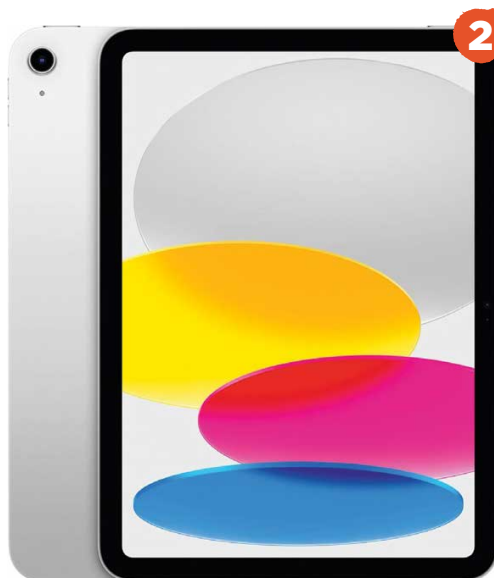
Do you want to see your art on these pages? Then email five pieces of your work and a short explanation about each artwork, along with a photo and a few details about yourself, to fxpose@imaginefx.com

Reviews



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

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



All images © Apple

The best iPad for Procreate

IPAD IDEALS Whether you're a beginner or a pro artist, here's how to choose the right iPad for you to get the most out of Procreate

THE BEST IPAD OVERALL

Apple iPad Air (M3, 2025)

Price From £599/\$599

Company Apple

Web www.apple.com

1 Though it doesn't quite match the raw power of the latest iPad Pro, which ranks third in this roundup, the iPad Air (M3, 2025) brings significant performance improvements with its M3 processor for fluid Procreate operation. Combined with its attractive pricing and stunning design, this model stands as the top selection for the majority of digital artists.

Pros ■ Enhanced performance with the M3 chip
■ Beautiful display ■ Supports Apple Pencil Pro
Cons ■ Not the most portable ■ Overkill for some

Rating ★★★★★

THE BEST IPAD FOR BEGINNERS

Apple iPad (11th Gen, 2025)

Price From £329/\$349

Company Apple

Web www.apple.com

2 Want something a bit cheaper than the first iPad on this list? The iPad (2025) is nicely affordable, and thanks to its new A16 chip, it runs Procreate more smoothly than previous iterations of the vanilla iPad. With a comfortably sized display, this iPad will suit anyone who doesn't mind using the older generation of Apple Pencil, as it's not compatible with newer ones.

Pros ■ Bright, colourful screen ■ A16 chip runs a range of apps well ■ Very affordable
Cons ■ No Pencil storage ■ Pencil 1 only

Rating ★★★★★☆

THE BEST IPAD FOR SHEER POWER

iPad Pro 13-inch (M5, 2025)

Price From £1,299/\$1,299

Company Apple

Web www.apple.com

3 If you want the absolute most powerful iPad available today, the M5 iPad Pro is it. Released in October 2025, it's one of the fastest performing tablets around. It's slim, well-built, and most relevant for drawing in Procreate, it has a bright OLED display with a fast refresh rate for seamless sketching using the Apple Pencil Pro.

Pros ■ The best screen on an iPad ■ Super-fast processor ■ Large storage options
Cons ■ The most expensive iPad ■ Much more than you need for Procreate

Rating ★★★★★





THE BEST COMPACT IPAD

Apple iPad mini (7th Gen, 2024)

Price £499/\$499

Company Apple

Web www.apple.com

5 This is the latest version of the iPad mini. It doesn't use Apple's M-series silicon, but it's equipped with an A17 Pro chip, which means Procreate runs very well indeed. It was put through the wringer with some big files and had no problems to speak of. It supports Apple's Pencil Pro for the premium drawing experience – the only question is whether the display is big enough for your needs.

Pros ■ Procreate runs super smoothly ■ Apple Pencil Pro support ■ Lightweight and portable
Cons ■ 8.3-inch canvas ■ Same design as 6th Gen

Rating ★★★★★☆

THE BEST IPAD FOR LIGHTNESS

Apple iPad Air (5th Gen, 2022)

Price Approx £299/\$299 (refurbished)

Company Apple

Web www.apple.com

4 If you're after the best thin and light iPad for Procreate, the 5th-generation iPad Air is excellent value. The M1 processor grants it very fast performance, and it's a pretty astounding creative computer. The iPad Air isn't the best option for those who want a tablet that they can also use for more demanding tasks, such as video editing, but for drawing, the M1 chip is plenty powerful.

Pros ■ Same processor as the iPad Pro ■ Stunning display
Cons ■ Quite close in price to the iPad Pro

Rating ★★★★★☆

THE BEST BUDGET IPAD

Apple iPad (10th Gen, 2022)

Price Approx £259/\$319 (refurbished)

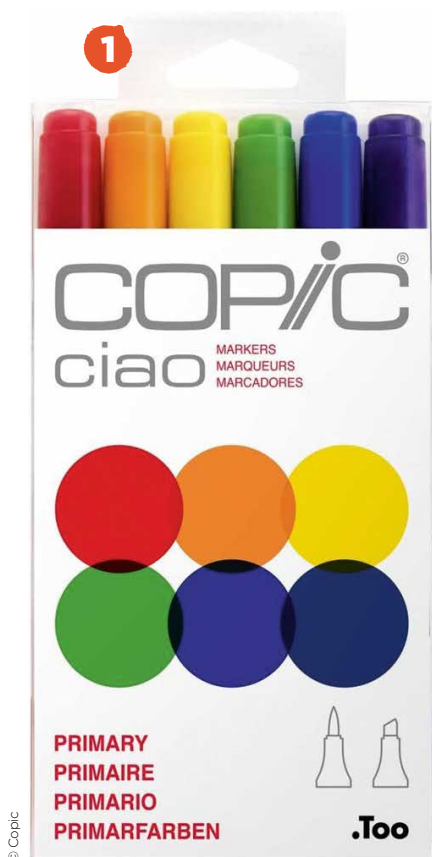
Company Apple

Web www.apple.com

6 The most recent generation of the iPad (2025) features at number two on this list; the iPad (2022) is even more affordable, and it will still work well for creating art in Procreate, too. It doesn't run Procreate quite as smoothly as later iPads, and you don't get quite as slick an experience, but it'll get the job done.

Pros ■ Bigger, brighter screen
 ■ Enough power for complex tasks
Cons ■ Needs Apple Pencil adapter
 ■ No Pencil storage

Rating ★★★★★☆



The best markers for artists

MAKE YOUR MARK Get the lowdown on some of the best markers on the market for drawing, colouring, and craft projects

THE BEST MARKERS OVERALL

Copic Ciao primary set

Price £32.99/\$32.94

Company Copic

Web <https://copic-shop.co.uk>

1 These reliably good markers won't let you down, delivering consistent, attractive colour across a range of surfaces. They'll last a lifetime, as you can replace the tips and refill the inks, and are versatile, with a super brush nib on one end and a medium broad nib on the other. This six-pack is a good starter set, which can be built on in future once you get the Copic bug – and there's no doubt you will.

