

# NO. 1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

**BECOME A**

# COMIC ARTIST

Essential techniques to create fearless comic stories and characters

FEATURING THE MAKER OF

**D'ORC**  
BRETT BEAN!

FUTURE  
ISSUE 265

**74**

WAYS TO GUIDE VIEWERS USING COLOUR THEORY

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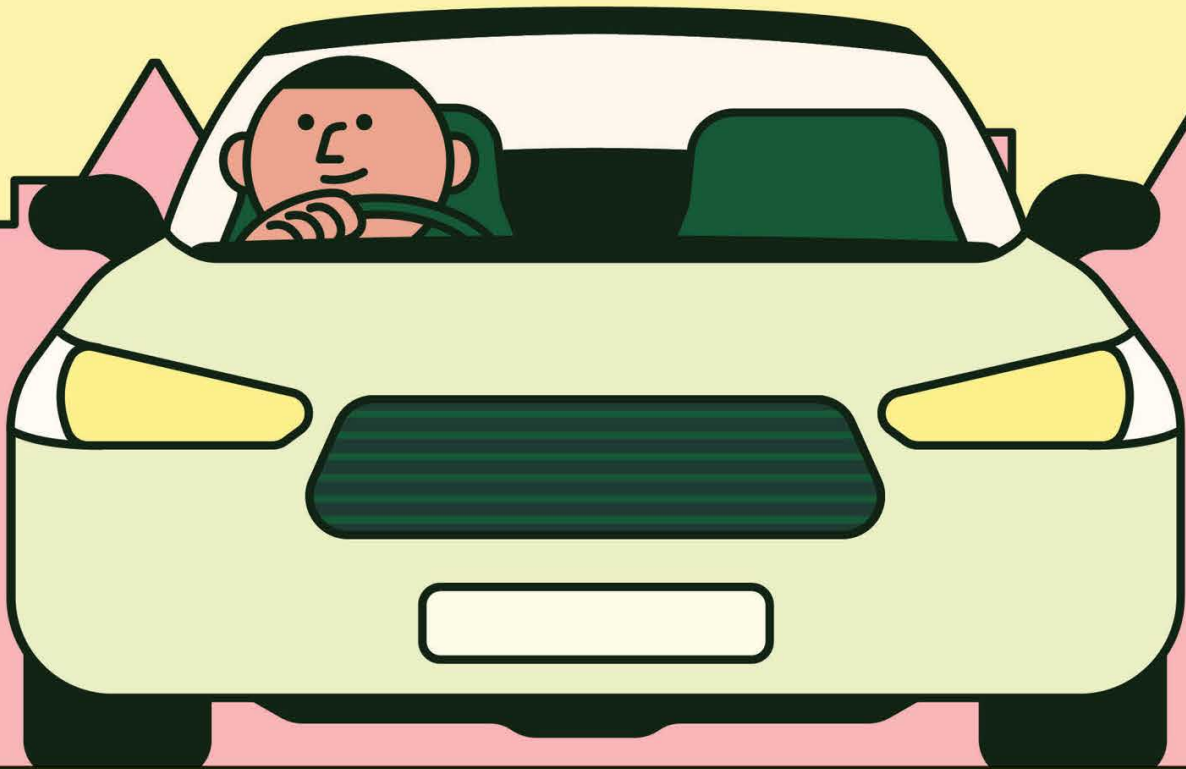
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Whether you're a long-term, hardcore comic nerd or you've never turned the pages of a graphic novel, there can be no doubt that comic art can pack a punch. You'll often find a vibrancy and dynamics you wouldn't necessarily see in other styles of art, and that's

why we're focusing on comic art this issue, with a mind to help you create your own, as well as understand what it's all about.

We start with our fantastically humorous D'Orc cover art, penned by artist and author Brett Bean, who also shares some insight into how this piece was put together.

Elsewhere, we have a primer on comic art, taking a look back from the current day to its origins in the distant past, to gain some understanding of what it's all about.

And if you're looking to pen your own comic, you'll need to get to grips with panels, and we have you covered there, with an in-depth tutorial on taking this from sketch to finished piece, demonstrated by comic artist Ludo Lullabi.

Enjoy the issue.

Rob

Editor  
 Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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



**Paint a cover on a deadline**

Brett Bean shows you how to get a project finished when time is limited.



**Master your use of colour**

Artist Tony Foti shares his expert tips on how to use colour to guide the viewer and support your story.



**Comic panels from sketch to final**

Ludo Lullabi covers his entire process in depth, from initial doodles to completed pages.

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# NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX Contents

## Your art

- 10 FXPosé**  
A round-up of digital art, submitted by you!
- 20 The Rookies**  
Up-and-coming artists share their work.
- 72 The Gallery**  
Get eyes on the finest traditional artwork.

## News and events

- 22 Starting out in the animation industry**  
The animation industry faces new pressures while still boasting unique creative opportunities.

- 26 Artist in Residence: Gretel Lusky**

This artist's Mediterranean studio, filled with tiny treasures, is where art and whimsy collide

## Features

- 34 Western comics**  
Comics are cool, but given the number of countries around the world, where do you begin – and where did they?

- 40 Development sheet: Flee**  
Jaehyun Kim revels in building worlds and breathing life into his creations.

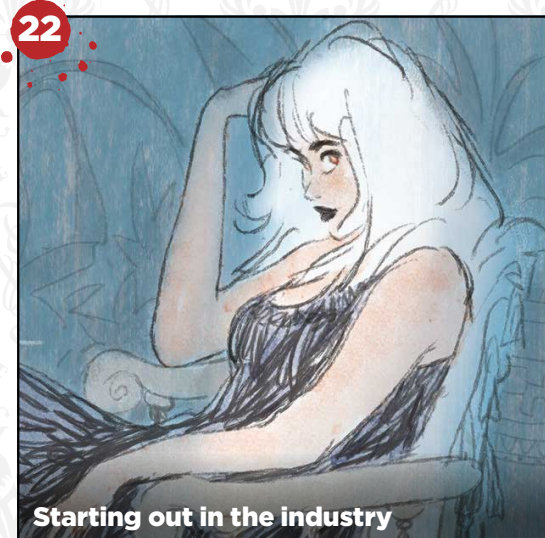
- 42 Sketchbook: Miro Petrov**  
Fantastical beings are the name of the game here, with digital art used to create something that looks more traditional

## Reviews

- 76 Hardware**
- 81 Courses and brushes**

## Regulars

- 6 Next month**
- 8 Subscriptions**
- 33 Letters**

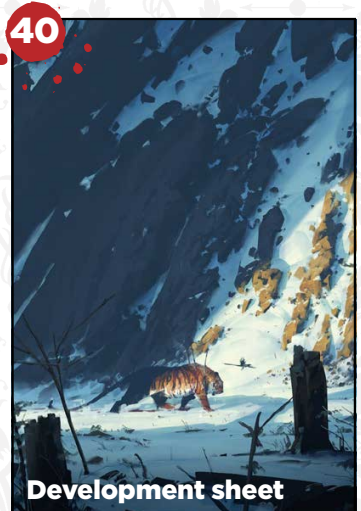


## FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



See page 10 for the best new art →



FANTASY SCI-FI DIGITAL ART  
**ImagineFX**  
**Workshops**

Advice and techniques from pro artists...



**50 Painting a cover on a deadline**

Brett Bean on how to get things done in time.



**54 Guide with detail**

Connor Sheehan makes art really stand out by adding small feature flourishes.



**56 Make the most of colour**

Tony Fotl guides the viewer with colour.



**62 Block colours in illustrations**

Fjell balances detail with broader strokes.



**64 How to master comic panels**

Ludo Lullabi takes us through his entire process.



**70 Stay on target**

Artem Chebokha says it's important to keep your goal in sight through every stage.

56



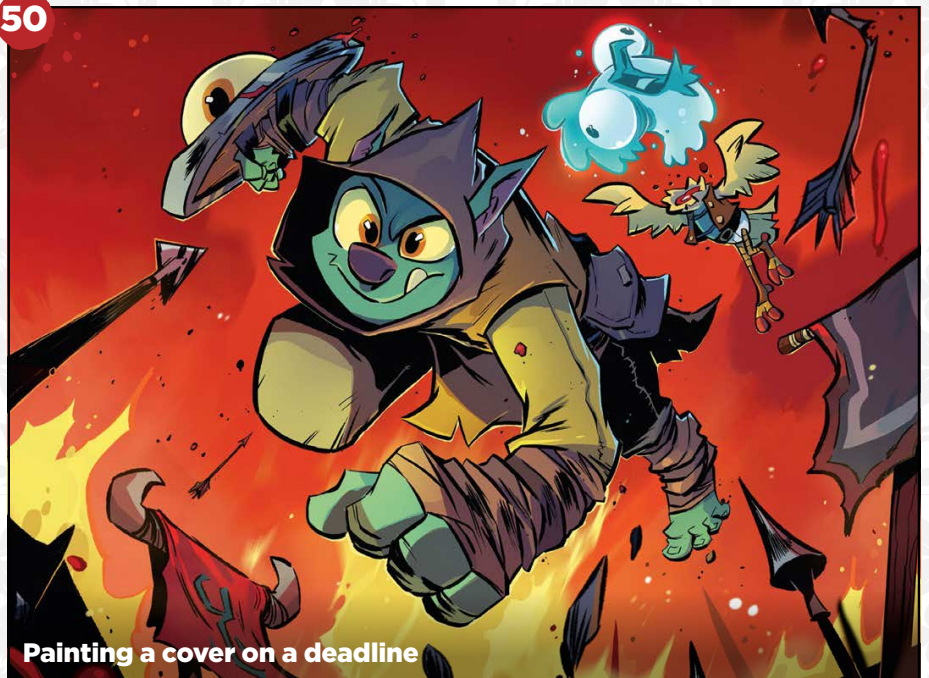
Make the most of colour

54



Guide with detail

50



Painting a cover on a deadline

**3D Artist**

Industry experts pass on their 3D art techniques...



88

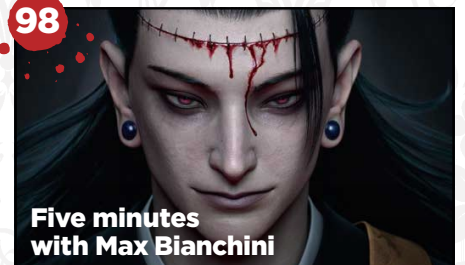
- 84 Showcase: reader 3D art
- 88 Build a cute environment design piece
- 94 Hybrid workflows
- 96 Back to 3D basics
- 98 Five minutes with Max Bianchini

64



Master comic panels

98



Five minutes with Max Bianchini

62



Block colours in illustrations

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- 3 Download what you need...**  
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# Next month

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#### Editorial

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Printed by Buxton Press Limited, Palace Rd, Buxton, SK17 6AE

Distributed by Marketforce, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London, W2 6JR. [www.marketforce.co.uk](http://www.marketforce.co.uk). Enquiries email: [mfccommunications@futurenet.com](mailto:mfccommunications@futurenet.com)

ISSN 1748-930X

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Full subscription rate: £97.50 for UK, €179 for Europe and \$203 for US.

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ImagineFX (ISSN 1748-930X, USPS 25891) is published monthly with an extra copy in October by Future plc, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Future plc, c/o World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.

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Next month in...  
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# EXAGGERATED ANATOMY

**Luis Rojas** takes anatomy to the extreme with his caricature art

**From the mind of a concept artist**

Chris Falkenberg shares his journey as a mixed-media artist and designer

**Play god with worldbuilding**

Bill Yi showcases his process for building vast and detail-rich 3D environments

**Give your heroes a cyberpunk setting**

Eddie Mendoza shows you how to paint dark, neon-lit sci-fi scenes

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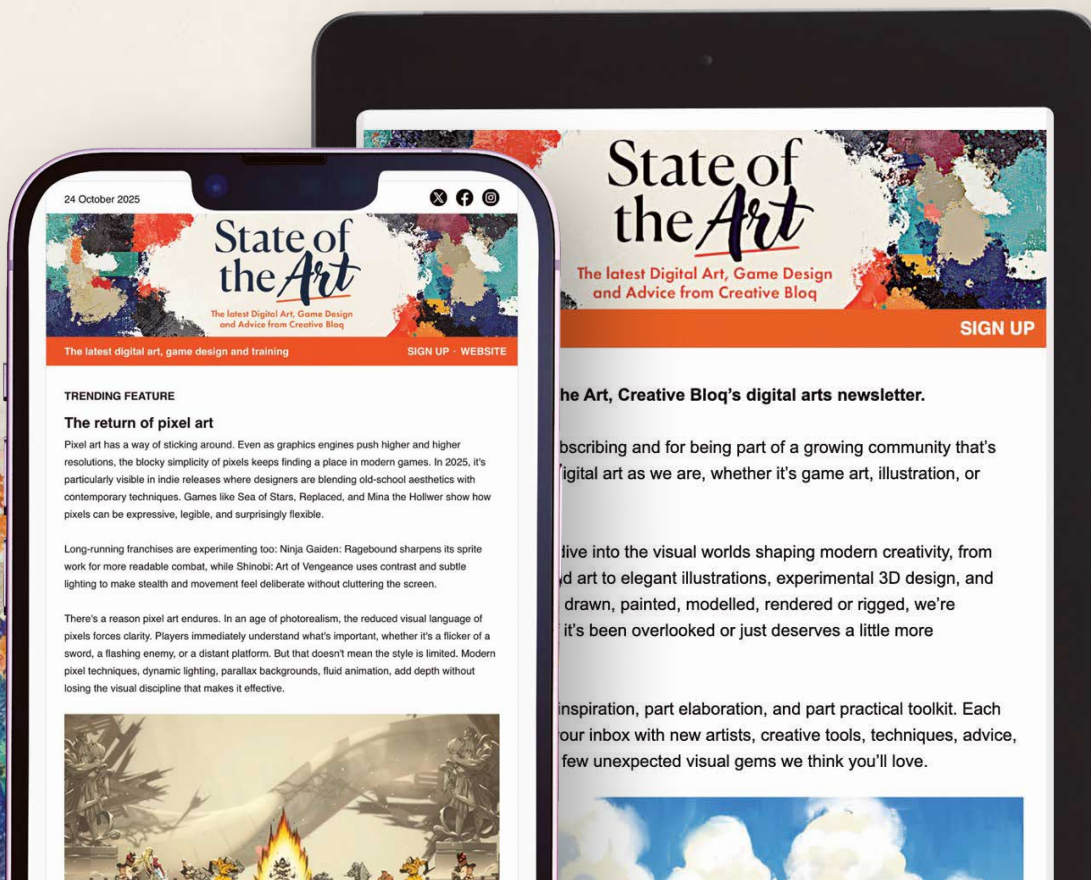
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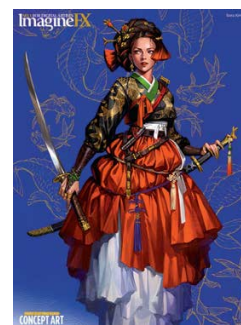
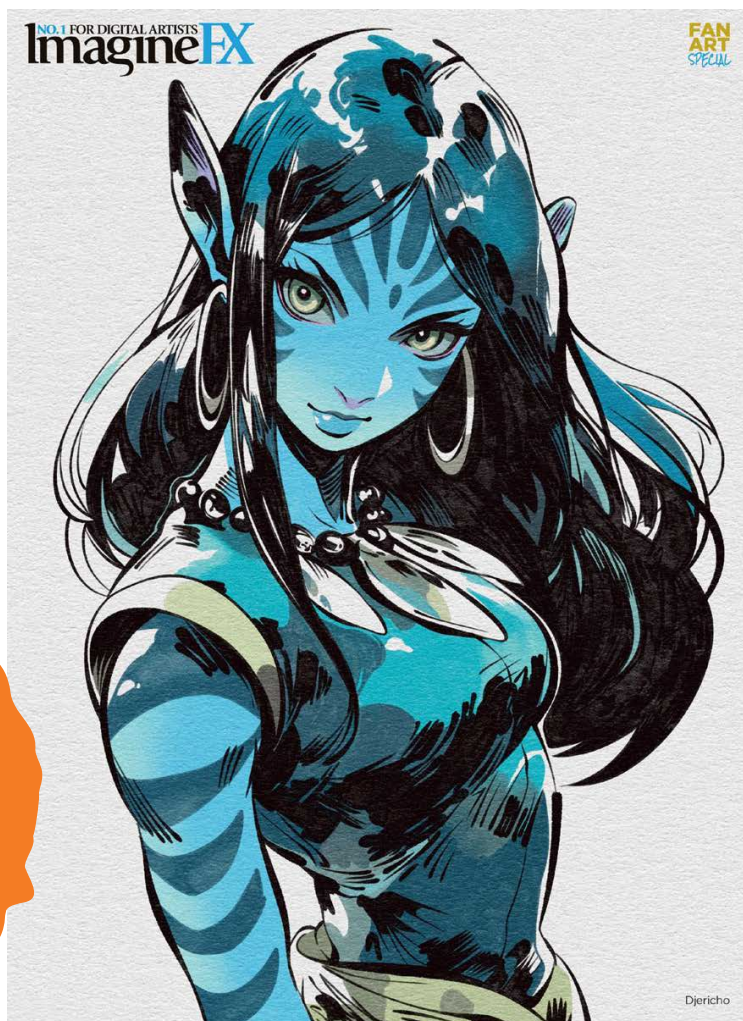
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# FXPosé

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## Fragan Tanguy

LOCATION: France MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: [www.artstation.com/fragantanguy](http://www.artstation.com/fragantanguy)

Fragan has been a professional concept artist since 2017, specialising in character design. He has worked with Virtuos, CI Games, Ubisoft and Warner Bros. A fantasy and cyberpunk fan, his work balances dark atmospheres with realism.

### 1 JIMINY CRICKET

"A character design for *Legendary: Game of Heroes*. This reimagining of the Pinocchio character has armour and equipment inspired by the 17th century, using a variety of materials that enrich the design."

### 2 GALLIUM LAKE

"This personal project combines dark fantasy, Aztec influences and organic forms in contrast to angular and solid structures."



WORLD FOR THE BEST  
ImagineFX  
ARTIST  
MONTH

3



### 3 CARMINE CYCLONE

"Another personal piece that blends solid structures with organic materials, exploring rocks and unusual textures that merge smoothly, while preserving a strong character design."

### 4 TLALOC AND ITZCOATL

"The goal here was to play with contrasts on all levels. As well as the scale of the characters, this piece balances dark fantasy with saturated colours."



ImagineFX

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1



## 1 COCO'S ADVENTURE

"This piece marks the beginning of an adventure series. It explores the animation-inspired visual style I want to keep developing."

2

## 2 THE READING PILOT

"A pilot character from my Coco project. Here, I wanted to experiment with a more detailed and dense painting style."

## 3 THE YOUNG WITCH AT DAWN

"This piece reinterprets a photograph I found some time ago with my own colour palette. I wanted to capture a slightly rough and expressive visual style."

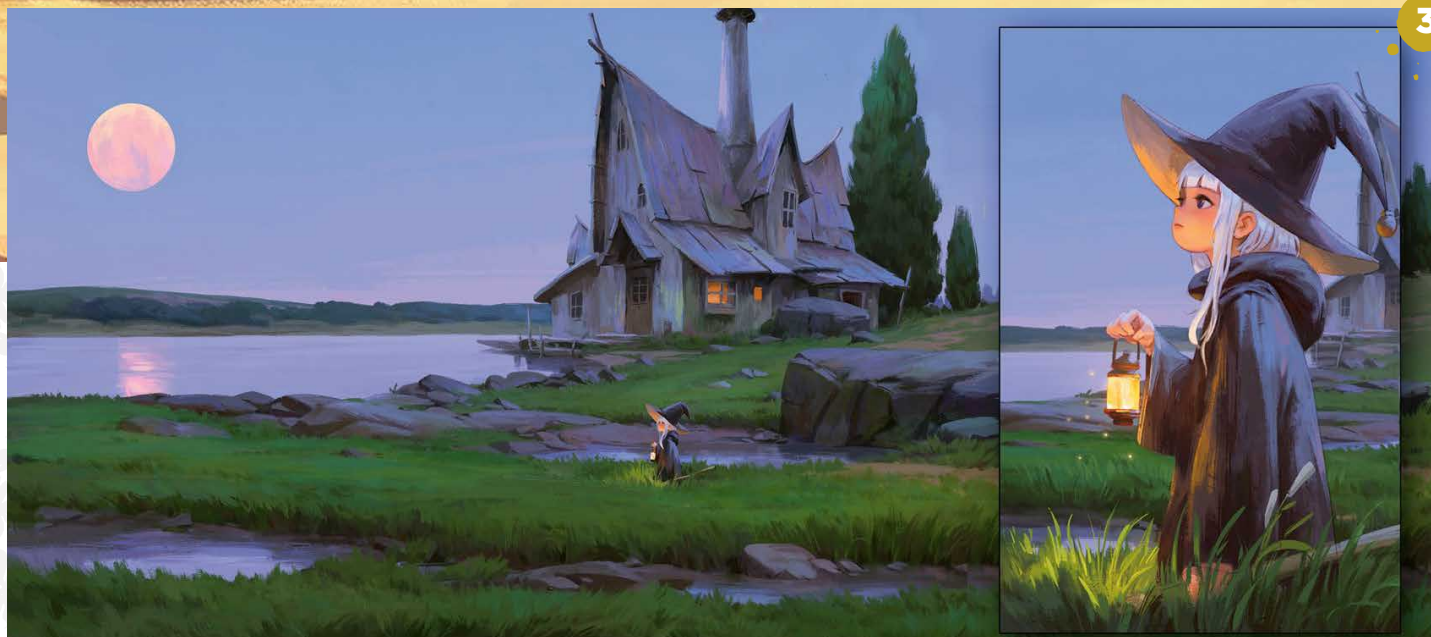




## Choi Keun Hoon

**LOCATION:** South Korea **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** [www.instagram.com/hoon2shoot](http://www.instagram.com/hoon2shoot)

Choi is a game art director whose work emphasises primary bold tones and a comic-inspired aesthetic to convey feelings. She is currently developing her own animated universe.



3



## Randy Ruedisueli

**LOCATION:** US **MEDIA:** Procreate, Photoshop

**WEB:** [www.instagram.com/randyruedisueli\\_art](http://www.instagram.com/randyruedisueli_art)

Randy is a professional artist and part-time teacher. After taking 10 years worth of courses, he left his job in the healthcare sector to pursue art full-time, and loves painting landscapes.

### 1 HOME SWEET HOME

"Nothing better than the comfort of your own home! I wanted to capture that feeling of warmth while making dinner for the family."

### 2 MOUNTAINS OF TERROR

"My true passion can be found in landscapes and fantasy worlds. I love creating maps, then painting what I imagine those worlds look like."



### 3 RAINY NIGHTS IN THE CITY

"I have always loved the way that lights reflect off of wet pavement. Here, I wanted to capture that feeling as the buildings recede into the blue beyond."

### 4 AUTUMN VIBES

"I love Autumn! Warm days followed by cool nights and a hot cup of tea. Often you can find me in my office painting autumn scenes and sipping cinnamon tea."

### 5 THE CALL OFF

"I spent many years working in food service for healthcare. Not a day goes by that there isn't a shortage of labour. I felt that frustration when I painted this."





4



5

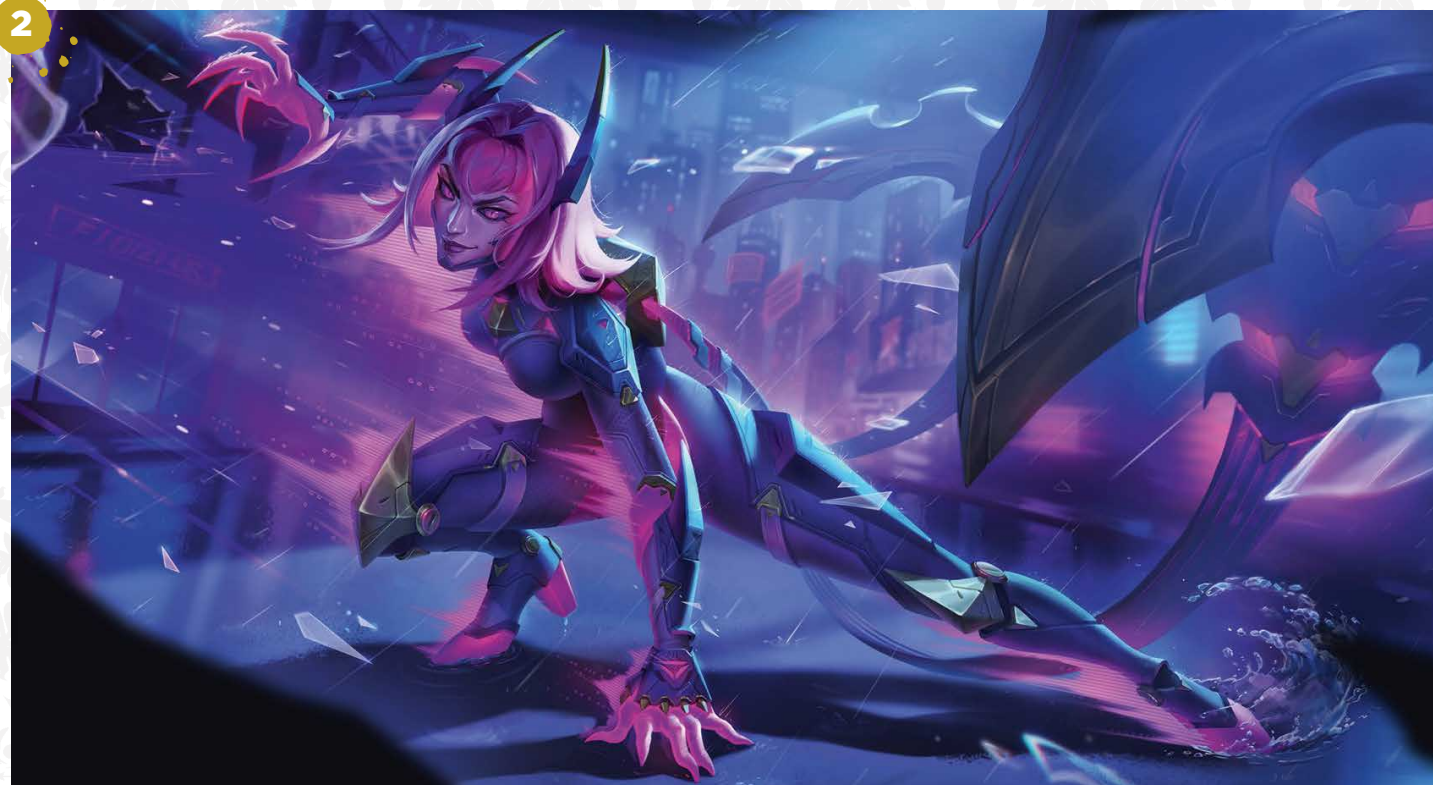
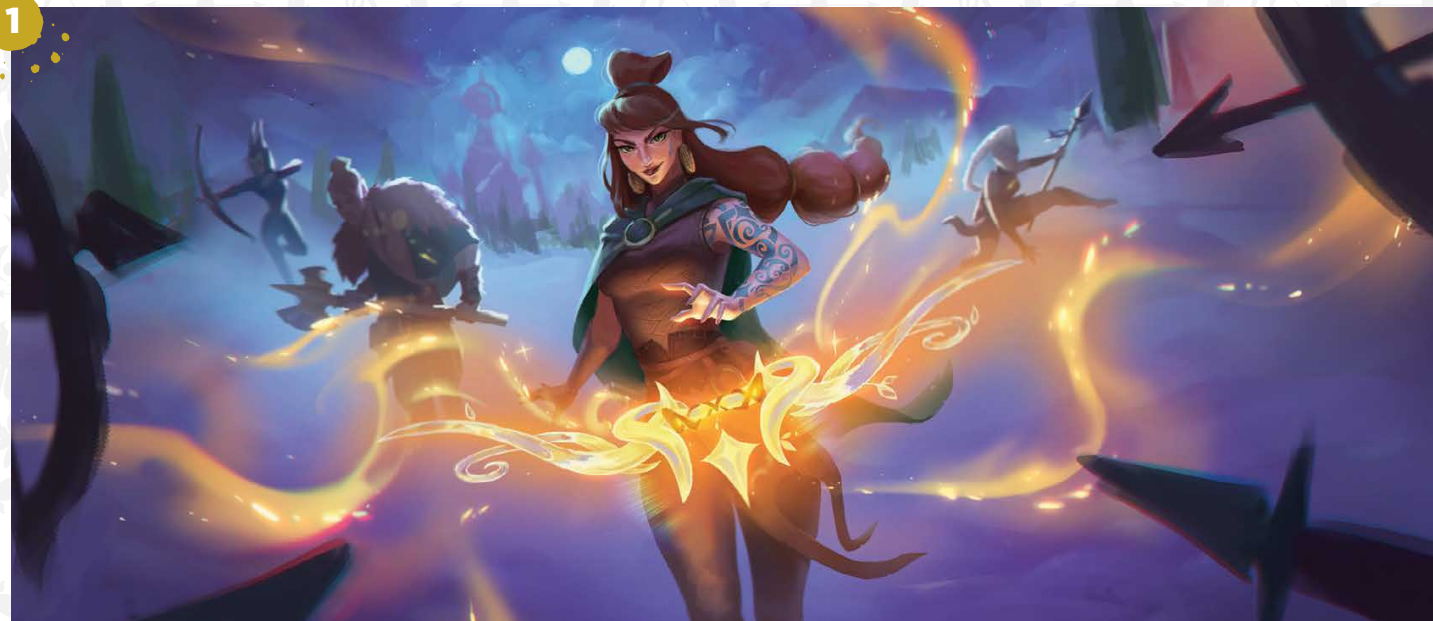




## Natali Samutina

**LOCATION:** Armenia **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Daz Studio, Blender **WEB:** [www.instagram.com/tashina.art](http://www.instagram.com/tashina.art)

Natali is a freelance illustrator who specialises in splash art and dynamic illustrations. She aims to make her characters feel as believable as possible, allowing the viewer to imagine the scene coming to life in front of them.



**1 AIRIS**  
“An illustration of one of my own original characters, Airis, standing against the people who want to destroy her city. Celtic and Pict cultures always inspire me.”

**2 CYBERDEMON EVELYNN**  
“This splash art depicts Evelynn from League of Legends in a cyberpunk skin. I tried to create an environment and mood that suited her vibe.”

**3 BASTET AND SEKHMET**  
“This work was inspired by the game Hades. I love the unique style of this game and decided to create my own characters based on Egyptian mythology.”





## Kseniia Semenova

**LOCATION:** Switzerland **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Blender **WEB:** [www.artstation.com/kessedy](http://www.artstation.com/kessedy)

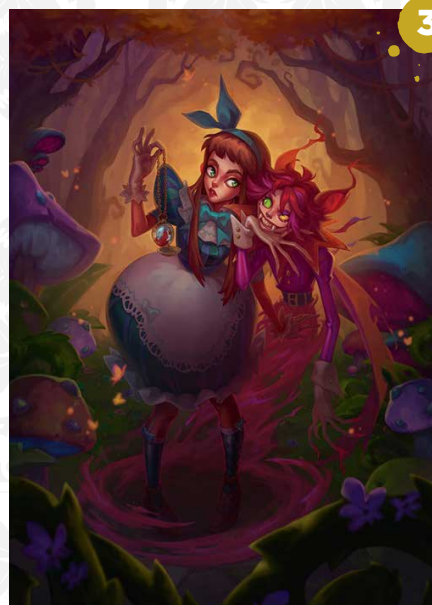
Kseniia is a freelance digital illustrator who focuses on stylised fantasy art and character-driven storytelling. Inspired by games like World of Warcraft, she uses expressive lighting to create atmospheric scenes.

### 1 IN DANGER

"This illustration is part of a personal project exploring my own fantasy world, inspired by the idea of a wandering circus. The characters I designed represent small fragments of this larger universe."

### 2 UNDERWEB SORCERESS

"A Hearthstone-inspired fan art featuring a creature in a magical cave environment. I focused on stylised shapes, glowing magical effects and a vibrant palette to capture the whimsical fantasy atmosphere of the game."



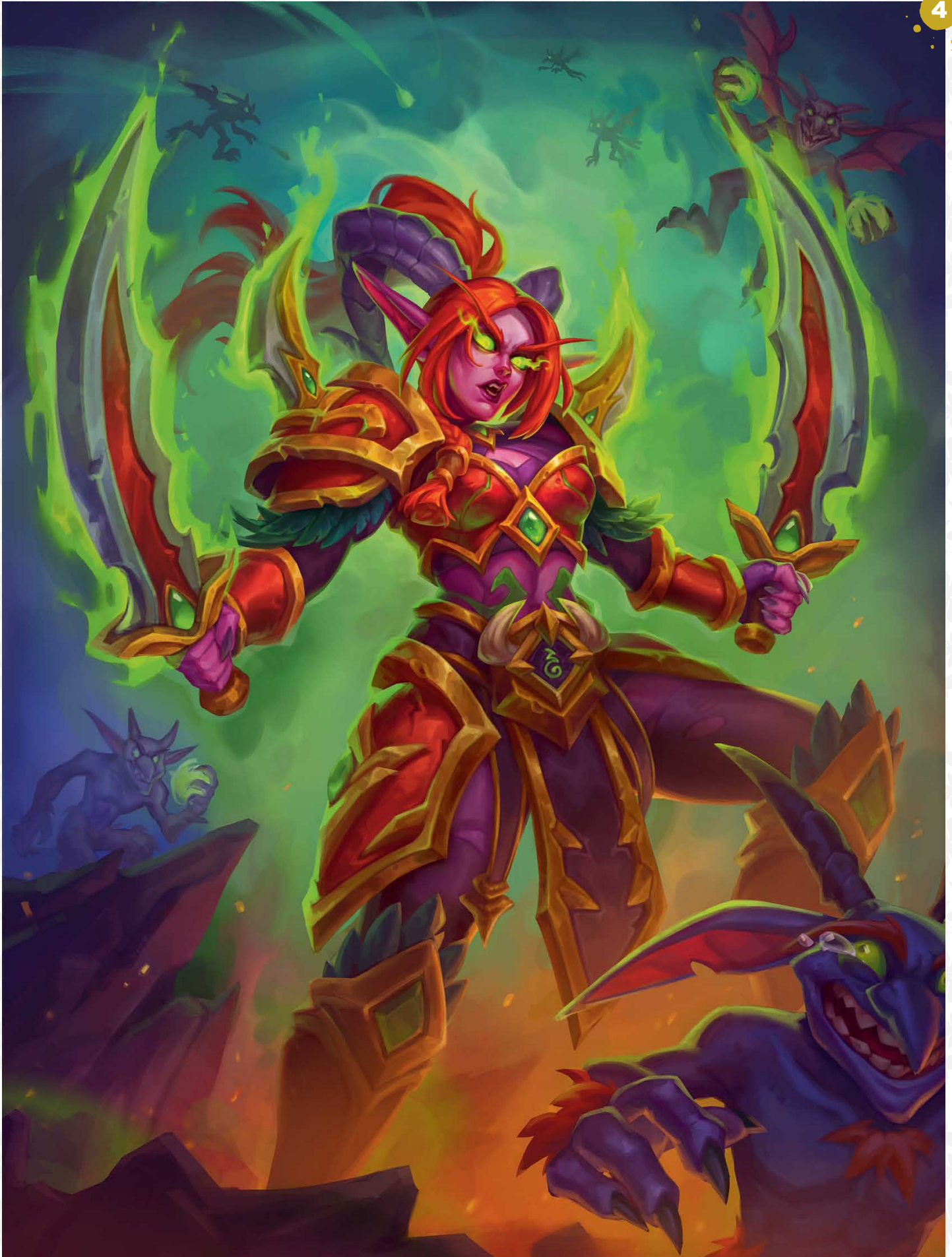
### 3 ALICE IN WONDERLAND

"This is a redraw of my older Alice in Wonderland illustration. I revisited the concept to improve the composition, colours and atmosphere, aiming to create a more polished and cohesive version of the scene."