Pros ■ Refillable ink ■ Dual tips ■ Long-lasting

Cons ■ An investment

Rating ★★★★★

THE BEST VALUE MARKERS

Ohuhu Kaala markers

Price From £16/\$19.99

Company Ohuhu

Web <https://uk.ohuhu.com>

2 The Ohuhu Kaala series consists of four sets. There's one for illustration, one for landscapes, one for skin tones, and basic tones to get you started. They're all a joy to work with. Coverage is clean, even, and dries quickly, and they were easy to hold and work with for long periods. Which set you choose will depend on what you're after, but you can't go wrong with the illustration set.

Pros ■ Fun colour ranges ■ Affordable price

■ Dual-tipped ■ Nice to hold

Cons ■ Non-refillable ■ Skin tones not that dark

Rating ★★★★★

BEST MARKERS FOR COLOURING

Winsor & Newton Promarker set

Price £70.66/\$135.29

Company Winsor & Newton

Web <https://uk.winsornewton.com>

3 Fantastically vibrant and brilliant for colouring, these alcohol-based markers have a dual tip, so you can use one end for fine details and another for filling in between the lines. They also blend nicely, and can be used on plastic, glass, and wood. Note that if you're using these on paper, they can bleed through unless you're using high-quality artist paper. There are various sets, but this set of 24 is perfect for getting you started.

Pros ■ Gorgeous hues ■ Dual tips

Cons ■ Bleeds through paper

Rating ★★★★★



BEST CHEAP MARKERS

Tongfushop 80 coloured markers

Price £13.53/approx \$18.35

Company Tongfushop

Web <https://tongfushop.store/en>

5 For those who want a lot of markers for as little money as possible, Tongfushop has an interesting offering. They're marketed for drawing manga in particular, and have a dual tip – one for fine drawing and another for colouring and shading. These markers also come in a handy bag for storage. Just be wary that these won't last as long as the more expensive markers listed here, and some may be prone to drying out.

Pros ■ Cheaper than Copic ■ Comes with a case

Cons ■ May dry out

Rating ★★★★★☆

BEST ACRYLIC MARKERS

Ohuhu Nahuku acrylic markers

Price From £24/\$24.99

Company Ohuhu

Web <https://uk.ohuhu.com>

5 Acrylic markers can draw on a variety of surfaces, so if you want versatility, these are the markers for you. Ohuhu sells this as a set of 24 or 48 markers, which means a range of colours. Simply shake them to get started and draw on your chosen surface. They glide on nicely, though they are not as good for colouring in on paper as other models as they smudge fairly easily.

Pros ■ Nice colour range ■ Works on lots of surfaces ■ Easy-to-carry pack

Cons ■ Can smudge

Rating ★★★★★☆

BEST BIG SET OF MARKERS

Ohuhu Honolulu markers

Price £193/\$249.99

Company Ohuhu

Web <https://uk.ohuhu.com>

6 This huge set features dual-tipped markers, with one end for brush work and another for broader strokes. This set comes with a whopping 320 different colours, with a carrying case and colour chart included. It's a great set to use, but the only gripe is that they're non-refillable, so they won't last forever. But with 320 pens, there's enough to keep you busy for a while.

Pros ■ Even, clean lines ■ Fantastic colour selection ■ Comes with a carry case

Cons ■ Blending not amazing ■ Non-refillable

Rating ★★★★★☆

LiberNovo Omni

COSTLY BUT EFFECTIVE On paper, the electric-powered, \$1,000 LiberNovo Omni reads like a marketing gimmick... but is it?

Price £1,248/\$1,000 **Company** LiberNovo **Web** <https://libernovo.com>

The LiberNovo Omni made a lot of noise in 2025 as one of the most funded office chairs on Kickstarter, with an advertised \$10,000,000 by 11,600 backers. We can see why.

The LiberNovo Omni is certainly a well-designed chair. Overall, there are probably enough round edges and clever material choices to soften this potentially industrial design into something that looks at home in a personal setting.

Clearly, a lot of thought has gone into the making of the LiberNovo Omni - from the incredibly plush materials used for the foam and coverings of the seat and back, to the multi-plated back support, it's undeniably well put together.

One big negative when it comes to the design is that it's a bit plastic fantastic (though there are metal components). That's something you probably shouldn't expect when spending \$1,000 on a chair.

The Omni does a lot right when it comes to comfort and ergonomics. Its arm rests are great. They move forward and backwards, up and down and left and right - the latter movement comes from the base of each arm. This last point is pretty unique in chairs, and absolutely brilliant, as sometimes you may want to adjust this range for extra room.



The controls are easy to access, just under the arm rest.

The seat material is super plush and soft. It's very comfortable and feels more luxury than the usual memory foam in chairs.

It would be reasonable to be sceptical of the electrical skeletal lumbar support at first, as it seems like a bit of a gimmick. However, the more it's used, the more it makes practical sense. The support simply moves up and down, and it feels both supportive and secure. Also, it's not a narrow point of contact like with some chairs. Your back will feel contact and support the width of your back. What could have been a gimmick is a useful feature that does a good job.

If you can afford it - in addition to the cost of new batteries when they die, for around \$70 a pop - and you want cutting-edge tech in your office chair, then there's not really a chair that can compete with the Omni.

Beren Neale

VERDICT

In the world of office chairs, it helps to have something on the spec sheet that makes your product stand out from the crowd, and the LiberNovo Omni certainly has that. It's battery-powered, and you control the shape of the lumbar support with buttons on the arm rest. However, this is actually an expensive distraction from an otherwise excellent chair.

Pros

- Soft, comfortable material
- Looks great
- Great arm rests

Cons

- Is the electrically powered lumbar support worth it?
- Only a two-year warranty

Rating



While not the best case design, the Languo markers are easy to identify on the fly.



Languo acrylic paint markers

BEST BUY? A budget set of quality markers is a rare but welcome find.

Price £29.99/\$39.99

Company Languo

Web <https://languoart.com>

RATING ★★★★★

Languo are a relatively small name in the art supplies market, but are making a lot of noise with some high-quality offerings, especially in when it comes to paint markers.

There are countless markers available out there, from alcohol and watercolour variants to inks and acrylics. With that in mind, we were curious as to how the Languo set would hold up against such diverse opposition.

Shipping in a clear plastic case, everything is well presented and protected, and there's a colour sheet you can fill in with the markers to see an accurate representation of each of the 60 markers. It's a nice touch, but in reality it's not needed, as the colour match on the base and cap of each pen is already spot on.