### 4 SHATTERED SUNBLADE

"This illustration was created for a fan challenge inspired by the world of Hearthstone. The concept explores an alternative take on the character's path while staying within the game's stylised fantasy aesthetic."

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

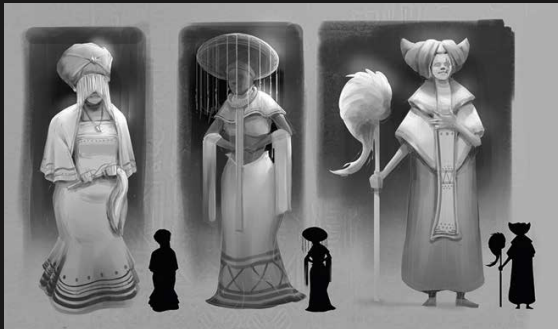
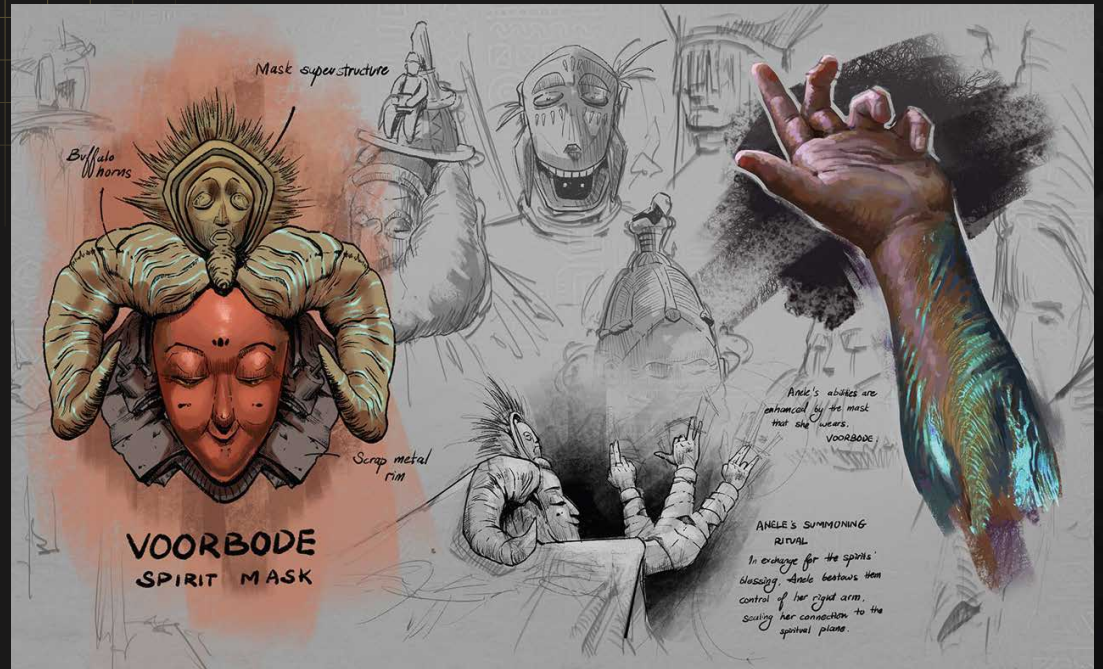




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## Voorbode

YEAR CREATED: 2023 MEDIA: Photoshop, Blender

“This project was a great opportunity for me to express my artistic tastes. My goal was to immerse the player in the horror of this place by gradually revealing some mysterious elements as they progress through the manor, leading up to the descent into the underground. I am truly happy to have concluded my last two years at New3dge with this work.”



## Artist **PROFILE**

**Terrence Wong Wei Jie**

**LOCATION:** Malaysia



Terrence is a fresh graduate from Malaysia who is keen to learn and grow, hoping to absorb as much knowledge as he can from his seniors and friends in the field!

[www.therookies.co/entries/36166](http://www.therookies.co/entries/36166)



"There's something forever magical about being convinced a drawing or sculpted model has emotions and a life of its own," says Josh.



## Starting out in the animation industry

**Moving pictures** The animation industry faces new pressures while still boasting unique creative opportunities. **Dominic Carter** discovers what artists need to know

As a medium, animation is notorious for being both expensive and time-consuming. However, as recent hits such as *KPop Demon Hunters* and *Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse* have shown, audiences are still hungry for the stories that only animation can tell.



"Animation taps into that child-like wonder we all have deep inside," says art director **Chris Zibach**.

"It's a magic trick that takes an incredible amount of magicians to pull off. The voices and stories being told are evolving, which allows for the visual to rise and meet the challenge."



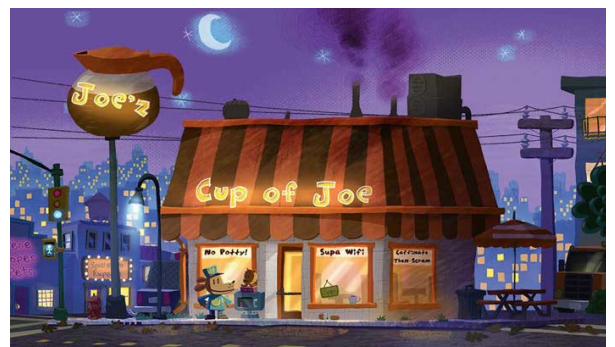
Fellow art director **Josh Wessling** agrees: "Animation is magic, and animated features are the ultimate expression of top

artists crafting these universal and moving stories. They capture audiences from all ages and show them something they can only dream of. It's proof of the magic that happens when you put the most talented minds together to bring their imagination to life."

### BREAKING IN

Given that animated films are some of the earliest and biggest inspirations for many artists, it's certainly no surprise that plenty of creatives are eager to enter the industry. Acquiring the necessary skills and adapting to technological changes

**“Animation taps into that child-like wonder we all have deep inside”**



"It seems that the cycles for innovation are speeding up and one can never be too comfortable in this climate," says Chris.

can make it difficult to know where to start, though.



For writer and director **Louie del Carmen**, artists need to cultivate tenacity and drive if they want to get their foot in the door. "Concurrently, you also have to get really good at craft and skill," he says. "Your work should always speak ➔"



### ROOM WITH A VIEW

Argentinian artist Gretel Lusky shows us around her colourful new studio on Spain's Mediterranean coast, filled with things that bring her joy. **Page 26**



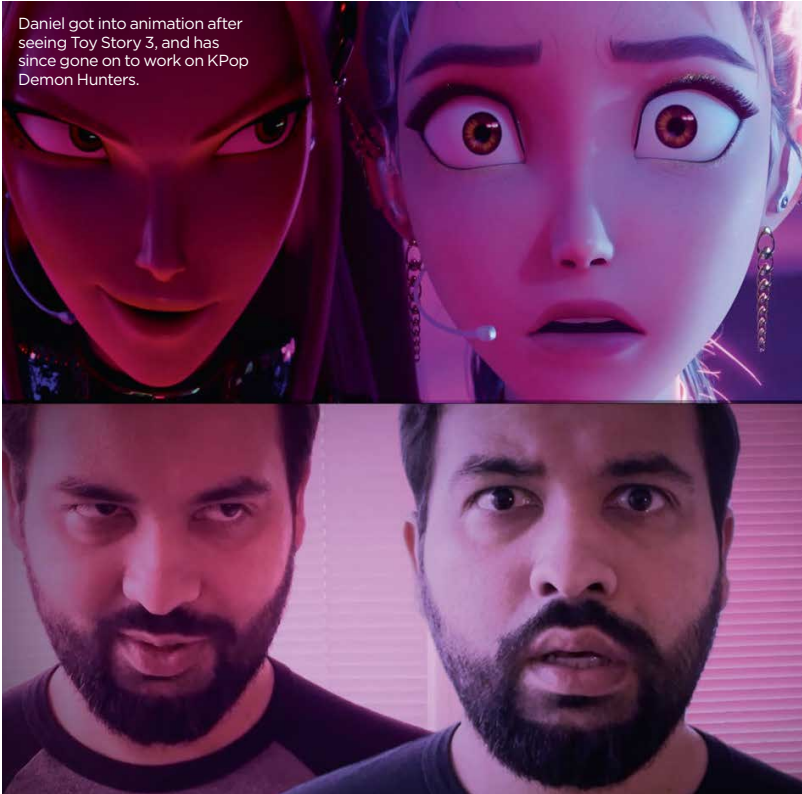
### FROM BOOKS TO BUILDINGS

Max Bedulenko, an environmental concept artist from Belarus, walks us through his career, from designing a book cover to building worlds. **Page 30**



### READERS' ART AND OPINIONS

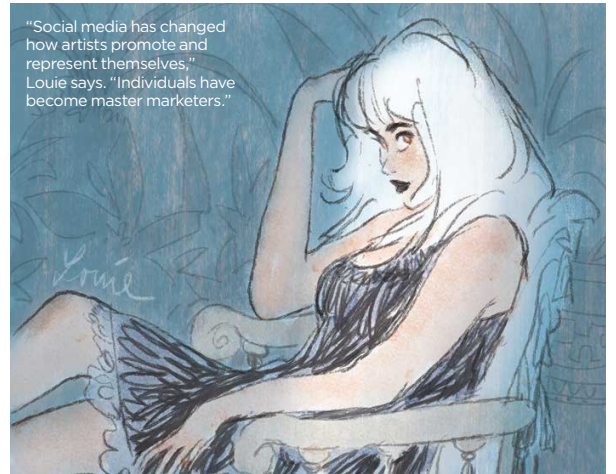
Two readers let us know how much they enjoyed our feature on fan art, while another shares her admiration for Greg Danton's stunning work. **Page 33**



Daniel got into animation after seeing Toy Story 3, and has since gone on to work on KPop Demon Hunters.



Louie remembers when the industry switched from 2D hand-drawn to 3D computer animation.



"Social media has changed how artists promote and represent themselves," Louie says. "Individuals have become master marketers."

"As schedules have less time and demand the highest quality, the new challenge is efficiency and adapting quickly," says Chris.



➔ for itself. The opportunities will come as long as you keep working on getting better.

“You have to fall in love with it and be willing to fail and start over. It’s how you really grow and progress. The industry is ever changing and it’s artists who establish a good work ethic, are dependable and deliver consistent, outstanding work that have the edge.”

Chris agrees: “I would suggest being hyper-critical of your work, and to strive to illustrate an honest point of view. Be your own number one fan first and foremost, and keep up with personal work. That kind of enthusiasm will carry through and recruiters will feel it.”

As with many creative endeavours, animation is raised by a village. “Try to surround yourself with honest people who support you, inspire you and push you to be the best that you can be,” says **Daniel Ceballos**, senior



animator at Sony Imageworks. “Community and support are such big factors when it comes to chasing your dream job.”

## CURRENT CHALLENGES

Like most arts sectors, animation is currently facing its own set of difficult headwinds. These include the bursting of the streaming bubble, outsourcing, an overload of content, and of course, the ever-present spectre of AI. With so many obstacles in place to overcome, it’s important to continue to remain positive and recognise what it is that separates animators from algorithms.

“I think the best way to combat these hurdles is to lean into what makes you different,” says Daniel. “Regardless of what technology looks like in the future, your ideas are what make you individually stand out.”

Josh admits the industry is tough. “There’s far less work than there was five to six years ago.”



Part of Daniel’s job as an animator includes recording dozens of photos for reference.

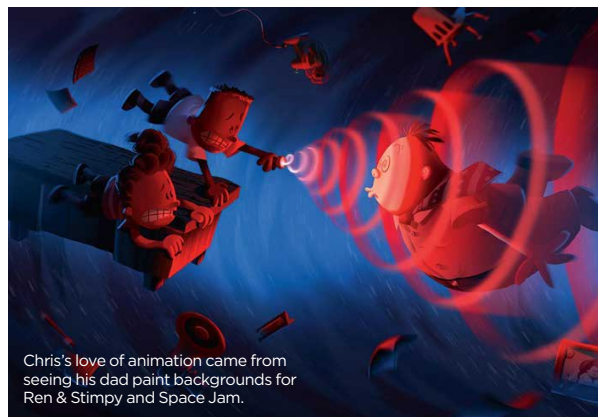
In his opinion, ideas grounded in lived experience will always be appreciated by audiences. “Everyone has a unique story that’s specific to them, and there’s a lot of value in that when it comes to art.”

Josh is all too aware of the problems that have arisen in the last five years, including smaller crews and technologies that are changing faster than studios can keep up with. “I think the best thing we can do as artists is

## “Try to surround yourself with honest people who push you to be the best you can”

to continue to respond creatively to how we’re feeling about the current state of things,” he says. “Not to be intimidated or beaten down by the current atmosphere. Be bold and authentic in our storytelling, even in the face of this kind of cultural anxiety.

“Our strength as artists isn’t about racing towards the future and anticipating trends or technology,” he



Chris’s love of animation came from seeing his dad paint backgrounds for *Ren & Stimpy* and *Space Jam*.



Louie’s sure there’s still opportunity for animators to tell expansive and unique stories.

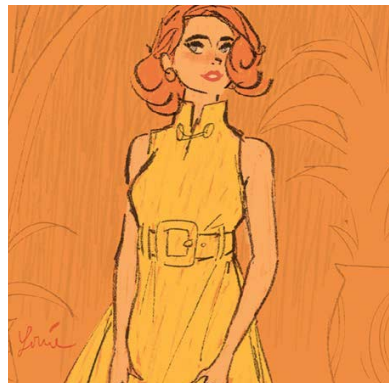
Louie thinks that animation’s enduring appeal to audiences is its ability to make the mundane appear magical.

adds. “It’s about slowing down and reflecting on the present moment. Art isn’t commerce or a service, like those pushing the latest technology want you to believe. It’s a process and a language for people to profoundly connect, human to human.”

## LOOKING AHEAD

While the forecast may look uncertain, Louie is on hand to offer some optimism. “Yes, things are a bit challenging at the moment, but it’s always been a cycle of chaos and order, and the industry always ends up remaking itself. We just have to be ready to adapt. And audiences will always gravitate to soulful creativity and authentic human connection.

“Animation has always been about transporting audiences into fun, imaginative worlds with poignant characters and emotional stories, and that’s not going to change. I was so moved and encouraged by what Gints Zilbalodis created in *Flow*. It showed what a dedicated creator and a small team can achieve with commercially available tools, a dream and meagre financial support.”





## INDUSTRY INSIGHT

### JOSH WESSLING

Art director Josh Wessling shares his thoughts on animation

#### How did you enter the animation industry?

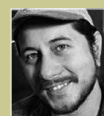
I was looking to combine my love for painting and filmmaking, so animation seemed like the obvious path. I studied animation/illustration at San Jose State University. After graduating, I moved to LA to find work. I began reaching out to my fellow alumni for advice. I continued to contact recruiters and went to networking conventions. Eventually, through those connections, I landed my first job in 2019.

#### What does your typical day as an animator look like?

Currently I'm a background painter for a television series, so my days are spent listening to music and cranking out backgrounds. I finish anywhere from 10–15 a week, so my workflow needs to be pretty streamlined. I try to automate as much tedium as possible, which helps me to get to my favourite parts, like colour and light, faster. But my workflow evolves depending on the needs of each production.

#### What do you think the future of animation looks like?

Unfortunately, the trend seems to be more output for a smaller budget. Typically, that's done through outsourcing. We'll probably see that pushed even further. Much leaner, more top-heavy crews. We've already seen entire crews except leadership get outsourced. Studio appetite for risk seems to have decreased significantly, so we'll probably continue to see the same existing IP, reboots and sequels that everyone is getting exhausted of.



Josh Wessling is an artist and animator with a passion for art direction and visual development.

[www.joshwessling.com](http://www.joshwessling.com)



Chris worked as a PA at Dreamworks Animation before breaking into the art department as an associate visual development artist.

"Tools are going to change, the way we produce and access art will change, distribution networks will change," says Josh, "but the reason why we create art won't."

Chris hopes that the pendulum continues to swing uninterrupted between risky, original stories and safer franchise films. "Animation will likely have a bigger foothold in the marketplace as audiences that have grown up demand more aged-up content," he says. "If studios fail to meet expectations, the indie projects and personal passion pieces will be there to inspire, unencumbered."

The future of animation doesn't just rely on the creators, either. "People vote with their dollars, which is why it's so important that audiences support original animation," Daniel points out. "Studios want to support original ideas, but they also have to make sure they stay afloat."

#### LASTING APPEAL

It speaks to the enduring appeal of animation that it continues to survive despite these turbulent conditions. Louie pins this success on its ability to appeal to everyone of all ages. "If done well, animation can convince an audience that a fantasy has always existed. Regardless of how it's made and how it's delivered, that is what



Louie is resigned to the fact that AI is here to stay. "It can't keep us from creating and I'd like to think that originality will always prevail."

makes good entertainment: Going on an adventure and getting lost in a good story."

Daniel agrees: "People often view animated movies as a genre for kids, but it's also a beautiful medium that can tell a story in unique ways. Animation is such a gorgeous means of storytelling, and there's truly something in it for everyone." ●



## Gretel Lusky

**Scenic view** This artist's studio, filled with tiny treasures, is where art and whimsy collide



Having a dedicated space for my art and creativity has always been important to me. That space

has changed and evolved a lot, particularly over the past few years. From leaving my first studio in my home country Argentina, to building one from scratch in England, to more recently moving to a small town on Spain's Mediterranean coast.

It's interesting to see how the studio is rebuilt each time - always a little different, yet always carrying bits and pieces from its past versions. A little bit like myself!

I spend a lot of time in this space, so I love filling each corner with things that feel familiar, bring me joy, and ➔



I love drawing rats and moody characters!



I bought this celestial chart poster at Griffith Observatory in LA in 2018. It's a bit worn out because it's been up pretty much in all my studio setups over the years, so it's kind of a staple at this point!

The canvas lamp I use to film a lot of my art process videos.

I won this huge stack of markers in the social media category of the Copic Awards 2020. Even after all these years, most of the markers still work perfectly fine.

A window with a pretty view of the sea. Also great for pigeon watching!

This is my nostalgia shelf, where I mostly display a bunch of old Winx Club dolls. Winx Club is one of the shows that made me start drawing in the first place, so it has a special place in my heart.