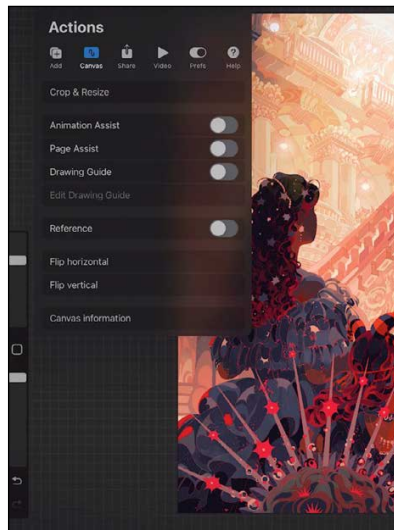
Coverage is strong and able to conceal mistakes, or work on dark materials, with just a single coat. The acrylics used make the markers smooth and thick, leaving a lovely matte finish, which we're big fans of. In the hand, the markers feel well balanced. They are nothing out of the ordinary, and comfortable enough, but the brushes are excellent, with a great feel. What's more, even after a lot of use, they hold their shape together well.

Rob Redman

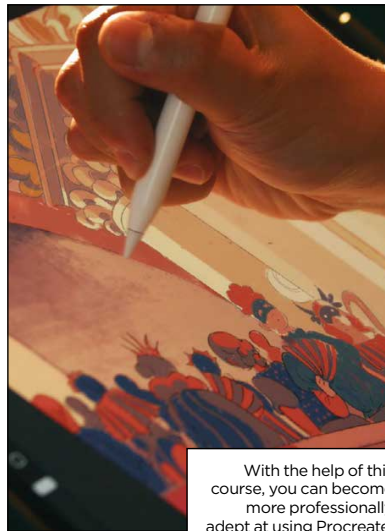
© LiberNovo



What could have been a rather industrial look is softened by good material choices.



The course expands on traditional workflow guides with real-life case studies.



With the help of this course, you can become more professionally adept at using Procreate.

Atmospheric Painting in Procreate: From Concept to Color

FIRST COURSE Learn to master utilising cinematic colour, mood and composition in Procreate with the guidance of Deborah Lee

Publisher Domestika **Price** £19.90/\$29.99 **Format** Online
Length 16 lessons (2h 40m) **Web** www.domestika.org

Deborah Lee is a US-based Korean illustrator who made the leap from professional illustrator with clients such as Google, Facebook, Lyft and LinkedIn to full-time freelance illustration in 2020. Her story is interesting, as she had a great career as a vector illustrator, but has since made the leap to 'stroke-based' art.

Lee's style is truly international, with flavours of art deco, classic and modern Japanese. Her influences segment of this course, if you can get it on discount, is a must for any graphic illustrator.

At just under three hours, the course moves efficiently without feeling rushed. Lee admits that Procreate is now her tool of choice over Photoshop, and you can see this in the way she lays out her files, as



The course focuses on learning by doing, and you get plenty of opportunities to do so.



Deborah Lee draws on years of experience to provide in-depth instructions on using Procreate.

sketches and finished work are all in there within Procreate stacks.

Lee brings her professional chops into her workflow by augmenting the standard 'this is my workflow' of many artists courses with snippets like, "Clients usually like to see three initial sketches". This also applies to detailing, where Lee is not afraid to show how she uses real-life references to detail within Procreate.

Lee's colour management sections are another great 101 in terms of colour theory, and due to how strong her work is, again this makes this course an easy investment. With an in-depth wrap-up on how to create a portfolio of 'product', Lee is an inspiration for artists looking for a shot in the arm of creativity with commercial potential. 🍷

Mike Griggs

VERDICT

While focused on Procreate, Lee's course shows a complete workflow from ideation to finished product or portfolio piece in a little under three hours. Lee is a relaxed teacher, making this a warm bath of a creative course – recommended!

Pros

- Led by a master pro artist with years of industry experience
- Covers business and portfolio guidance
- Available in six different languages
- Comes with colour theory resources

Cons

- This is exclusively iPad and Procreate in terms of workflow
- Does not delve into every element of Procreate

Rating



Brushing up...

We put three packs through their paces to find out whether they're worth downloading



Comic Inking Set

Artist Robert Marzullo

Software Procreate

Brushes 40 **Price** Free

Rating ★★★★★

An excellent free set of brushes from a working comic artist, with 40 brushes, including cross-hatching and inking tools. The video tutorial and sample art for practice make this set excellent value for Procreate comic inkers.

bit.ly/4cb8cJH



Vintage Comic Creator

Artist Artifex Forge

Software Procreate

Brushes 11+ **Price** \$22

Rating ★★★★★

Another Procreate exclusive toolkit. Includes ink liners, halftone patterns, speech bubble stamps and vintage overlays sourced from real retro comics. Brilliant for those 'KAPOW' moments.

bit.ly/4qMZgOg



Stayf Comic Inks

Artist Stayf Draws

Software Procreate

Brushes 14 **Price** \$15

Rating ★★★★★

Traditional brushes and pens such as Sable and Crow Quill have been digitally replicated by Stayf Draws. Includes the aforementioned brush and quills. The Walt Kelly and Yves Chaland tribute brushes are a nice touch.

bit.ly/4aZjn74

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3D Artist

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CREATE A 3D PRINTED FIGURE

How to design your own characters to put through to a 3D printer

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The best 3D art around
Discover the creatures of Arya Hou and the sci-fi cityscapes of Julian Calle.

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Play with the details
When crafting 3D sculptures, the smallest details can be of significant importance.

96



Back to basics
Discover the three main components of almost all 3D models and why they matter.

98



Five minutes with...
Jan Buczny was inspired by Tolkien and fantasy comics for his world-building.

3D Artist Showcase

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BE INSPIRED BY THE BEST DIGITAL ART AROUND

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Liuyazi (Arya) Hou

LOCATION: US MEDIA: ZBrush, Blender, KeyShot, Substance 3D Painter WEB: <https://aryamonster.com>

Arya Hou is a senior concept artist and sculptor working across AAA, console, VR and mobile games. She combines digital and traditional sculpting to create characters inspired by fantasy and mysticism.



1 THE GLACIAL RIDER OF JUDGMENT DAY

"This was an attempt to visualise vibration, weight and momentum. I wanted to attempt to explore the idea of catastrophe as a transformation."



2 SERPENT DRAGON

"An ancient giant serpent dragon coils around a rocky ledge, emitting low, resonant chants that echo with a soaring eagle's cry."

3 THE PLAGUE RIDER OF JUDGMENT DAY

"To create an insightful weapon, I explored the similarities between disease and vibration. Both are unseen forces that disturb inner balance, changing physical and mental states."



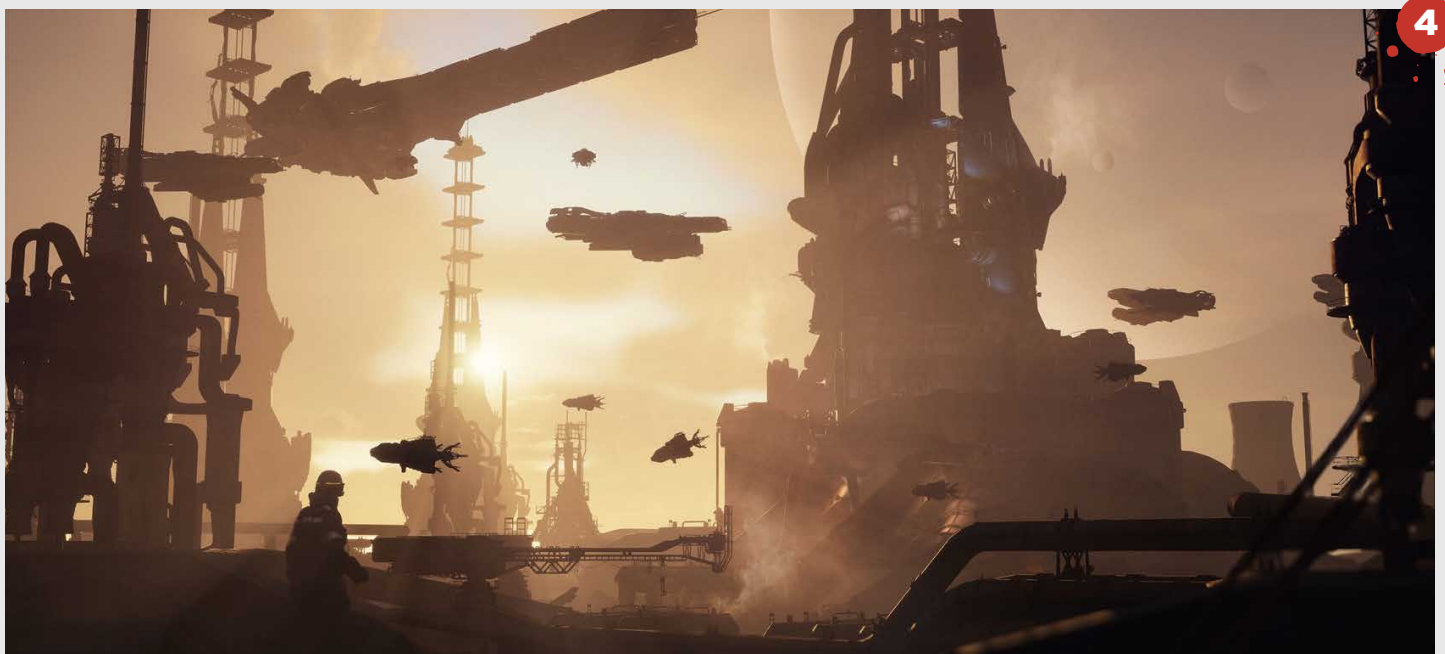


Julian Calle

LOCATION: Canada **MEDIA:** Unreal Engine, Blender, ZBrush, Photoshop **WEB:** www.juliancalledesing.com

Julian is a senior visual development artist and concept artist for video games, film and visual effects projects. He focuses on developing realistic and cinematic pieces, as well as working on stylised projects.





1 SCI-FI CITY
“The primary objective of this particular image was to demonstrate how to create a scene by using a mixture of tools, before adding 2D images with Photoshop in order to make a beautiful composition.”

2 BLENDER PRACTICE
“The aim of this personal project was to create a dynamic scene of moving spaceships. I used ZBrush to model them, then imported them into Blender to compose the scene before rendering it all in Photoshop.”

3 FACTORY
“This is a personal sci-fi exercise where the goal was to create a very specific sense of space and depth. It was created with Unreal Engine using 3D elements from a website named Big/Medium/Small.”

4 FACTORY, OTHER VIEW
“This is the same personal science fiction exercise, but in this case, I wanted to play with light so that I could attempt to generate interesting silhouettes that have a very specific sense of space and depth.”

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



ZBrush

CREATE A 3D PRINTED FIGURE

Oscar Juárez talks to us about his process for designing and creating characters to put through his 3D printer

Artist PROFILE

Oscar Juárez (El Ox)

LOCATION: Mexico

Oscar is an architect who has worked in CG since 2010, running Fibrha Studio. He has worked with clients around the globe, is an eager learner and is currently focused on creating art toys. <https://bit.ly/4sOwsTr>



3D printing has been very affordable for several years now. This has allowed many artists to express

themselves in more than one way, from useful models for the home, for decorating our homes, and yes, in the world of collectibles.

When I bought my first 3D printer some years ago, it marked a radical change in my life. The feeling of holding a model in my hands that I had only seen in pixels on my

monitor was amazing. Knowing that I had developed that piece and now it was something tangible made me want to learn more every day, and that led to the creation of many models that I currently have on the shelf in my studio – a collection that is constantly growing.

The goal of this tutorial is to show the way I create a figure focused on being an art toy. I will never say that this is an easy process, as it consists of many stages – some more serious than others, so to speak – but fun in

the end. I will share things that I wish I had known when starting in this world of art toy creation, like setting the right scale for the stl file, character proportion details, ways to quickly present a model to a client and, of course, the way I carry out the configuration for its 3D printing. Just as technology has changed over the years, this process will adapt to the needs of each person. I hope this can be considered a beginning point for those who are making their start in this world of figure creation.

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 5 now!

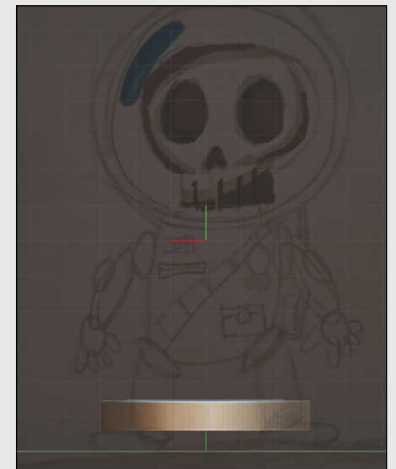


1 Character sketch

Every character needs a foundation, a plan... a sketch. This will help in the process of creating the figure's model. Many times during the process, it will change; we will add things as well as remove others. On many occasions, despite having the model faithful to our sketch, we will have to make significant adjustments for the sake of the figure's composition. An interesting, eye-catching figure is not necessarily the most complex or colourful, but the feeling it conveys to those who come into contact with it.