My art wall features work from Natalie Andrewson, Ami Thompson, Sibylline Meynet, Maud Bihan, Kiera Won, Lara Carson, and Maxine Vee, among many others. I also love collecting riso prints and posters from Disney parks.

My own artbook, *Wayfinder: The Art of Gretel Lusky*, published by 3dtotal! Definitely one of my most important projects I've done to date.

I'm obsessed with checkered patterns, so this rug was the perfect addition to the studio!

My two beloved original drawings of Starfire and Raven, kindly gifted to me by Teen Titans artist Brianne Drouhard.

"I prefer looking at artwork from other artists instead of my own, and I often choose prints with lots of pinks, blues, and pastel tones to decorate my walls."



➔ inspire me every day. My perfect recipe for an inspiring studio starts with a window. I work traditionally a lot and I usually film videos for social media, so having plenty of natural light is non-negotiable to me. I have to say that this might be my favourite window I've ever had, because I get a perfect view of the sea while I'm sitting at my desk!

## A TIDY APPROACH

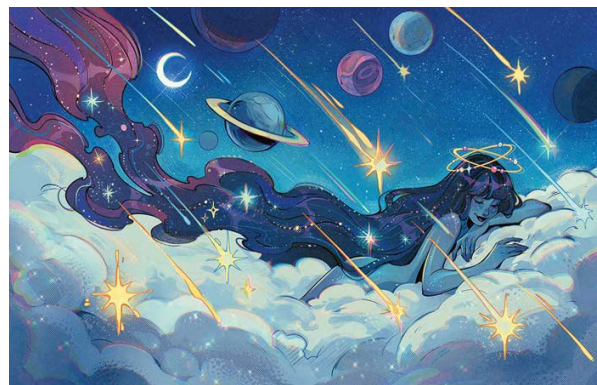
I have two desk areas, one for digital art with a laptop and a Wacom Cintiq 24, where most of my commercial work happens. This is also where I reply to emails and organise tasks for the week. The second desk is purely for traditional art fun, filled with pens, paints, and all kinds of markers. The pegboard up on the wall is one of my favourite ways to keep my art supplies organised and neatly displayed within my reach! This area is a space for experimenting and exploring my own ideas, rather than working on client projects, though that can happen

sometimes. I tend to gravitate towards traditional art when I want to draw purely for the joy of drawing.

Another absolute essential in my studio is a shelving unit to store my books and beloved items. I enjoy collecting stickers, stationery, vinyl figurines, and all sorts of trinkets that are displayed all around the studio. I particularly love stuff from the 90s and early 00s that reminds me of my childhood and has influenced my work in one way or another. If it's

“ I love stuff from the 90s and early 00s that reminds me of my childhood ”

Starry Dreams is one of the illustrations I created for my own Mixed Media Art Kit made for Mossery.



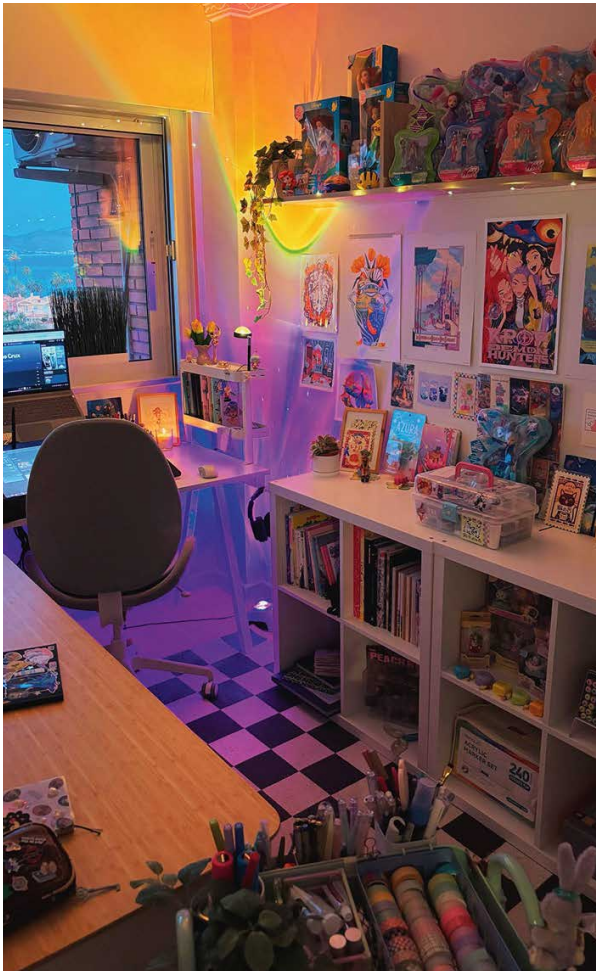
cute, colourful, and sparks my interest, it will probably end up on my shelf!

I don't have a lot of my own work displayed in the studio, since I prefer looking at artwork from other artists instead. I find colours very inspiring, and I often choose prints with lots of pinks, blues, and pastel tones to decorate my walls. I also love being surrounded by green, so there can never be too many plants.

I don't look forward to the day I have to move out again, but I know that I will always be able to rebuild my own little world wherever I go!

*Gretel Lusky is an Argentinian freelance illustrator and comic artist known for her expressive characters, fantasy themes, and vibrant mixed-media style. She has worked for clients including DC, Netflix, Disney, 3dtotal, and BOOM! Studios. [www.gretlusky.com](http://www.gretlusky.com).*

# Artist news, software & events



My shelf is filled up with artbooks and all kinds of inspirational material, particularly artists' sketchbook compilations, which are my favourite type of books. Here, I also keep any comics I've worked on, as well as my French and Spanish copies of Wayfinder! I love decorating with little souvenirs from my travels.

More items on my shelf, featuring a couple of Ariel vintage dolls, Sailor Moon, Polly Pocket and Sylvania critters.

The studio at night is filled with fairy lights and a galaxy projector my partner bought me.



A rolling cart to store art supplies is a must-have for any traditional artist. Inside the drawers I keep the sketchbooks I'm currently using, sticky notes, paper, and my wooden stamp collection. It also features a huge folder of Deleter screentones I brought back with me from Japan.

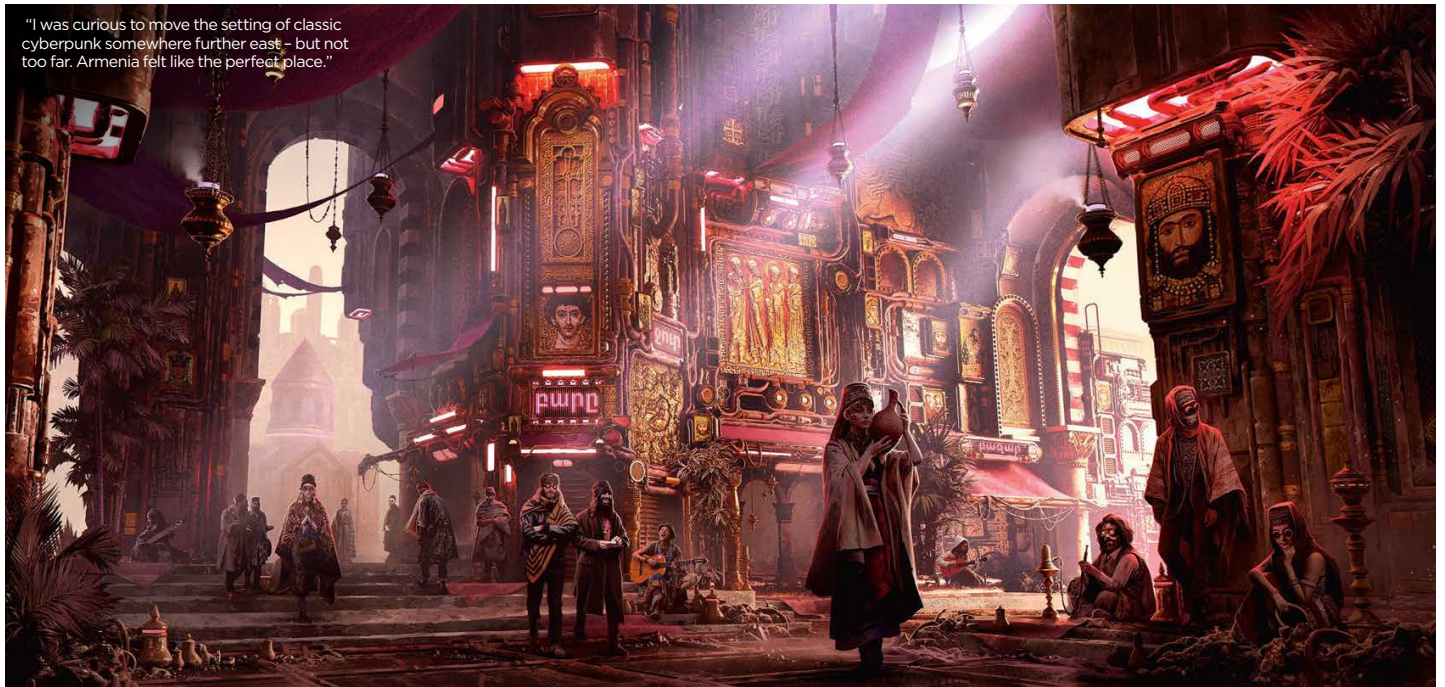


My favourite area, where I spend time playing with analogue tools, brainstorming new ideas, and filling sketchbooks!



Drawing pumpkin-headed people in my sketchbook is probably one of my favourite things to do, no matter the time of year.

"I was curious to move the setting of classic cyberpunk somewhere further east - but not too far. Armenia felt like the perfect place."



## The path of... Max Bedulenko

**Worlds apart** Environmental concept artist Max Bedulenko talks us through his journey

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

I was born and raised in Belarus, in Minsk. I don't know whether this fact alone shaped who I am today, but the lack of interesting architecture and art definitely influenced my interest in the heritage of other countries and cultures. I always wanted to know, "How is it there?"

### What, outside of art, has most influenced your artwork through the years?

I believe that an artist should know and understand as much as possible. The way this world works leads you to a certain way of expressing yourself. In turn, this can help you share your voice with others and inspire someone to follow their own path.

“The lack of interesting architecture and art definitely influenced my interest in the heritage of other countries”

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

I can't say that a single image or a particular artist influenced me the most. But I really love tall, rustling trees and Gustav Klimt.

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

I don't really remember my first work or my first client. I think it was a book cover - nothing special, but it felt good to work on something familiar and close to me for the first time. I always knew I wanted to be an artist, but I never believed it would work out.

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

Even though I see myself as a



"This image marks a return to the theme of Qheeva - a city from my fictional universe, Velvet Road. It's nice to come back to something that once worked well."

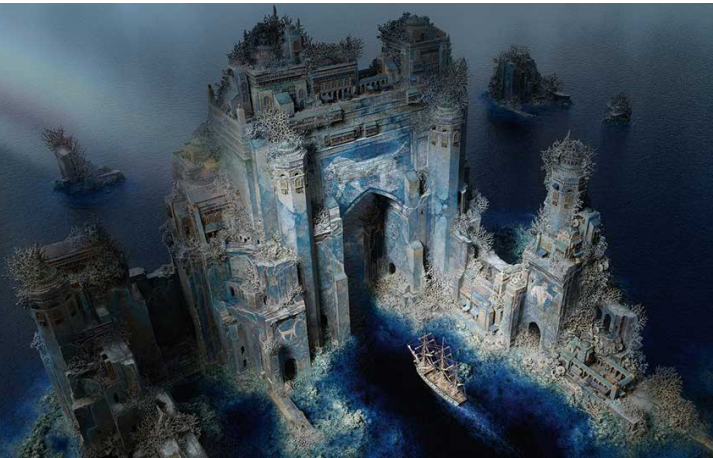
completely ordinary person and a rather average artist, I have still come some way, and my first attempts at art are very different from my last works. Recently, I've become interested in worldbuilding, and I want to tell more complex stories. So I'm still working on how to present these stories, but I don't have much free time, unfortunately.

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

My main dream has always been to find my place and my own path. In a way, that's what I do and art is just one part of a much bigger journey.

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

My main advice to myself would be to take things more easily and not



"I wanted to touch on Persian mythology, but reinterpret it in my own way, as always. This is like a gate to another world, reached by a road across the water."



"Another location from Velvet Road - Nogroth, a city of young, ambitious people living far from older civilizations, and eager for contact, cultural exchange - and war."



assume that nothing new is waiting just around the corner. And yes - never be afraid to turn that corner. These are personal thoughts, but I don't mind sharing them.

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

Of course, people can talk endlessly about changes in the market, AI and everything else, but I don't really have anything new to add to that conversation. I'm not very fond of these trends, and because of that it

has become even more important for me to focus on my own niche and stay honest with myself. This is more about my personal path than about the industry or the world around me.

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

I can't say that my work is who I am. It's a part of me - certain thoughts and ideas - but I never fully identify myself with what I create. To me, that narrows a person too much and can easily lead to unnecessary suffering.

"This comes from a universe I explored with a friend. We were both too busy to develop it further. It's a city built on a vast lake. This is the town hall of the Fishermen's Quarter."

### What is your next step in art or life?

My next step is to keep going - to be able to take the next step again and again. More specifically, I'm working on something like a script for the story I've been building, and I can't really put it off any more.



*Freelance concept artist Max was born in Belarus. He enjoys experimenting with meanings and genres, combining things that don't seem meant to work together and searching for new syntheses.*

[www.artstation.com/artist/mb14](http://www.artstation.com/artist/mb14)

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ImagineFX

# Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS



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Our fan art tips can help you take your favourite characters and give them the personal touch.

inspire and inform, and it sounds like we've done just that for you. Those tips are great and a fantastic kicking-off point for anybody who wants to do fan art while staying true to their own style.

## Fan-tastic

I've been drawing for years although it's more of a hobby than a job. Most of my work is fan art, based around characters from my favourite games, such as Destiny and Halo. I really liked the last issue of ImagineFX, with its focus on my hobby. I learned lots but, most importantly, how to look at existing art and add my own twist on it, something that doesn't come naturally. Thank you.

**Dean, via email**

**Rob replies** Thanks for writing in Dean. Great to hear from you and I'm pleased to hear our fan art issue has opened your eyes to new ways of thinking and drawing. Sounds like an exciting time making things your own.

## Delightful toys

Hello Rob. I loved the recent issue with the tutorial about how to make 3D printable toys. That's something I've wanted to do for a while now and didn't really understand the process or even where to start. Please pass my thanks on to Oscar for making my life that little bit easier. Plus, his spaceman model was very cool.

**Lara, via email.**

**Rob replies** Hi Lara. I'm so pleased you enjoyed Oscar's workshop and found the advice you needed. He's a talented artist who's made it really easy to understand how to go about modelling and preparing for 3D printing. I think I'll be doing something similar myself, thanks to him.



## Short but sweet

In your last issue, you had a short (just two pages) piece by Greg Danton, which I adore. I'd have thought it was oils, but seeing his breakdown has me reaching for my Wacom, so thank you!

**Alison, via email**

**Rob replies** Hi Alison. You're absolutely right. That piece tells a story with real style and it's hard to see it's digital, let alone created using so much 3D.

## Tips galore

A quick hello from me and a thank you for the fan art tips in the last issue. These were all really useful to me. I don't do fan art but I see I was wrong and it could be a great way to take characters I like and make something quite different and new. I especially like the cover art and how it gives a fresh look to a well-known face.

**Stephen, via email**

**Rob replies** Hi Stephen. Hello to you, too, and thank you. Our aim is to both

Greg Danton's gorgeous art may look traditional but it really isn't.



**DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?** Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 264 at [ifxm.ag/single-ifx](http://ifxm.ag/single-ifx).



New works that have grabbed our attention



**Elizabeth Elaine**  
[@elainedrawz](https://instagram.com/elainedrawz)



**Erotokritos Papis**  
[@erikpapis](https://instagram.com/erikpapis)



**Karina Boissonnier**  
[@pizzdraw](https://instagram.com/pizzdraw)

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

# WESTERN COMICS: A PRIMER

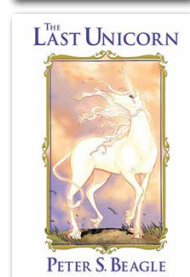
**Asha Bardon** agrees that comics are cool, but given the number of countries around the world, where do you begin – and where did they?

**T**hink of the word “comic” and you’re probably either drawn to manga from Japan or comics from Western countries, such as the US or France, each with their own histories and subcultures.

But, as we move into the latter half of the 2020s, one thing is key: regardless of region, comics are cool.

No longer the sole province of nerds and picky readers, comics are in vogue, both as living pieces of art on bookshelves and walls, and inspiring everything from Netflix’s next big hit to summer blockbusters. But where did they come from and how did we get here?

Comics are as varied as the genres they cover and the mediums they’re created in, from satirical single panels in political magazines and daily newspapers to short strips such as Fred Bassett, Peanuts and Strange Planet, to longer story-length titles like Watchman, Kabuki or adaptations of other media, such as The Last Unicorn, Doctor Who or Hellraiser.



## COVER STORIES

Top: The cover of the 2019 edition of classic comic Watchmen, by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons/DC Comics. Above: The cover of the graphic novel adaptation of Peter S. Beagle’s The Last Unicorn by Peter B. Gillis (author), and Renae De Liz (artist).

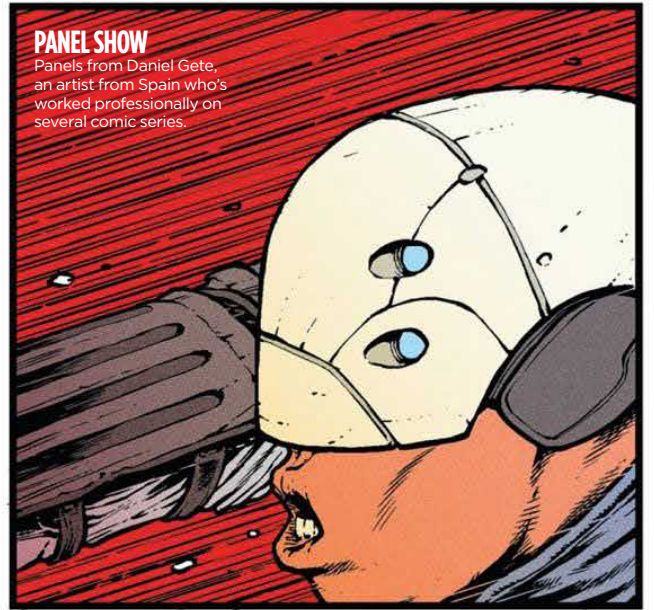
The most freeing part of the medium is its versatility; each publication or strip has its own distinctive art style, some black and white, others coloured. Some are written by one person, others are collaborations between writers and artists, with patron saints such as Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Alan Moore. And, now we live in an online world, they’re often available in digital form as well, meaning they’re even more accessible than ever for anyone with a phone, Kindle or library card.