2 Background image

Whenever I am going to make a new figure, I like to put the sketch I made in the background. This helps me practically observe the figure's volumes, and if I see any detail, I can make adjustments directly in 3D. To add the image, you need to have the floor activated (Ctrl+P) and then deactivate the perspective (P). Then, in the Draw menu, look for 'front/back' and import the image there. Once it has loaded, it can then be scaled and placed in the position that best suits us. ➡➡

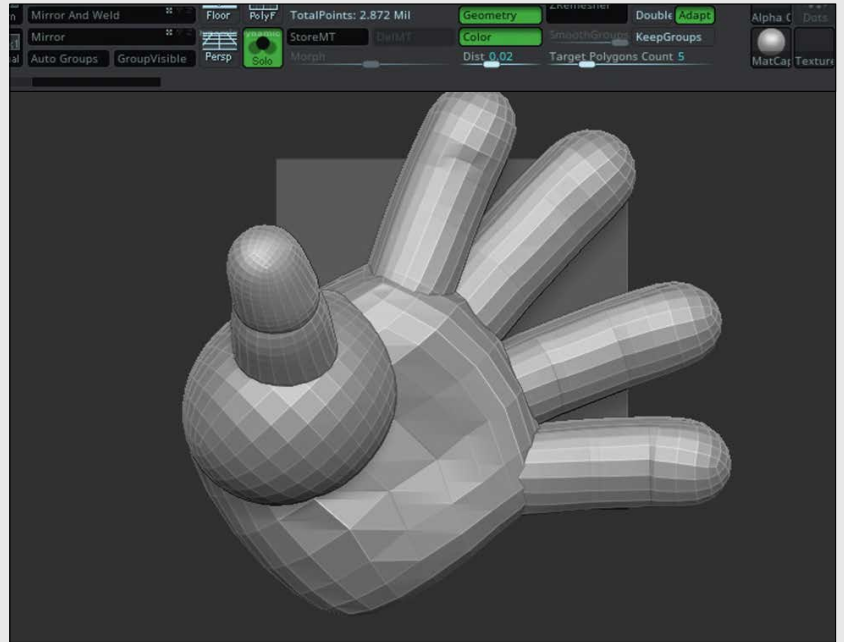






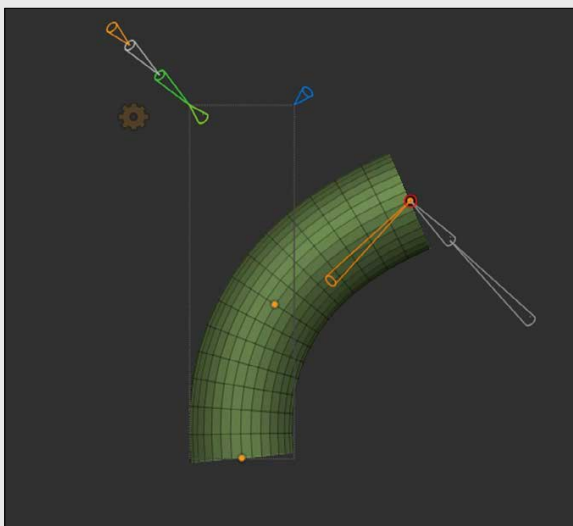
3 Blockout

With the background image in place, the next step is to start modelling the figure. The most practical way to do this is by using basic shapes: spheres, cylinders and cubes are what best align with my working style. This part is usually known as the Blockout. This is where we will establish the volumes and location of elements that cannot be seen from just the front view. This stage can be understood as the model in its simplest, yet vital form, as once we have this model, detailing each element will give us a satisfactory result in the end.



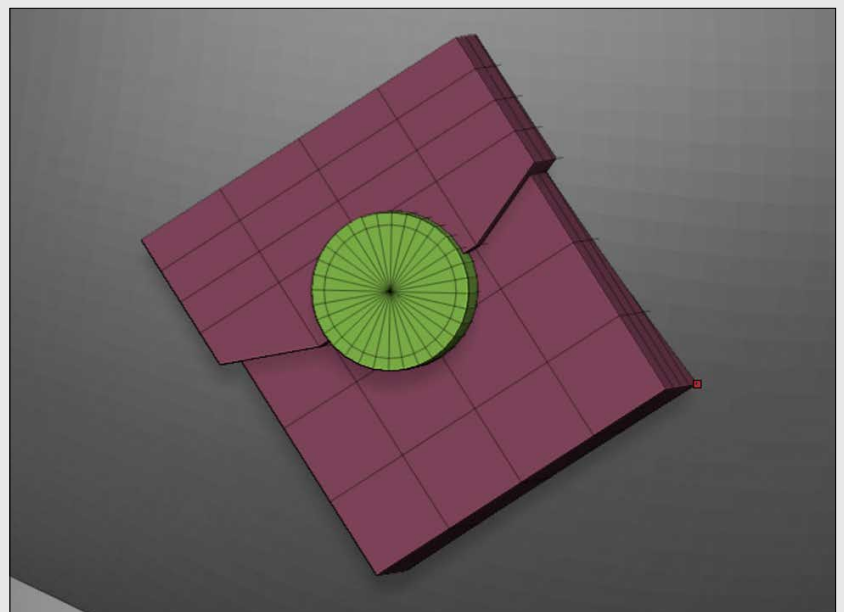
4 Insert mesh brush

Something I used to do a lot when starting out was making my figures from scratch, but then I learned about Insert Mesh brushes. The idea is that they can be used as ready-made pieces to include in the model, serving as a base to modify and shape them exactly as we need. To create them, you just need to set the front view, centre the piece, then press 'B' and select 'Create Insert Mesh'. If it's a new piece, you select 'New'; if it's a piece we want to add as a variable to an Insert Mesh we already have, we select 'Append'. Each Insert Mesh can have many options. They can be saved as collections for a specific piece or a specific theme as well.



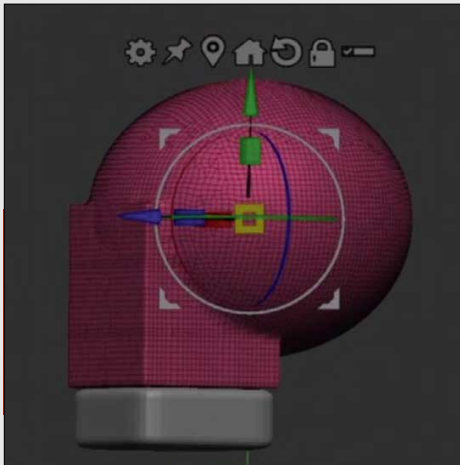
5 Bend curve

In ZBrush, there are always many ways to do things, but something I used to struggle with was making the arms for my figures. When trying to get that perfect curvature in the arms and legs, I usually did it with the move brush, which was a mistake. With the figure selected, we open the 'Gizmo 3D', select the gear icon, and there, where it says 'Bend Curve', cones will appear on the figure. The yellow cone gives us more control points, and the green cone represents the axis on which the curve will be made. To modify the polygroup, select the cone that appears, and click and drag.