## ART AS EDUCATION

Art has always been a way for people to tell stories, dating back to hunters in the famed French caves of Lascaux – now a UNESCO World Heritage site – where the art has been dated to around 20,000 years ago. This was well before humans could write, before complex civilisations existed or words were pressed into clay tablets or scribed on papyrus paper.

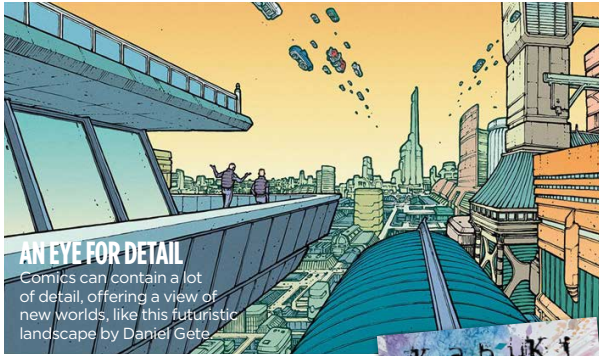
In times when literacy was rare, art became instructive. Look at ➔





© Daniel Gete/Oni Press

© Daniel Gete/Omi Press



### AN EYE FOR DETAIL

Comics can contain a lot of detail, offering a view of new worlds, like this futuristic landscape by Daniel Gete

→ stained glass in churches, which was used to tell stories to non-literate worshippers back when every window was not just about glory to God but also about instructing a populace who could rarely read, let alone had access to the Bible in anything but Latin.

By this definition, the Bayeux Tapestry – a 70-metre work that retells the Battle of Hastings of 1066 in colour and stitches – is, technically, a woven narrative that could easily be an early ancestor of modern graphic novels. It has a narrative. It has scope and characters with their own arcs. And it exists today thanks to its fame.

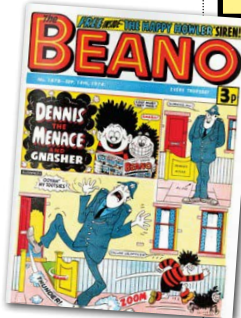
### FROM SATIRE TO SOMETHING MORE

Early newspapers used drawn images where we would use black and white or colour photographs today, relying on artists to illustrate stories. As a result, the first comics were often found in satirical newspapers. Thanks to politics being a universal medium for comedy and caricature, these became named “cartoons” in 1845, although that term is much,



### COMICS AS ART

Kabuki's bright covers make the graphic novel really pop.



### SATIRICAL COMEDY

The first issue of The Beano was published in 1938 and is still going strong today.

“The Bayeux Tapestry could easily be an early ancestor of modern graphic novels”



### LASCAUX

These cave drawings in France date from around 20,000 years ago, preserved thanks to the depth and humidity.



### BAYEUX

A panel from the 11th-century Bayeux Tapestry, which shows the Battle of Hastings in 1066.



© Asha Bardon

### ART AS INSTRUCTION

St Stephen's Church in Norwich has a modern stained glass window that tells the visual story of the Calming of the Storm from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

## GET STARTED WITH SHORTER COMICS

Comics can be short and sweet, long and complicated, or somewhere in between. Let's start small...

Given the sheer number of comic books and the decades of publication, it's sometimes difficult to know where to start. If you like superheroes, then DC and Marvel are a good place to start, but given the complex storylines and lore, it can be a little overwhelming. For this reason, if you want to get into mainstream comics, try their cinematic universes to help learn the basics. But if you want actual comics, start with strips over long form.

Start short; if you like sci-fi, try **Strange Planet**, which mixes human humour with grey aliens



living day to day. If you like gaming, try **Penny Arcade**. For politics, look to newspapers like the New Yorker. Social media like Instagram is an excellent place for short comics, as well as sites such as Webtoon and Pixiv. Solicit friends, artists and otherwise, seek recommendations and go from there.

© Nathan W. Pyle/Penny Arcade

older, and originally referred to a kind of Italian art form on over-sized paper.

During this period, the idea of serialisation was popular, with novels serialised in literary magazines and only afterwards printed into so-called penny dreadfuls and early paperbacks. It's no surprise that the latter evolved into a way to bring illustrated stories and cartoons to the masses.

Modern comics were born in the early 20th century, with The Adventures of Tintin by Hergé (the pen name of Georges Remi) in 1929 and The Beano in 1938. In the US, Detective Comics (or DC) was founded in 1937 and introduced

Superman the following year, ushering in the Golden Age of Comics.

Such publications were initially aimed at children, with serialised stories and popular characters – including superheroes – but each has its own distinctive art style, some black and white, others coloured, some available weekly and others sold as graphic novels or collected volumes.

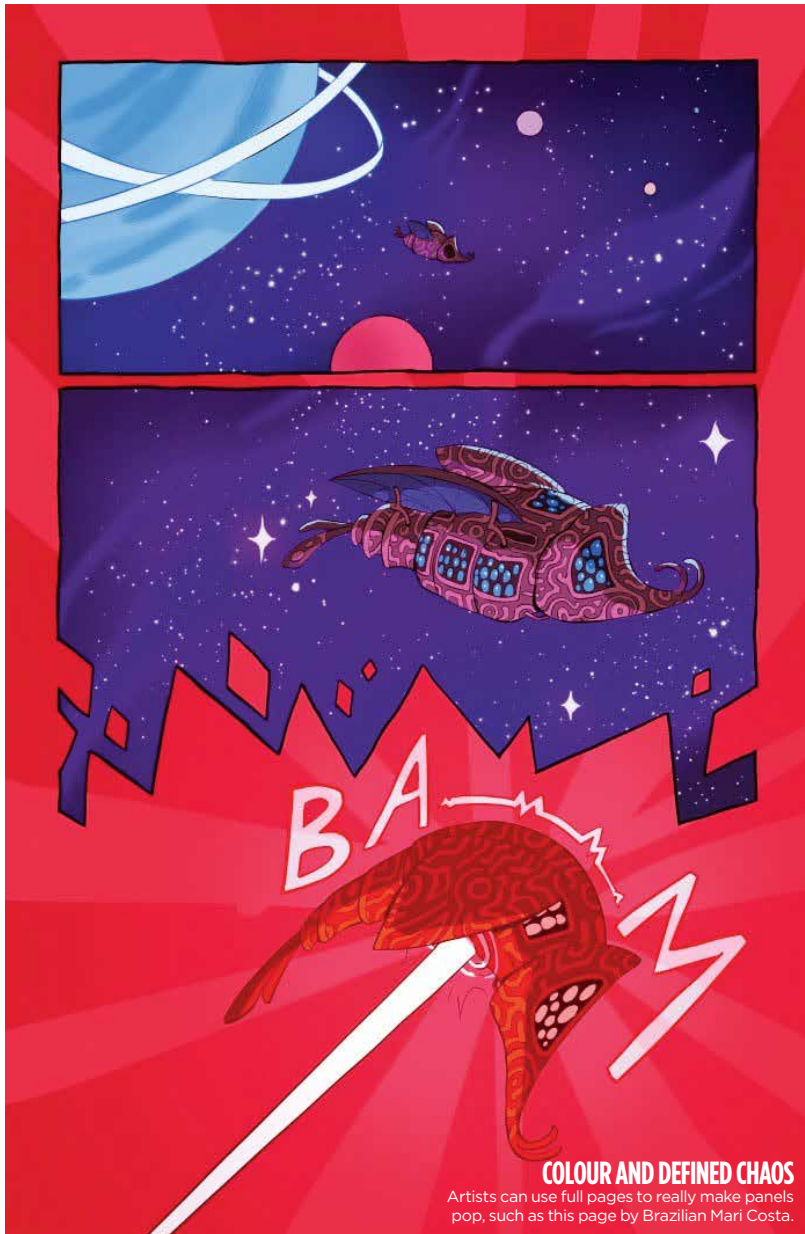
Comic books feel like a modern and accessible format, mixing art and words to create a hybrid medium that takes the best of imagery and mixes it with the narrative found in language.

Yet they've been looked down on for decades as somehow being lesser than novels and other non-art-based fiction. Thankfully, the digital age means anyone, be they an artist or a writer with a flare for storytelling, can publish work online for all to read.

### FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

**Austin Briggs**, an artist from Tacoma in the US, says: “What draws me to comics is the freedom – they feel bold, personal and unapologetically creator-driven. Indie and strip formats especially have this raw honesty where you can feel the artist behind every panel. That authenticity is what makes them powerful and why readers connect so deeply with them.”

Comic books have been viewed as somehow inferior or even cheating when it comes to exploring narratives,



**COLOUR AND DEFINED CHAOS**  
Artists can use full pages to really make panels pop, such as this page by Brazilian Mari Costa.

but the reality is that, thanks to the accessibility of the format, comic books are an evolved form, which takes the best from novels along with the distinctive art styles of their artists.

Think of comics and you'll probably focus on the United States, the ancestral home of modern comics, on DC and Marvel, the two great publishers of so many popular series, from Batman to The Avengers. But that's only the start. When you mention comics, especially the Big Two, it's often superheroes who come to mind first.

**Daniel Gete**, an artist from Spain who worked on *Uber: Invasion*, *Warrior Nun* and *Biker Mice from Mars*, explains: "I guess I love Western comics and particularly superhero comics ➤➤"



**STYLE AND SUBSTANCE**  
Some art styles are all about intricate and sweeping details, like this panel by Austin Briggs.

## LEARN HOW TO MAKE ART LIKE ANTON W BLAKE

**Anton W Blake** is a cartoonist and TTRPG designer based in Austin, Texas.



"While the techniques and technology have changed a lot, the major steps of making comics have persisted since the early days of the medium. Unlike in most mainstream

American comics, where these steps are done by different people, most indie creators wear many or all of the hats of comic creation. There are, of course, deviations from the process, such as taking shortcuts due to tight deadlines."



### ANTON'S WORKFLOW:

#### 1 THUMBNAIL SKETCHES

"These are done small and are where the layout, panel composition, perspective and speech bubble/caption placements are decided. The majority of the storytelling and flow of a comic is done at this stage. Doing all of that heavy lifting at this stage will always make the other stages easier."

#### 2 PENCILS

"Next, the thumbnails become more refined drawings. Depending on the artist or the art team, this stage might be very tightly drafted or still somewhat sketchy."

#### 3 INKS

"This is where the linework enters its final rendered appearance. It can range from following the pencils very closely to adding further depth, energy and contrast."

#### 4 COLOURS

"This is mostly done digitally these days, but some (myself included) use a variety of traditional mediums, sometimes mixing digital and traditional."

#### 5 LETTERING

"Every speech bubble, caption, font choice and the majority of sound effects are added this way (though some artists add those in at the pencil/inking stage). For books that I write, I also treat this as a place to revise dialogue."



# Feature

➔ because that's what I started reading as a child. They were simply there first for me. Later, I started reading and also falling in love with European comics and manga, but superhero comics were my first love. I loved everything about them: the mythology, the costumes, those vibrant colours. They were easy to follow and so much fun. I was mainly focused on the art: Alan Davis, Jim Lee, Arthur Adams. That's how they got me!"

There are smaller but still influential publishers like Dark Horse Comics, IDW, Oni Press and the like. Then there are all the independent publishers and artists who post their art online, either on their own custom sites and social media like Instagram, X and Facebook, or via platforms such as Webtoon, Pixiv and ArtStation.

But comics are as universal as art, with myriad styles and focuses, from black and white and simplicity, to full-colour panels and pages that tell longer, more complex narratives.

## EVOLUTION AND ACCESSIBILITY



**Stephen Brown**, a UK artist who's made the jump, says: "Going from indie to professional work has meant higher

standards and tighter deadlines, but the creative passion remains the same. I think Western comics stay popular because they evolve with culture, and the internet has made them more accessible than ever."

**Mari Costa**, an artist from Melbourne, Australia,



## IMPORTANT MOMENTS

Artists can craft moments of emotional impact using lighting and colour, like in this example from Austin Briggs.

explains: "As a child growing up in Brazil, I was an avid reader of Turma da Monica (Monica's Gang) and it's even the primary way I learned how to read, so I've bought into the comic book hype for a long time!"

Most people immediately think of US comics but countries like France have had a complex comic culture for decades, with series like Barbarella and *Le Transperceneige* (Snowpiercer). Many of these stories are probably better known by their film or TV adaptations but the graphic novels

have their own stories and fanbases who are just as loyal to the medium.

There are plenty of stories that, like manga, find themselves adapted as movies and television shows – films such as *Snowpiercer* (which exists as both) and *The Eternaut*,



## TALE OF A TRAIN

A page from the post-apocalyptic French graphic novel *Le Transperceneige* (known as *Snowpiercer* in English).

which is based on the Spanish comic book by Héctor Germán Oesterheld and Francisco Solano López, for instance. With many of these series, like *The Boys*, *Strange Planet* and *The Old Guard*, hitting massive streaming platforms such as Amazon Prime, Apple Originals and Netflix, as well as independent creators on YouTube, this means a potential worldwide audience

“Comics are continuing to evolve and change, sometimes changing society, too”

## FREE AND EASY

Because of the medium's freedom, comics can be made in any style, with Daniel Gete's style well suited to comics.



who might never have otherwise seen them, but who will now look out for the comic and read it.

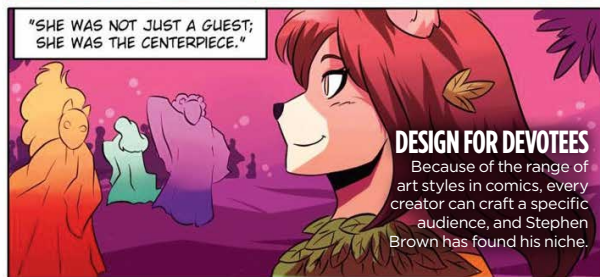
Thanks to the internet and the rise in non-English media – partly due to the popularity of manga and similar media from across Asia – this has led to curiosity around comic books from other countries, from China to France. And thanks to the internet and international bookstores, it's also a lot easier to access both original series in their native languages and authentic versions in translation.

Mari continues: "Seeing the evolution of Western comics, from cape comics to graphic novels to webcomics all the way to webtoons, has been really incredible! I'm super-grateful it's happening in my lifetime!"



## ADAPTATION = NEW AUDIENCES

The Eternaut is a 1957 sci-fi classic from Argentina, and is just one of many comic series to get a recent live action adaptation by Netflix.



## DESIGN FOR DEVOTEES

Because of the range of art styles in comics, every creator can craft a specific audience, and Stephen Brown has found his niche.



"TO BE CHOSEN... IS TO SURRENDER."

## MAKING THE JUMP TO BROADCAST MEDIA

There's a long legacy of series that have seen adaptations that give a new lease of life to old stories.

Comic books might be fashionable but they've also become the next big thing when it comes to adaptations in other forms of media. While we often assume that this is something new tied to the cinematic worlds of publishers such as Marvel, it's not. For example, Superman hit radios between 1940 and 1951, and has now found new life as a podcast. The franchise then moved to TV, with spin-off series such as Smallville, and more movie adaptations than you can shake a cape at. Yes, the MCU did kick-start a cinematic universe, but comics have been inspiring TV series, novels and film for decades. The



## RADIO WAVES

Many don't know that Superman had a radio show, now reborn as a podcast.

real question is, as media evolves and our consumption of it changes, where will comics go next? How long until we have holographic comics or mixed media for VR headsets that brings comics into augmented reality?



## ARTISTIC LICENCE

The internet and digital tools mean it's easier than ever for artists to get their styles out there, like Mari Costa's cutesy comic art here.

## UNIVERSAL THEMES

Life inspires art and art is very much inspired by life, as simpler strips tell universal stories, like this short strip by Mari Costa.

Nowadays it's super-easy to get started making your own comic and I encourage anyone to try it."

As we enter a new digital golden age, comics are continuing to evolve and change, sometimes changing society at the same time, as well as introducing new generations to classics of the genre, plus new takes on older narratives, such as 2025's Superman and the upcoming Avengers: Doomsday.

Regardless, 2026 is a great time to be a comic book reader and this is only set to continue as we edge towards 2030 and beyond. The world is embracing original work, in English and other languages, as a dynamic form of media, offering new stories to tell beyond what we're used to. ●



# Development sheet

## Artist PROFILE

### Jaehyun Kim

LOCATION: South Korea



Jaehyun Kim is a visual development artist with 10 years' experience across film, TV, animation and games. He specialises in

world-building, concept design and establishing visual directions. His passion is defining the core aesthetic that brings creative visions to life.