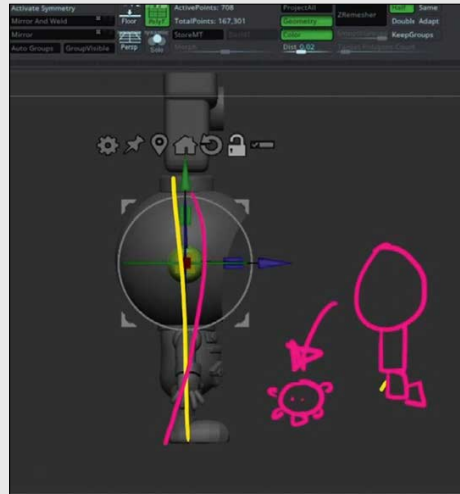
6 Add details with basic shapes

The details are always what will give personality to each model. Many times, I thought that the more detailed each model was, the better, but when creating stylised characters, the optimal approach is actually to use basic shapes. The advantage of using basic shapes is that the level of detail can be controlled better. They can also be used as an Insert Mesh, and the impact on the viewport is minimal in case you are using a less powerful machine. For the figure, I always used cubes and cylinders. Each one was placed in a way that met my needs, and then I adjusted them to the shape of the body using a 'bend curve'.



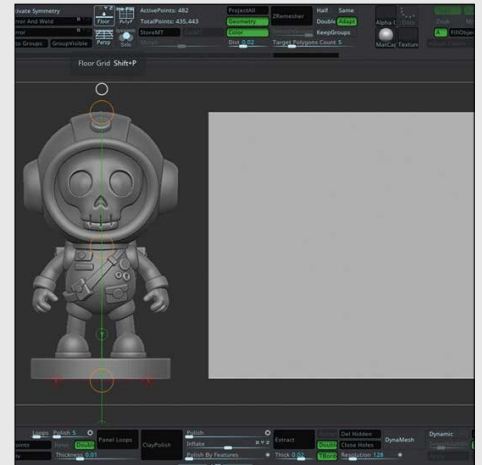
7 Merge shapes

Every shape can be obtained in many ways. In this case, since basic shapes were used, the most practical way to obtain other shapes is by merging polygons. For the figure's head, a sphere and a cube were used. They were merged using 'Merge Down' in the Subtools palette, and then with 'Dynamesh'. This was done to reduce the polygon count and, at the same time, make them a single body. Often, Dynamesh is not used, and when editing the figure, each body maintains a different polygon count, which prevents modelling on it because, despite being one SubTool, they are not a single mesh.



8 Shape adjustments

On many occasions, we will have a model that is faithful to the initial sketch we have, but that is when we must think about a factor that can sometimes be overlooked: the stability of the figure. This means that it must be able to stand without a base, and that it can remain upright and not fall over easily. This is the reason why I always try to avoid having the figure straight in the side view; I always add a curvature to the body, and in some cases, making the feet larger gives us better stability, bearing in mind that the piece will not have an extra base.



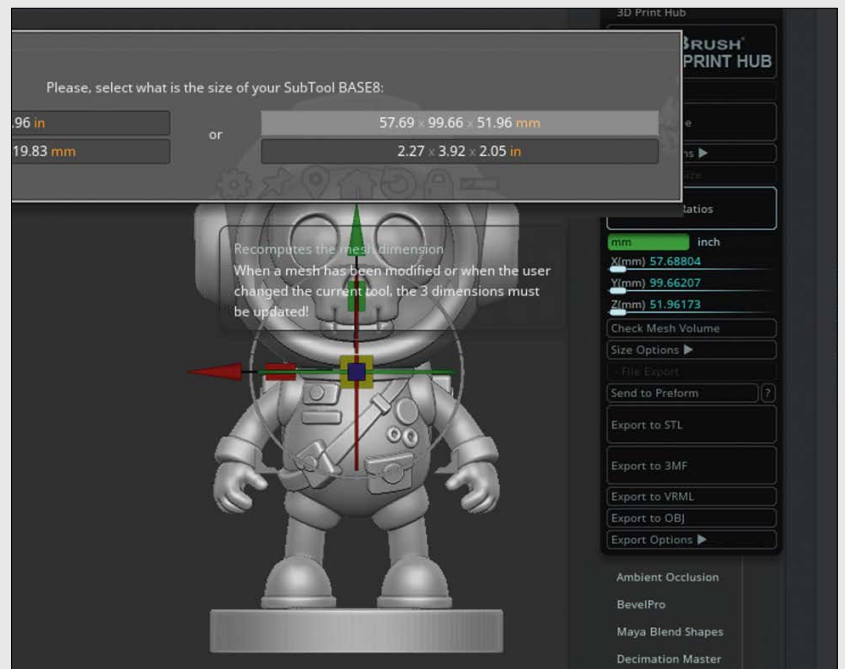
9 Real scale

A problem I encountered when starting out was the scale. After exporting, the figure would come out small, and I had to adjust it. To give the model the correct scale, I add a cube. Then, in ZPlugin, I go to 'Scale Master' and give it a value of 100 (100mm = 10cm), and select 'Resize Subtool'. If the figure needs to be 15cm, I make a 5cm cube and replicate it three times. To check that the figure has the right dimensions, with the Gizmo 3D active, press 'Y' to activate the Transpose tool. Click on the base and, holding Shift, drag a straight line to the top of the model. You can see the measurements in the upper left corner.



10 Turntable

One very useful tool once the model is ready, which allows you to present the progress or the final model to a client, is the creation of Turntables. To do this, go to the 'Movie' menu and select the last two options: set both values of 'Title Image' to 0, and set 'Overlay Image' and 'Opacity' to 0. Select 'Window' and 'Medium', and then select 'Turntable'. Doing this will play the animation. To export it, go back to the 'Movie' menu, but this time, select 'H' next to the export button, and then click 'Export'. This will have the effect of opening the menu to save the turntable animation.



11 Export file for 3D print

Once the model has its real scale, the next step is to export it so it can be printed. The best and most common format for exporting is 'STL'. To export, you need to go to the 'ZPlugin' menu and there, in '3D Print Hub', select 'Update Size Ratios'. This will confirm the model's measurements (I usually select the upper right side). After that, select 'Export to STL'. In this way, you will have the model in its real scale, ready to be printed.



Artist **PROFILE**

Miguel Leonardo

LOCATION: Canada

Miguel is a professional graphic designer who specialises in creation and development of 3D characters. He has a strong passion for sculpture, especially in the realms of fantasy and fiction characters.
<https://bit.ly/4cBnHKV>



Technique focus

PLAY WITH THE DETAILS

Miguel Leonardo explains how, for crafting 3D sculptures, the devil's in the details



"I created this figure, Svafa the Dream Sculptor, for a miniature collection from Creature Caster.

It's a small model for a tabletop gaming campaign, but regardless of size, it contains numerous intricate details. The model was digitally sculpted in ZBrush, rendered with Marmoset Toolbag, and the colour

gradient adjustments were completed in Photoshop. The highlight of creating this piece was the statue's dynamics and composition, prioritising clean areas rather than excessive details in specific parts and ensuring each flow allowed for an understanding of the character and the surroundings. All aspects were sculpted patiently by hand, giving it a more organic appearance."

How I create...

AN INTRICATE DIGITAL STATUE



1 Lay down the basic shape

The initial step is to establish the primary basic shape, which provides a three-dimensional outline and a conceptual framework of the overall composition. Following a strong foundational concept, the next step is to focus on the anatomy, paying close attention to the pose while capturing the character's movement and expression.



2 Apply details and colour

After a significant amount of time elaborating on the piece, incorporating secondary and tertiary shapes, armour plates, intricate filigree, textures, and additional small elements like jewellery and decorations, I apply paint to the sculpture directly in ZBrush. I also use the Polypaint tool to introduce colours and establish the main colour palette.



3 Render and refine

The last phase in generating these images and showcasing the sculpture is the rendering process. I used Marmoset Toolbag, a highly adaptable software where I utilise my lighting expertise to enhance the character, incorporating additional materials to achieve maximum realism and evoke the magic of the piece.

3D Artist Back to basics

OUR 3D EXPERTS ARE HERE TO SHARE THEIR KNOWLEDGE...

Every 3D model shares a number of characteristics - it's how these work together that determine how it will turn out.



WHAT IS A 3D OBJECT ACTUALLY MADE OF?

Nearly every 3D model shares the trait of being built from the same three components - **Mike Griggs** shows what they are and why they matter



It is weird to think that every time we see a 3D rendering of a character or environment, it's

essentially a bunch of equations placing points in an infinite computer void, then the computer connects them with the 3D application. This is because every polygon-based 3D model is constructed from three components: vertices, edges and faces.

Everything else in regard to the model is dependant on the way that

these three parameters work together, from texturing, which map to the polygons, to animations that are dependant on organised edge flow.

If you've used sculpting tools like ZBrush or Blender's Sculpt mode, you may be reading this going nope, I use a voxel based workflow, and you would be correct; that works differently - up until the point you need to do something with the model and then the sculpt needs to be baked (aka converted) into a usable point, edge

and polygon mesh. Therefore, understanding how to access vertices, edges and polygons in your 3D application of choice is essential.

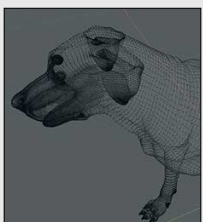
This is because this knowledge unlocks everything that follows - for example, selecting parts of a model, editing edges precisely, and that's where real modelling control begins.

Mike is the founder of Creative Bloke and has experience in content creation, workflow design and emerging creative technology. See www.creativebloke.com.

Three things to look out for when creating a 3D object

1 Object mode vs Edit mode

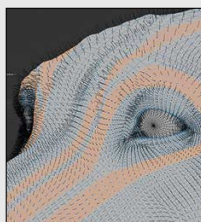
Most 3D applications have two basic states: Object mode treats your model as a single item, and Edit mode lets you access the geometry. Be mindful of parametric



shape types, which are application specific. This is especially the case in Cinema 4D, as these are controlled via inputs, and can be converted to become basic meshes.

2 Vertices, edges and faces

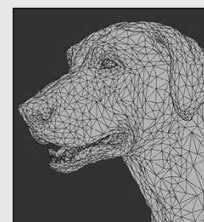
In Edit mode, you can select individual components. Vertices are points - the corners and control points of your geometry. Edges are the lines connecting vertices.



Polygons are the flat surfaces enclosed by edges. Most 3D apps let you switch between these modes. Also, be mindful of normals; the 'direction' that a polygon is facing.

3 Why topology matters

The arrangement of vertices, edges and faces is called topology. When importing models from a sculpting or CAD application, these can export topology, which can involve



learning how to 'remesh' a model to work with your 3D applications - for example, with characters where topology can define creases in a face.

Using different focal lengths and apertures can help your renders look more like photographs.



MAKE YOUR 3D CAMERA A CREATIVE TOOL

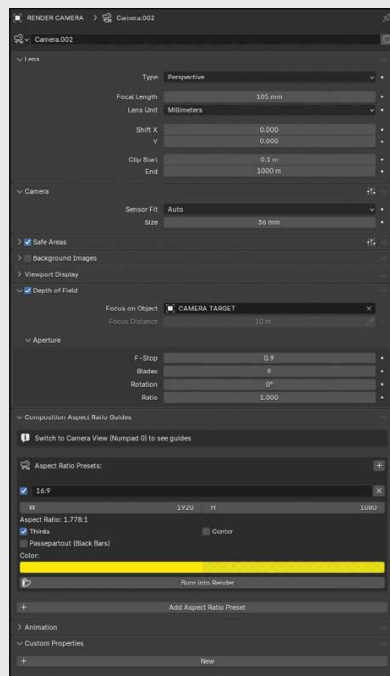
Rob Redman shows you how you can take your 3D camera and use it to add character to your renders



If you're new to 3D then you are probably aware that you can add a camera to the scene, which you use for setting up the angle of your final render. That's great, but you can do a whole lot more with it. Some things aid you in composition, but you'll also find settings that can help you add character to your images. This is particularly useful in production if you need to match a plate shot on a real camera, where things like depth of field come into play.

If you struggle with composition, try adding grids to your render camera so you can benefit from things like the rule of thirds. This will help viewers understand focal points of the render, or make more pleasing imagery. Alternatively, let's say you want a less sterile-looking result. Take advantage of a larger aperture so you can blur the background. Of course, you can make further adjustments with things like chromatic aberration or bloom, but we will cover them another time. Here, we'll focus on the basics to get you started.

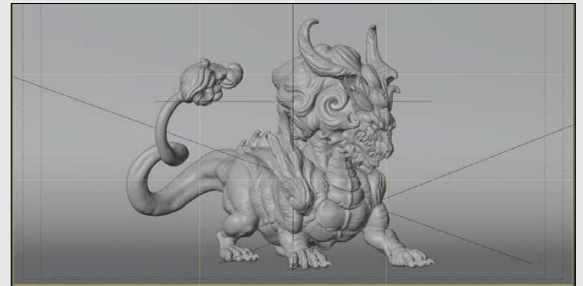
I'll be showing you three key tools in Blender, but most 3D software will have similar options.



Unfold headings to explore more settings for your cameras. There's a lot to experiment with.