[www.artstation.com/oha\\_jhk](http://www.artstation.com/oha_jhk)

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PROJECT TITLE: **FLEE**

**Jaehyun Kim** revels in building worlds and establishing the aesthetics that will breathe life into his creations. Here he guides us through his approach, from exploring the layout to adding fine details

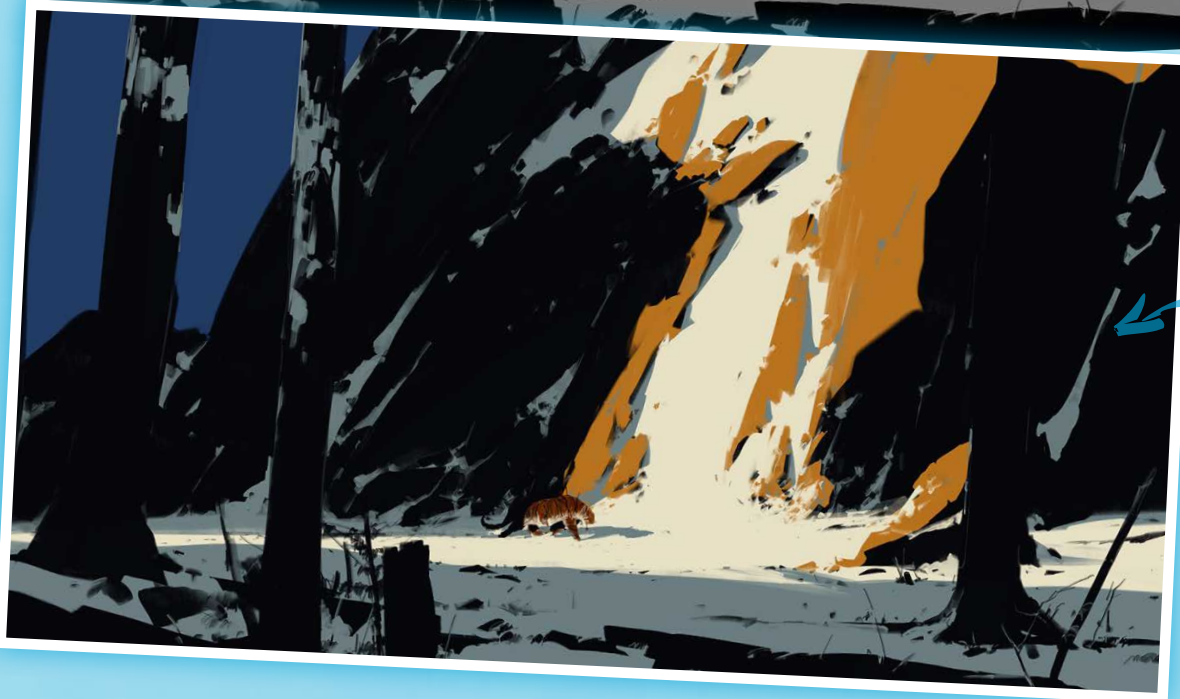
### Black and white sketch

This is a crucial phase where I explore layout, form and lighting. Though the sketch is rough, most key creative decisions are made here. It's essential to have a clear vision of the final image in mind while establishing the foundational structure of the piece.



### Initial colour blocking

I apply colours while maintaining simplicity, resisting the urge to jump into details too early. By using minimal colours and values, I ensure the foundation is solid. A strong start at this stage is vital for maintaining the integrity of the artwork through to completion.





## Refining values and forms

Building on the initial plan, I push the colours and values a few steps further. I gradually refine the shapes and silhouettes to add more clarity. At this point, the image begins to look more organised and becomes much easier for the viewer's eyes to navigate.

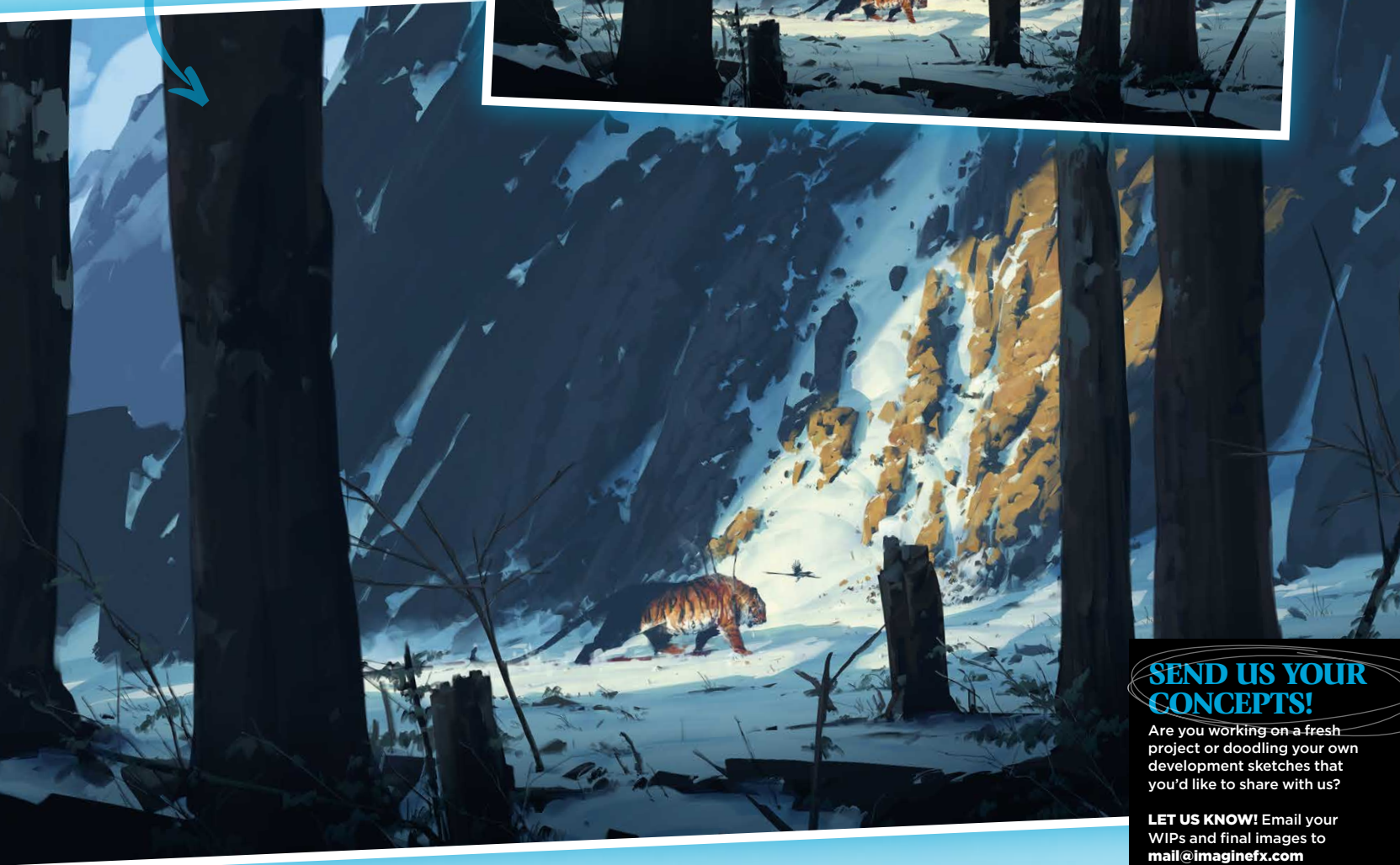
## Enhancing mood and depth

I intensify the scene by adding atmospheric perspective and ambient occlusion. This allows me to break down colours and values into finer increments. I introduce smaller elements and intricate details, ensuring the mood remains cohesive while the visual complexity increases.



## Final polishing

I zoom in and out constantly to add fine details without disrupting the overall balance. After a final check of the mood, I apply the smallest details in form and value. This final touch adds a 'moist', polished quality, bringing the entire piece to a professional finish.



## 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](mailto:mail@imaginefx.com)

# Miro Petrov

Fantastical beings are the name of the game here, with digital art used to create something that looks more traditional

## Artist PROFILE

**Miro Petrov**

LOCATION: Bulgaria



Miro is a concept artist and art director with 20 years of experience specialising in character and creature design, and environmental artwork. He has published two art books: *The Art of Miro Petrov: The Fellowship* and *The Art of Miro Petrov, Volume 2*. Companies he has worked with include *Wizards of the Coast*, *Riot Games*, *Gameloft* and *Facebook*.  
<https://soulsurvivor.artstation.com>

### GOBLIN

"A sketch of yet another goblin design. There is no specific backstory behind this character; just a pure training on the paper."



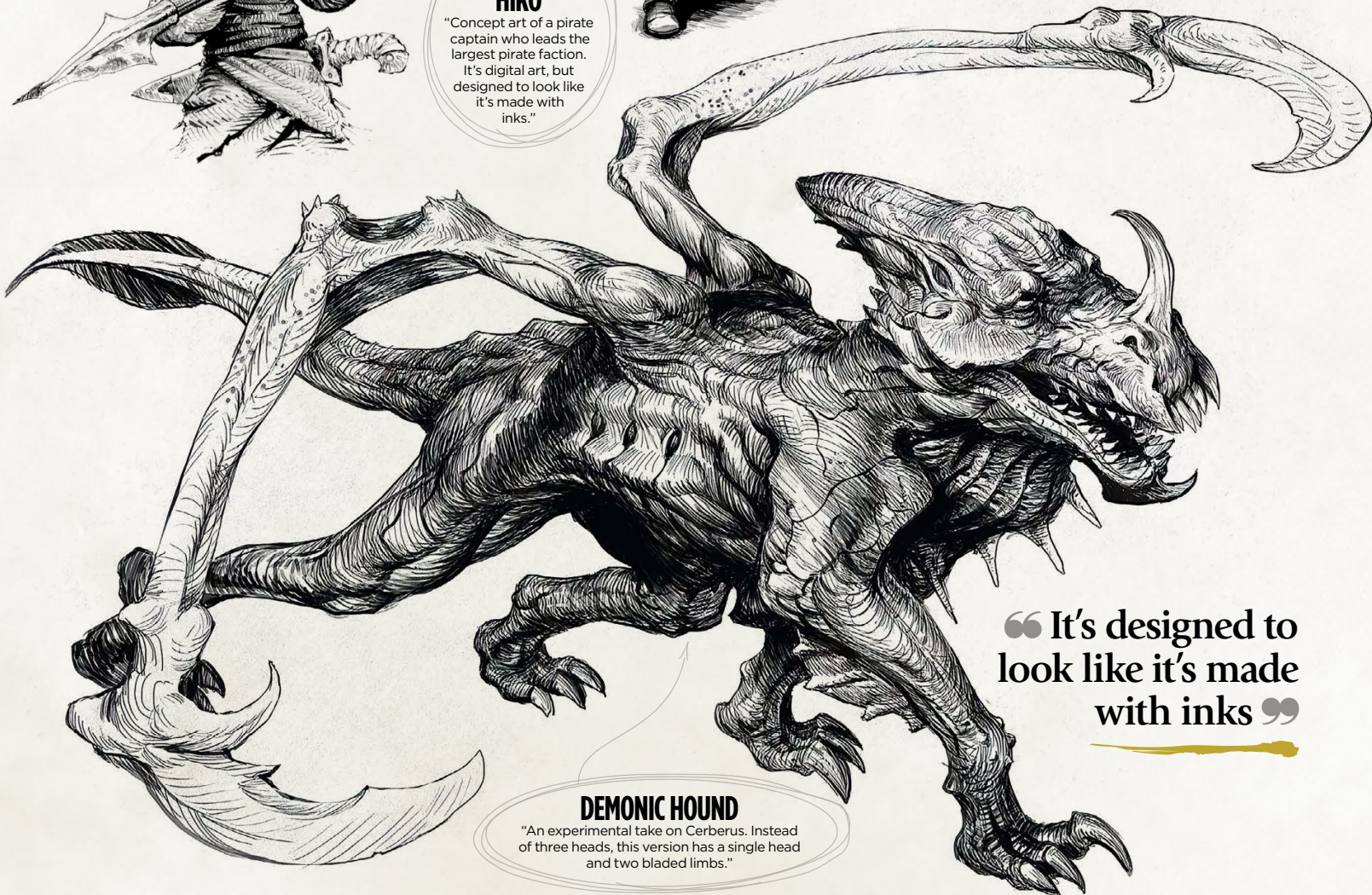
### WEREWOLF

"A head concept sketch of the creature. I experimented with slightly different proportions. I drew this one with a 2B pencil."



### CAPTAIN HIKO

"Concept art of a pirate captain who leads the largest pirate faction. It's digital art, but designed to look like it's made with inks."



“It’s designed to look like it’s made with inks”

### DEMONIC HOUND

"An experimental take on Cerberus. Instead of three heads, this version has a single head and two bladed limbs."



## COMBAT SUIT 5

"A conceptual sketch of an exoskeleton armour suit. I was exploring a bit of a different approach to this subject."



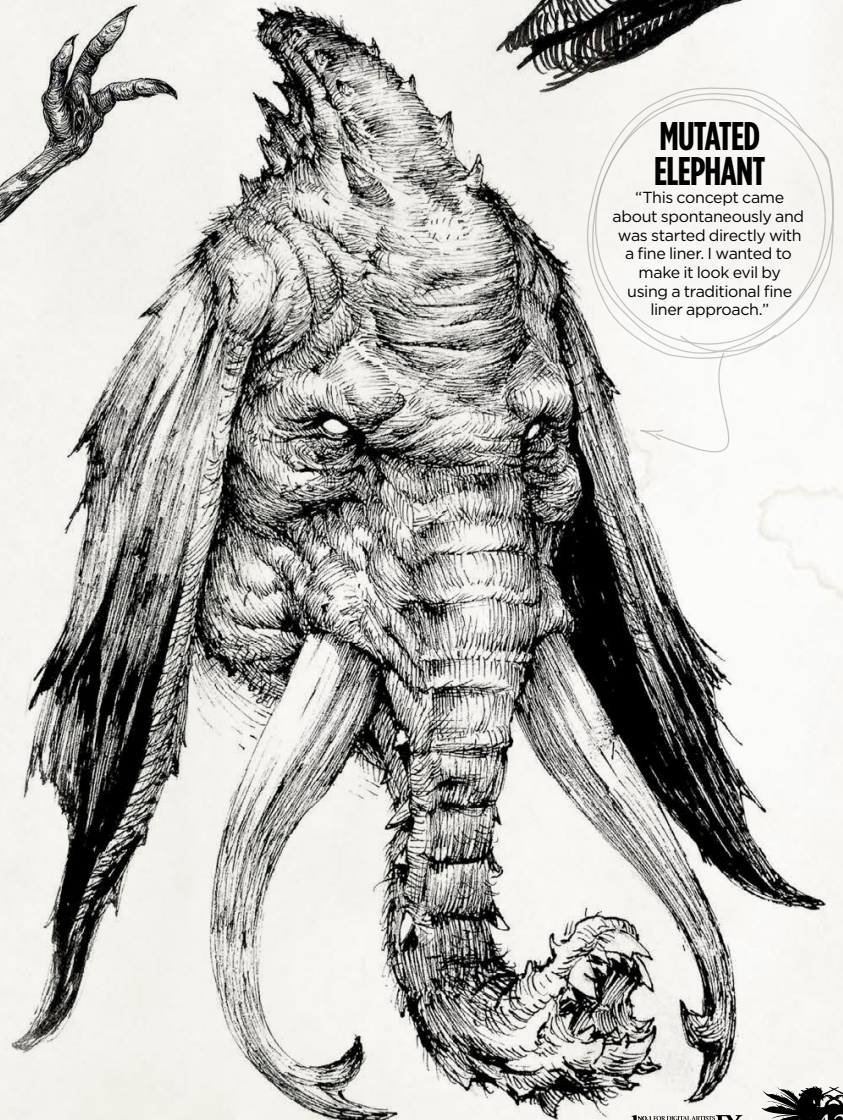
## BATTLE DWARF

"This dwarf was inspired by the popular game Warcraft. He is a protector and warrior of the mighty air kingdom of the winged dwarves."



## MIND CONTROLLER

"A demon sorcerer who manipulates minds and commands the demonic hound on the left page. He was also created digitally."



## MUTATED ELEPHANT

"This concept came about spontaneously and was started directly with a fine liner. I wanted to make it look evil by using a traditional fine liner approach."

### ALIEN

"A conceptual drawing of a demonic-looking alien species based on an idea that I had a long time ago, created with a 0.05mm fine liner."



### MONSTER SLAYER

"I wanted to portray a veteran demon hunter, along with the trophies he has collected and wears as proof of his battles."

### WOODLAND DWARF

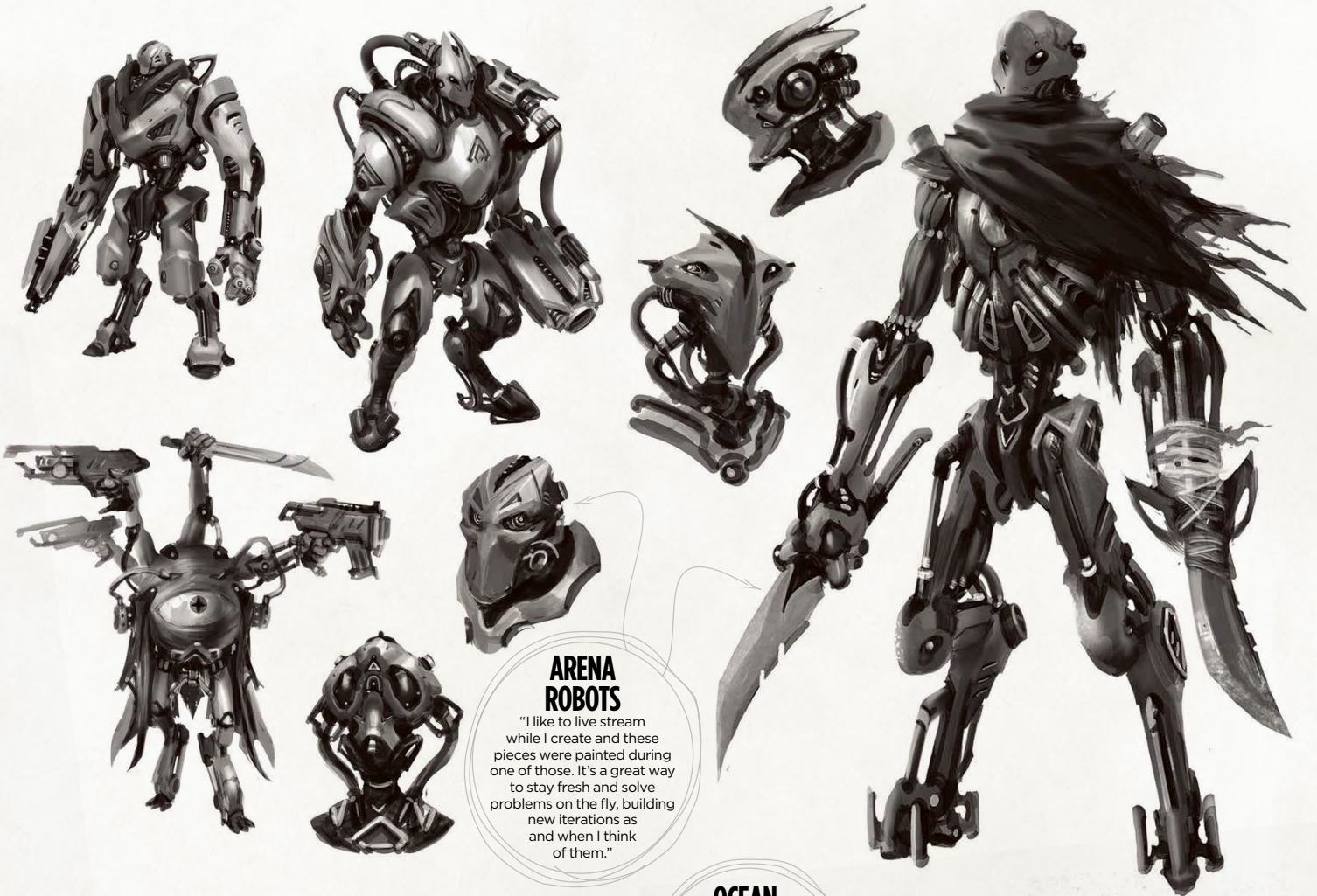
"An idea for a new type of dwarf that lives in forests, wearing helmets made of wood and animal materials."



### BIRD MAN

"My first more successful drawing, which was published on several art websites. I really love to mix birds with human proportions."





## ARENA ROBOTS

"I like to live stream while I create and these pieces were painted during one of those. It's a great way to stay fresh and solve problems on the fly, building new iterations as and when I think of them."

“These were created during an online live stream as conceptual sketches”

## OCEAN MAN

"An idea for a race that lives in the depths of the Atlantic Ocean. It's a traditional concept sketch made with a 2B pencil."

## BIRD GOBLIN

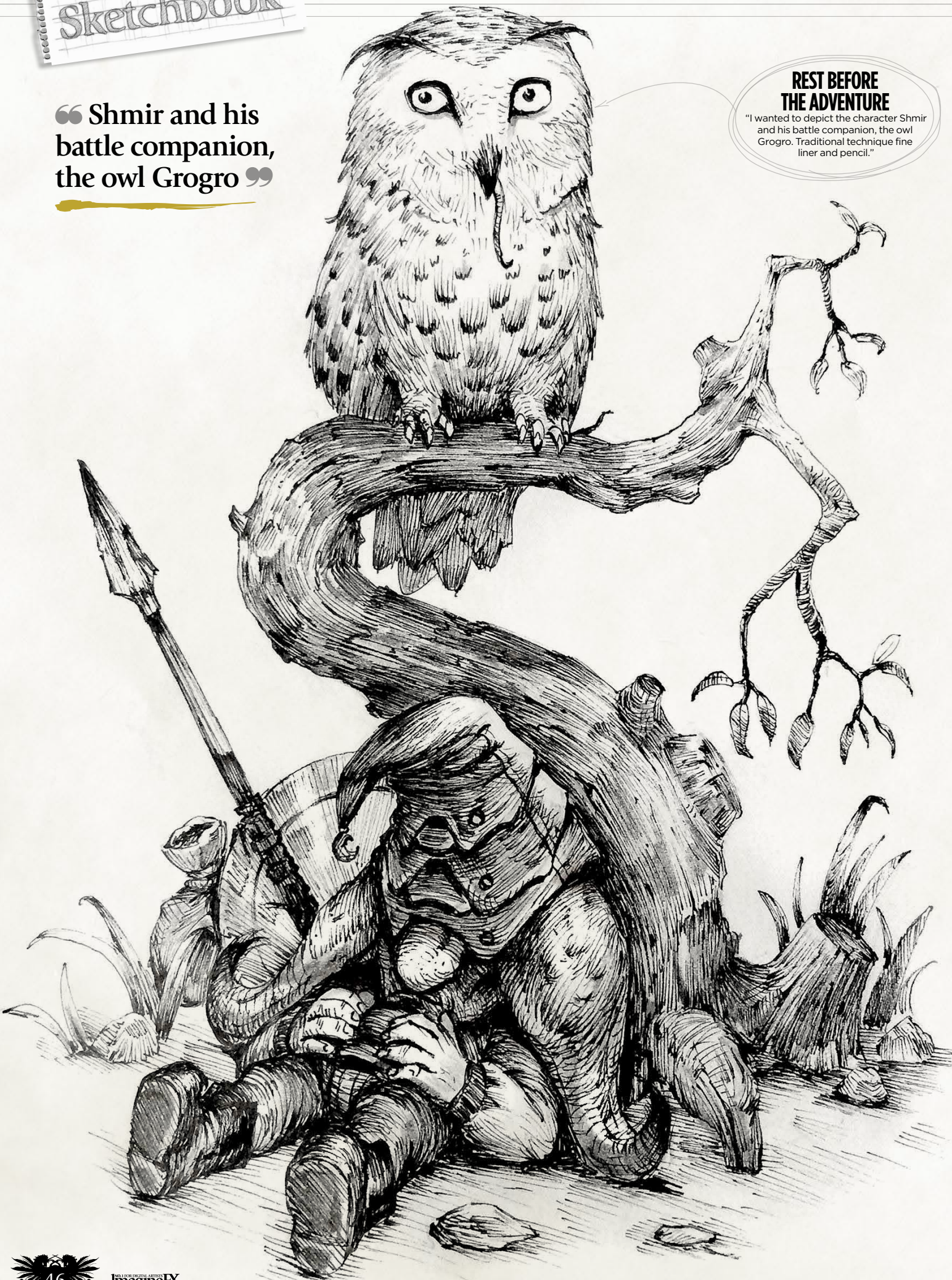
"A new race of blind goblins with a twist on their original concept. Their facial features resemble those of birds."



“ Shmir and his battle companion, the owl Grogro ”

**REST BEFORE THE ADVENTURE**

“I wanted to depict the character Shmir and his battle companion, the owl Grogro. Traditional technique fine liner and pencil.”





## JACK

"Inspired by Jack and the Beanstalk, I love the book, so I wanted to express it on the paper with the fine liner."

## PIRATE

"Pirates have always fascinated me. In this piece, the inspiration from Pirates of the Caribbean is clear. Again, it's digital artwork imitating traditional ink."

## GLADIATORS OF THE ARENA 2

"I have been a long-time fan and player of Quake Arena. These characters were created during an online live stream as conceptual sketches, focusing on character design and development."



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](mailto:sketchbook@imaginefx.com)



# URGENT APPEAL



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

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

### We must act now.

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

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

### Will you help us by donating?

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

To help protect vulnerable children, donate online at: [www.hopeandhomes.org/donate](http://www.hopeandhomes.org/donate). Or call **01722 790 111** Monday – Friday 9am - 5pm.

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

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

I would like to make a donation to Hope and Homes for Children:

Name		Address	
Tel		Email	
I enclose a cheque for £ <input type="text"/> made payable to Hope and Homes for Children or please debit £ <input type="text"/>			
from my credit/debit card (details below)			
I would like to donate by debit/credit card			
<input type="checkbox"/> Visa	<input type="checkbox"/> Mastercard	<input type="checkbox"/> Maestro	<input type="checkbox"/> CAF card <small>Maestro only</small>
Card no. <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Start date <input type="text"/>	Expiry date <input type="text"/>	Issue no. <input type="text"/>	Security no. <input type="text"/> <small>on signature strip</small>
Signature <input type="text"/>		Date <input type="text"/>	

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

Name of taxpayer <input type="text"/>	Today's date <input type="text"/>
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Please let us know if you would like to hear from us:

by phone  by email  
 please tick here if you would NOT like to hear from us by post.

**Please make cheques payable to 'Hope and Homes for Children' and send to Hope and Homes for Children, FREEPOST RTKX-TYLS-JHHB, East Clyffe Farm Barn, Salisbury Road, Steeple Langford, Salisbury SP3 4BF.**

You can view our privacy policy here [www.hopeandhomes.org/privacy](http://www.hopeandhomes.org/privacy).

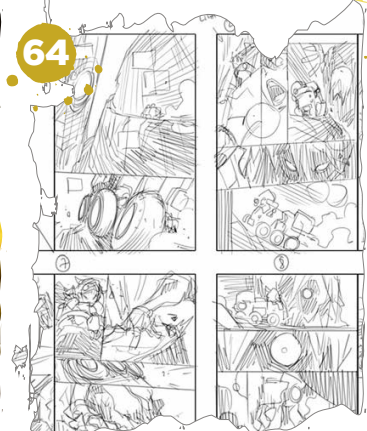
# NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX Workshops

**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:

### 50 **Painting a cover on a deadline**

Brett Bean on how to get things done when your assignment was due yesterday.

### 54 **Guide with detail**

Connor Sheehan on how to make your art really stand out by adding small feature flourishes and fine details.

### 56 **Make the most of colour**

Tony Fotl on the many ways in which you can guide the viewer and enhance your storytelling with colour.

### 62 **Block colours in illustrations**

Fjell balances detail with broader strokes when putting together her artwork.

### 64 **How to master comic panels**

Ludo Lullabi takes us through his entire process, from idle sketching to the final tweaks.

### 70 **Stay on target**

Artem Chebokha says it's important to keep your goal in sight through every stage.

# Artist insight PAINTING A COVER ON A DEADLINE

## Artist PROFILE

**Brett Bean**  
LOCATION: US

Brett is the creator of D'Orc, the hilarious high-fantasy romp from Image Comics, and artist on The Dungeon Crawler Carl: Crocodile, which is out in autumn 2026 from Vault Comics.  
[www.brettbean.com](http://www.brettbean.com)

**Brett Bean** shares his process on how to get things done when your assignment was due yesterday!



I was asked to do a third printing late at night, and the question is always "how fast can you turn this in?" I've worked in production for 20 years – it's *always* that question. And I've given the same answer for 20 years: "I will make it as good as I can with the time I have." Deadlines always come first. But by

the third printing of D'Orc, I was swamped with work and deadlines. It's a great problem to have!

The first cover was story related, and the second cover was a close-up character study. I knew I wanted a hero shot for the third cover, and I had to do it quick! This gave me only a day, and in production that's a normal thing. It's problem solving, not always art solving. I needed

something fast, but still quality to the best I could do.

The big reveal of the major characters had been shown on social media and various variant covers, so I knew it was necessary to have them all in the cover. I also believed that if I did a nice hero shot, I could use it for the graphic novel collection. Factor in your decisions and make sure to work smarter, not harder!

## How I create... A COMIC BOOK COVER



**1 Pick a highlight**  
This image is not a moment from the issue, but a snapshot of what the audience is in for. By adding common elements, it's easy for someone to interpret what the world is about and let people know where this will take place. I did this drawing for a poster earlier and cut it out for the third printing cover. I thought I could do a more aggressive stance for my hero shot.



**2 Draw your cover star**  
I knew that I didn't have time to ink an entire cover, but I still really wanted the hand-drawn feel. I decided to meet myself in the middle and do a combination of digital and traditional. This way, I manage to get the speed of digital and the look of traditional – where it counts! I inked the heroes so that I could scan and slap them over the background painting.



**3 Arrange the background**  
I added more fire and special effects to the background; elements that surround the character and refocus eyes to the shot. Normally, I do this with the logo on the cover so I can make it feel 'on purpose'. I also added swords and blood upfront to change the elements I snagged from the poster, but also to create a nice foreground, middle ground and background element.

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## COMIC BOOK COVER



### Use layers

Keep your elements of tonal range on the important parts in your illustration. I retain a layer that turns colours on and off as I paint and switch back and forth. If I've done my job, the highest contrast elements (black to white) are in the characters and the arrow pointing at them. I try to keep the eye looking in the centre - that is, until we slap a giant logo on the cover and change it all...

## Bring the fire

For the fire, I made shapes in the background that felt pleasing to my eye. When I have shapes, I use the motion blur and smudge tools in Photoshop to elongate and create visual interest and energy. I couldn't care less about reality; let photographs and anal-retentive artists handle that kind of stuff!

## Stay varied

Simple to busy: dirt, grime, spots, patterns, mechanical greebles, flames, shapes of the light and any element you wish. They bring focus in a scene, create variational interest, give the eye a moment to rest and follow, and draw attention to what's important in a scene. Pick your moments. It's an artist's choice, and they influence style and design.

## Keep to the theme

I try to make art that reflects the character and hopefully makes the audience smile. The technique, brush or flick you use don't matter; find your purpose and set out! Always have something to aim for in a character design, environment, scene or illustration. Don't design in the dark. If you have a purpose or a keyword then you can successfully problem-solve. But without it, there's no answer that you can work towards.

## Brushes

If people like your art, they will not care what brush you used. That's an excuse for hard work. Put in the time, and you won't regret living a creative life. It doesn't have to equal money or fame, nor should it. But your eyes will open, your smile will get bigger and your heart will expand if you can find being creative in your life.



## Start drawing

Put down the videogame, phone and excuse to not create, and start creating. Hell, put down this article and stop as soon as you read this! It's better to just create something, fail and learn from it then read this article like it will change you. It won't! But living life, drawing, creating and painting will change you, I guarantee it. So here's my butt in a seat, living life and creating in balance. Your turn.





## Technique focus

# GUIDE WITH DETAIL

### Artist PROFILE

**Connor Sheehan**

LOCATION: England

Connor is the co-founder of 5th Column Studio. He blends the different game and film art pipeline that drives his studio's projects into his own work.  
<https://bit.ly/41dcgSI>

**Connor Sheehan** on how he makes his art stand out by adding small feature flourishes



"For this official art reveal from Kaidan, I started with a 3D mock-up. Generic elements like the trees and rocks were pulled from asset stores, but anything that required a specific design was built by hand for full control. Some asset store meshes can be insanely heavy on the computer! Once I was happy with the composition, I made subtle

adjustments to the colour balance, contrast and value in the compositor or in Photoshop. When it comes to the paintover, I always work from large, sweeping changes first and only move into the finer details once the big picture is locked in. If you can, keep the refinement and detail most concentrated at your focal points. Let the periphery parts of the composition be a bit rougher – it helps guide the viewer's eye!" ●

## How I create... A 3D ART BATTLE SCENE





**1 3D mock-up**  
Unless I am purposefully creating a loose exploratory sketch, I prefer to mock up my paintings inside a 3D scene. The beauty of this approach is that everything stays malleable throughout the entire development process, and it slots naturally into game, film and animation pipelines.



**2 Composition, lighting and colour**  
With the scene in place, I focus on composing and lighting the shot. Working in 3D means I can generate variations in almost no time, which is genuinely one of the most enjoyable parts of the process. That said, it's easy to get lost in the options.



**3 Painting over**  
The great thing about having a 3D base is that you can never truly destroy it, so don't be precious about the paintover. Sometimes, the best move is to lay down heavy, broad strokes that completely obliterate the underlying detail, then slowly paint back in using the render as a guide.

## Artist insight

# HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF COLOUR

**Tony Foti** explains a number of ways in which you can guide the viewer and enhance your storytelling with colour

### Artist PROFILE

**Tony Foti**  
LOCATION: US

Tony Foti is an illustrator who's been working on books, magazines, entertainment and games of all kinds for over 15 years.  
[www.tonyfotiart.com](http://www.tonyfotiart.com)



Colour is one of the most important tools an artist has. The way you use your palette has a significant impact of the mood of your piece and how it reads to the viewer. The same principles that guide line, shape and value design are all relevant to colour. Contrast, rhythm,

texture, variety, shape... Colour is just one more lane where you get to play with all that stuff.

Colour can be scary for new artists, but it's the bit you get to have most fun with. If art were a meal, the values are the protein and the colours are the spices. When you nail the values and shapes, the colour is very forgiving. When realism is your

goal, the colour of the light sources is the guiding factor in your colour design. If leaning into abstraction, it's an endless playground. The goal is for you to understand that colour is here to make your life easier. It's one of the most emotional and instinctual ways to express yourself, as opposed to slightly more technical skills, such as perspective.



### 1 SIMPLICITY AND REST

This was meant to evoke the thrill of 80s PC roleplaying games, and one way I got there was with the kind of demonic skeleton you'd see on an album cover. It results in a lot of busy shapes and textures, which can camouflage the focal points. To counter that, I made the fire a fairly solid yellow. Keeping that area simple lets me be busy elsewhere without it all turning into texture noise.



### 2 COLOUR FRAMING

Now, take that concept and make it big. By grouping large sections of the art together with purple and blue, I've taken a complex list of illustration needs and simplified them into something that won't overpower the text of the magazine cover. The purple of the rocks and dragon create an implied frame around the centre of the image, and the big patch of blue at the top frames the title text.

## 3 COLOUR TEMPERATURE

The warmth of a colour helps evoke atmosphere



### Set the mood

Colour design is deeply emotional and personal. Some concepts are learned from experience, like red being a colour of heat (fire), love (blushing) and brutality (blood). This piece is the cover I did for Spotify's The Count of Monte Cristo audiobook, a story about betrayal, imprisonment and the count's personal mission of revenge. He sees it as his personal mission from God. The colour scheme is meant to reinforce that.

### Hue, value and saturation

The warm light of the off-screen oil lamp is hot, like the count's slightly absurd but entertaining mission. That heat is important. You can try to categorise colour temperature by hue, but value and saturation play a big part as well. A really light, high saturation electric blue can feel warmer than a dark, muddy red. It's different for each person. It's art. Where you put contrast communicates to the viewer. Since most of this piece is cool, the warm parts stand out, which is why I've kept most of them around the count. He should be the first read.

### Nature can be ignored

I've pushed the moonlight a lot further than nature would allow, because I'm here for the drama. In nature, darkness means a lack of colour, but this is art and we're here to tell a story. These decisions are where your personal style comes out.

### Blue for tragedy

The cool blues, which are more stage lighting than realistic moonlight, represent the tragedy these characters are each experiencing. Mercedes is bathed in it, because very little about her situation is enviable. The count has that blue across half of his face, to show the duality of his story.