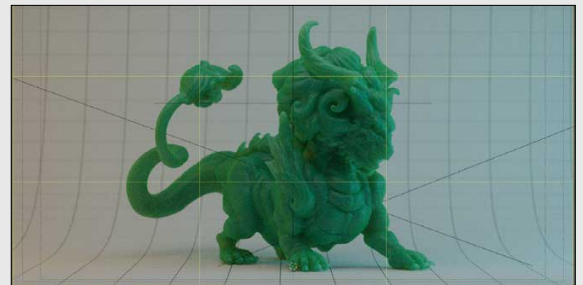
Rob is the editor of ImagineFX and has worked as a 3D artist and photographer for over thirty years, with clients from Royal Mail to Ministry of Sound. Away from his desk he is usually found playing guitar. robredman.co.uk

Discover three key settings to help your renders shine



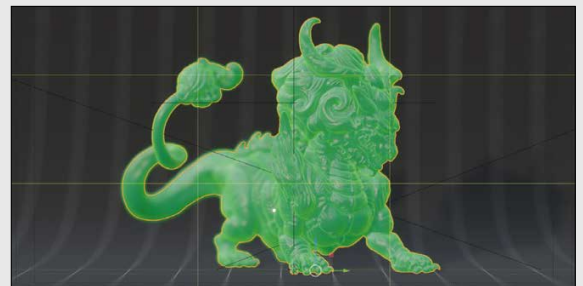
1 Set up some guides

Add a camera to your scene, then press 0 to look through it. Before you line it up in the viewport, click the camera in the attributes panel, unfold the Composition Aspect Ratio Guides and click + to create a preset. Now, you can add a thirds grid and colour it to suit.



2 Set your focal length

This can have a dramatic impact on your image. A wider lens – say, around 30mm – will have a very different look to an 85mm lens, even if you frame your subject the same size. What works for you will be a matter of taste, but it's worth experimenting with.

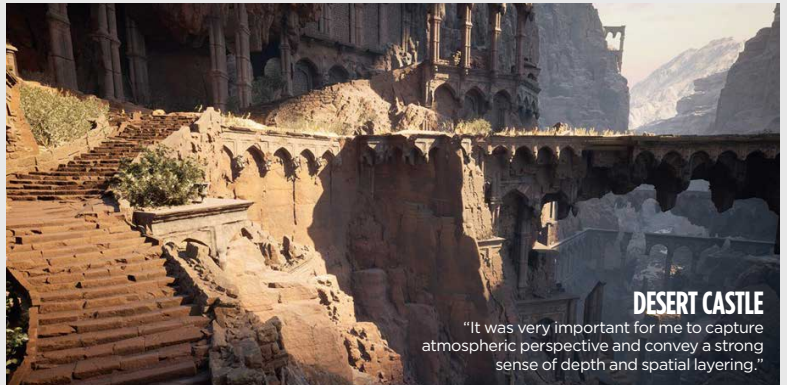


3 Limit depth of field

Use this to draw the eye to the in-focus areas or enhance a feeling of scale. In the settings, check Depth of Field and adjust the F-Stop. Lower numbers will have less in focus. Remember to select your focus object!

FIVE MINUTES WITH JAN BUCZNY

A love of fantasy encouraged this artist to create his own worlds



DESERT CASTLE

"It was very important for me to capture atmospheric perspective and convey a strong sense of depth and spatial layering."



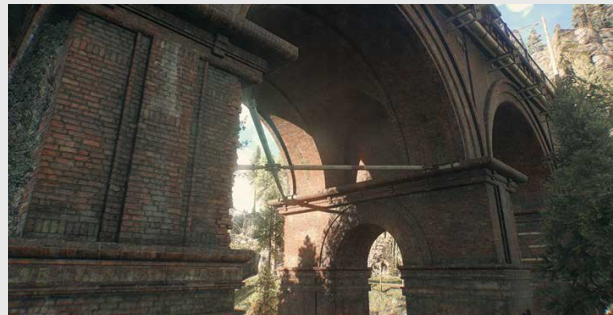
Where did your artistic journey start?

My artistic journey began with learning to draw and studying architecture. At first, I was drawn to structure, composition and the logic behind buildings. But when I started painting with watercolours, I realised that what truly excited me wasn't becoming an architect – it was the act of creating images and atmosphere. Over time, that passion evolved and found a new medium. Eventually, Unreal Engine became my canvas, allowing me to combine structure with emotion and build worlds rather than just design them.

As a young artist, were there worlds, in movies, comics or art, for example, that gave you a desire to create your own?

Absolutely. I was fascinated by the battle descriptions in *The Lord Of The Rings* and *The Hobbit* – the scale, the atmosphere, the sense of myth. Fantasy worlds have always had a strong impact on me. The comics my father showed me, like *Thorgal*, *Rork* and *Sláine*, also shaped my imagination in a profound way. They felt mysterious, epic and slightly surreal.

But perhaps my biggest inspiration has always been my



RAILWAY BRIDGE

"This is one of my favourite pieces for Techland's *Dying Light: The Beast*, where I focused heavily on realistic material aging and believable decal layering."

father himself. He is an artist, and our conversations often turn into intense creative brainstorming. Those discussions planted the desire not just to admire worlds, but also to build my own.

If you were starting out now, what words of wisdom would you most appreciate being given?

“A sustainable rhythm often leads to stronger, more thoughtful creative work”

I would tell myself to be more patient. Early in my career, I was promoted quite quickly. While it was an incredible opportunity, it also meant intense pressure and a very demanding pace of work. Growth came fast – maybe too fast at times. Looking back, I would advise taking things slower and allowing more space for comfort, exploration and balance. Ambition is important, but longevity matters even more. A sustainable rhythm often leads to stronger, more thoughtful creative work.

Are there any challenges to working in 3D?

One of the biggest challenges is

the constantly expanding ecosystem of software and tools. Every year there are new workflows, plug-ins, techniques and technologies to learn. The pace of change is exciting, but it can also feel overwhelming. I often catch myself discovering new “tips” or methods that I feel I should already know – while still working to truly master the fundamentals.

That balance between staying up to date and deepening core skills is an ongoing challenge. At the same time, it's also what keeps the field dynamic and pushes me to keep growing.

Do you tend to stick to 3D, or do you sketch and draw as well?

I love sketching on my tablet and I try not to lose that habit.

What is your next step in art or life?

I'd like to become a more complete artist. Right now, I'm focused on improving my lighting skills and learning more about effects and post-production, so I can build scenes in a more holistic way. What you see in *Desert Castle* is part of that learning process – an attempt to approach environment creation with greater depth and control over the final image.

At the same time, I don't want to lose touch with sculpting. I still spend late evenings in ZBrush, shaping forms and exploring ideas. For me, growth means expanding my toolkit while staying connected to the fundamentals that made me fall in love with art.

Jan started by drawing before moving into 3D art and fully dedicated himself to game environment creation. He was the lead 3D artist on *Frostpunk 2*, recently shipped *Dying Light*, and is currently working on an unannounced AAA project.





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