## 4 COLOUR AS RHYTHM

As I know colour can lead the viewer's eye, it's also important to consider the rhythm of that pathway. The fast and hard staccato of heavy metal drums hits differently from the sweet and smooth transitions of bossa nova, and you have that same control with colour. This illustration uses the colour red like lily pads, so you can hop your way along the small red napkins over to the big red focal point that is Holden's hat. Avoiding the use of red in other parts of the painting keeps those reds special and noticeable. ➔

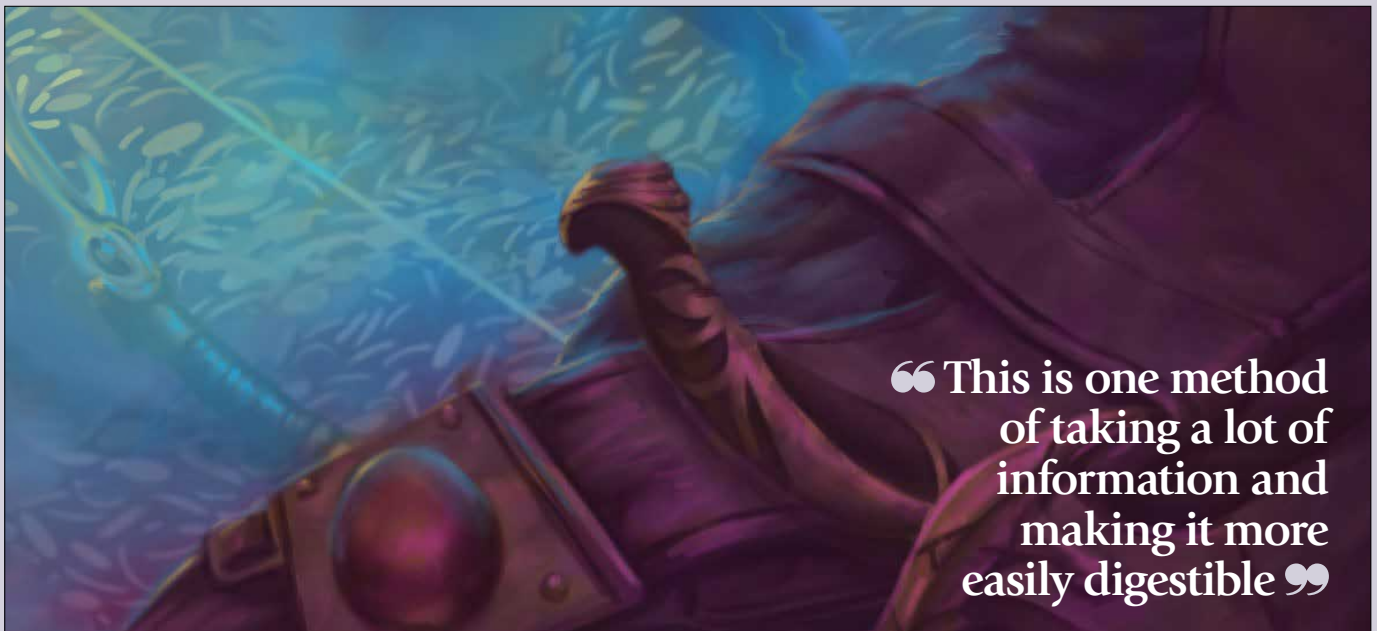


© Scholastic

## 5 LOCAL COLOUR VS LIGHT COLOUR

The local colour of an object is the way it looks under perfectly white light. Under a white light, every crayon in the box looks like the colour written on the side of that crayon. If you put the crayons under a red light, though, everything changes. This concept can be a whole

workshop in itself, but know that the colour of the light pushes everything it hits towards that colour. The severity depends on how pastel that light is, and the local colour and the texture of the object. Here you can see the blue light from above is influencing everything that isn't lit by the brighter light source, her magic missile spell.



© Scholastic

“ This is one method of taking a lot of information and making it more easily digestible ”

## 6 COLOUR GROUPING

You can use that same concept to group things together under the same colour. By placing several objects under one coloured light, they all take on that colour and fade into each other. At least, it feels that way. This is one method of taking a lot of information and making it more

easily digestible. In this piece for Scholastic Science World, the client asked for a treasure trove of Dungeons & Dragons elements to be scattered throughout, in celebration of the game's long and rich history. To paint each one of those things in their local colour would turn into static really quickly.

## 7 GRADIENTS

You can also use gradients to draw the eye to a particular spot. Back to the game box art. Since the heavy metal skeleton is meant to add more to the story of our ambiguous hero (the player character), I want to draw the eye down from his bony, beautiful mug and towards the first read. To do that, I've put cool blues and greens above, which gently blend into a warmer orange and eventual sunny yellow. Heroic yellow. The smooth colour transition is meant to counter the sharp edges of the demon.



## 8 EXCLUSIVITY

You can also use colour like a bullseye. In the game art, I've made sure that the red of our hero's cape isn't used anywhere else in the piece. By keeping all the other colours something other than bold red, it makes that bold red spot stand out immediately. If I choose to add more red items, each addition would take away from the overall impact of the cape. That doesn't mean you have to be exclusive with a colour, but it's a powerful tool.



## 9 THE GREYS

Now for something a little different. Diving back into my old schoolwork here. In this exciting painting of a cybernetic (but fully realistic) pear that is *definitely* sci-fi/fantasy art, I'm using colour very minimally. By letting the pear be the only object in the image with a saturate local colour, it looks more important than everything else in the image. Also, keeping my palette this small makes all the colour bounce effects stand out more. The reflection of the yellow on the plate and blinds gets to be its own point of interest.



## 10 THE SPRINKLES EFFECT

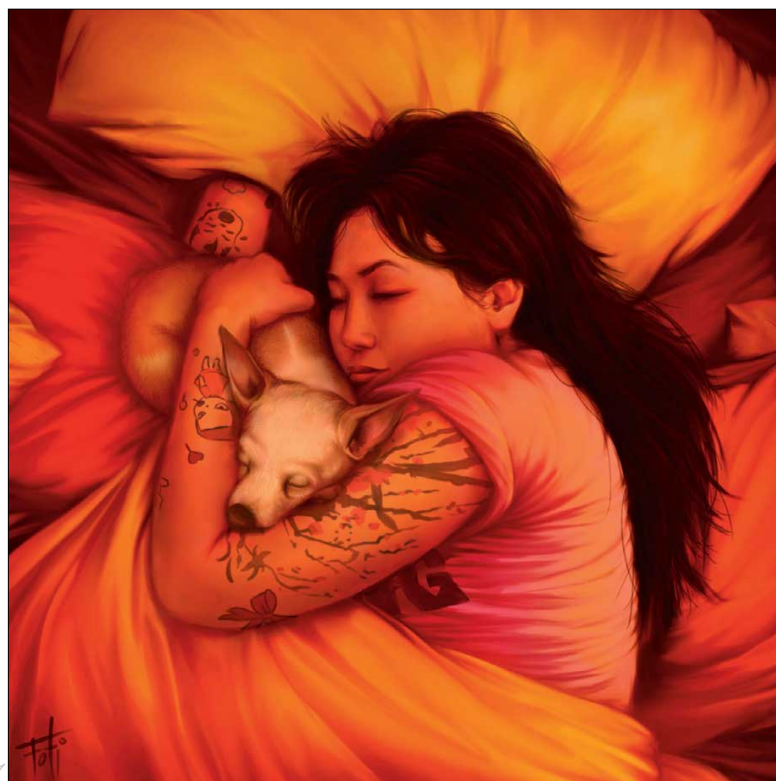
What if I told you this next part was based on a dream I had? A dream that was structured like an art lesson. Well, that's exactly what happened. If you want objects in your foreground to feel special and colourful, consider toning down the saturation in your background. The less colour in your background, the more colour in your foreground can shine. Putting different colours behind the sprinkles like this both illustrates that point and creates the flag of my kingdom. ➤



## PRINCESS OF SWORDS

### 11 FLAT AND GRAPHIC

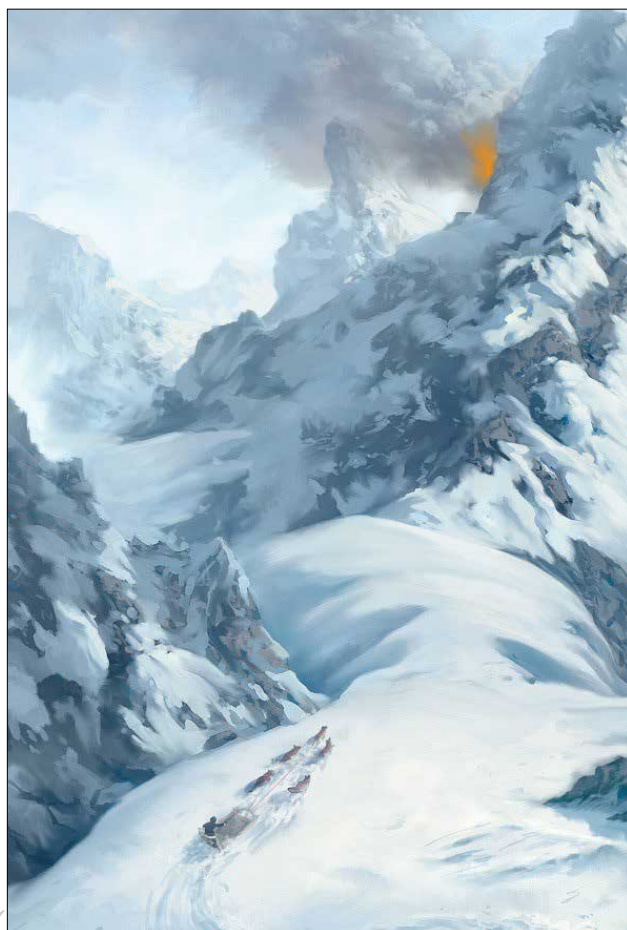
The same idea works for flat, comic-style art. Even if you're not using colour to represent anything like real light, you can use these same concepts with good old salt-of-the-earth flat colour. Here I've used the flatness of the sun/moon symbol behind Rachel to create a clear frame for the focal point. All contrast can be good contrast when used the right way, and realism versus iconography can be contrast.



## 12 HARMONY

I also like using colour to create harmony. In this portrait, I wanted to centre in on the bond between Jade and her dog Pickle. It's a warm, soft image, and the colour usage reflects that. Keeping everything in this analogous colour scheme creates the sense that they all belong together. By telling the story with colour, I can tell the story of the art.

“ Keeping everything in this analogous colour scheme creates the sense that they all belong together ”



## 13 DISHARMONY

In this snowy landscape, I've used colour to harmonise 95 per cent of the image, but made one part different. Like the idea of exclusivity, but I'm doing it with colour, texture and tone to an extreme. By keeping everything in an analogous blue colour scheme except for the orange fire, it makes that fire stand out way more than its real estate would normally allow.



## 14 COMPLEMENTING COLOUR COMBINATIONS

Colour complements are another way to make the focal point pop, which is half the battle. In this interior art for the Illumicrate edition of the novel *Slow Gods*, I knew that both of the environments I'd be painting the main character Maw in were predominately green. With that in mind, I chose red as the primary colour of his outfit. Red is the complementary colour to green, so placing one on top of the other creates the highest amount of contrast two colours can generate. Red/green, blue/orange and yellow/purple are the three most basic combos that I use to devastating effect in the art ring. ●



## Artist **PROFILE**

**Fjell**

LOCATION: Norway

Fjell is a freelance character and environment artist from Norway. She loves to illustrate, and works with various clients to bring their stories to life. <https://bit.ly/3NHGZnW>

## Technique focus

# BLOCK COLOURS IN ILLUSTRATIONS

**Fjell** talks about how she balances detail with broader strokes when putting together her artwork

"For this piece, I wanted to capture the cool, dark depths of the woods. This is also a dynamic moment where the character startles a monster that's rising out of the water. In the past, I've often found it challenging to balance detail when I'm inking a piece like this. I don't want my

illustrations to be too busy; they should have a clear, graphical look. To help me achieve this, I've recently started colour blocking. This takes the guesswork out of designing the right shapes and balancing details, and helps me to see whether I'm getting the right end result at an early stage." ●

## How I create...

### A STYLISED SERPENT



#### 1 Lively ink

Inking is my favourite part of the process. I think of it as drawing neatly, rather than making every line perfect. I use a textured ink brush at about 50% flow, and will often break up my lines to distress them. Once I've done my first ink pass, I always go back in and add some graphical black shapes.

#### 2 Colour block

To help design graphical shapes, I'll start colour blocking while I'm inking. This has sped up my workflow by taking out the guesswork of imagining how things will look. Blocking out the dirt and grass shapes made this much easier to ink, and seeing a glimpse of the final piece made me extra excited to finish it.



#### 3 Light and effects

I used opacity layers to add light to the scene, and multiply layers for the shadows. To create gradients that emphasise my focal point, I used a textured watercolour brush. Using the same brush, I added some dirt and texture in order to make the illustration look less digital. Finally, to push the drama in the scene, I added an artificial spotlight to the characters.

## Artist insight

# HOW TO MASTER COMIC PANELS

Comic artist and writer **Ludo Lullabi** takes us through his entire process, from idle sketching to adding the final tweaks

### Artist PROFILE

**Ludo Lullabi**  
LOCATION: France

Ludo Lullabi lives in southern France and is a freelance comic artist and writer. He's worked on several Blizzard projects, including as penciller on the World of Warcraft: The Comic series.  
<https://bit.ly/4bq9zDe>



I've worked for many years in the video game industry, notably at Blizzard on Hearthstone, where I was responsible for storyboards and layouts for cinematics and trailers, as well as creating a large number of cards. I've also collaborated with Airship Syndicate on several games (Battle Chasers, Darksiders Genesis, Ruined King), mainly working on cutscenes and visual storytelling.

More recently, I've been working actively on my personal project Ghost Pepper, a comic series published by Skybound/Image Comics. On a long-form project like this, with a sustained production rhythm, it's essential to have a workflow that is clear, solid and adapted to your everyday reality as an artist.

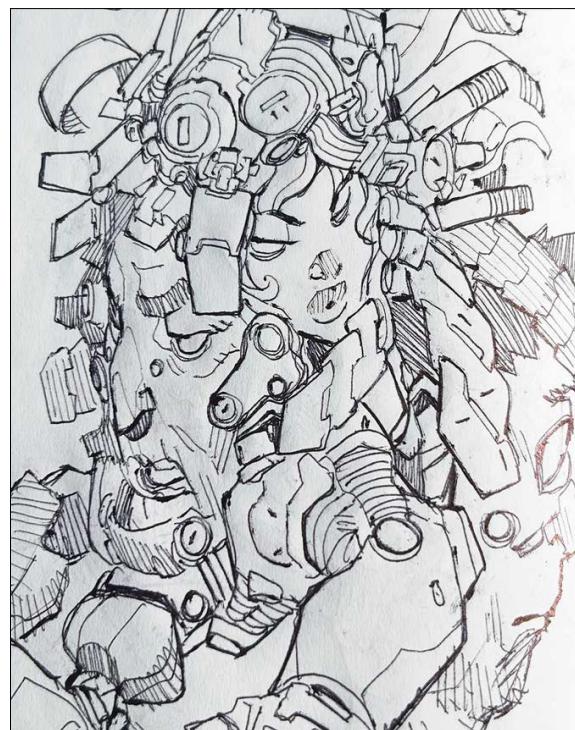
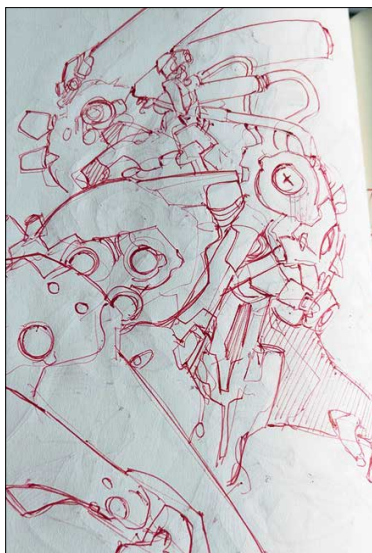
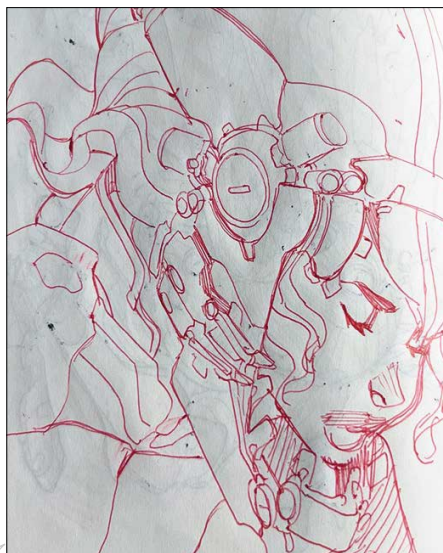
For all of my work, I use Manga Studio 5 EX, the predecessor of Clip Studio Paint. It's a piece of

software I've been using for more than 15 years, and I mainly rely on its core, basic tools.

Even though I'm constantly questioning my technique and the way I work, some principles remain unchanged. In this workshop, I'm sharing a very practical, experience-based approach to my process, moving from beginner-friendly advice to a more direct method designed for professional production.

## DOODLING

Starting with some loose doodles can get the creative juices flowing, even if the results are never used



### DRAWING WITHOUT AN OBJECTIVE TO BUILD MUSCLE MEMORY

For me, doodling is not a production step. It's drawing without a specific goal, narrative or visual intention. I'm not looking for a usable result or an idea to develop. The objective is

to let the hand move freely without constraints. I often doodle in a small sketchbook using a pen or pencil, sometimes while watching TV or on the phone. I'm not fully focused on the drawing, and that's what makes the exercise interesting. There's no pressure to achieve a result. These 'invisible'

drawings build muscle memory, maintain fluency and develop a natural confidence in the line. Even if they're never used directly in a project, they make drawing more fluid and instinctive. Don't confuse this freedom with a productive work stage; doodling trains the hand, it doesn't prepare a final image.

## BUILD YOUR CONFIDENCE

Before moving to a fast production mindset, it's important to master a more segmented workflow. This is recommended for anyone with the time to build pages more confidently

### 1 THUMBNAILS - THINKING SMALL TO SEE CLEARLY

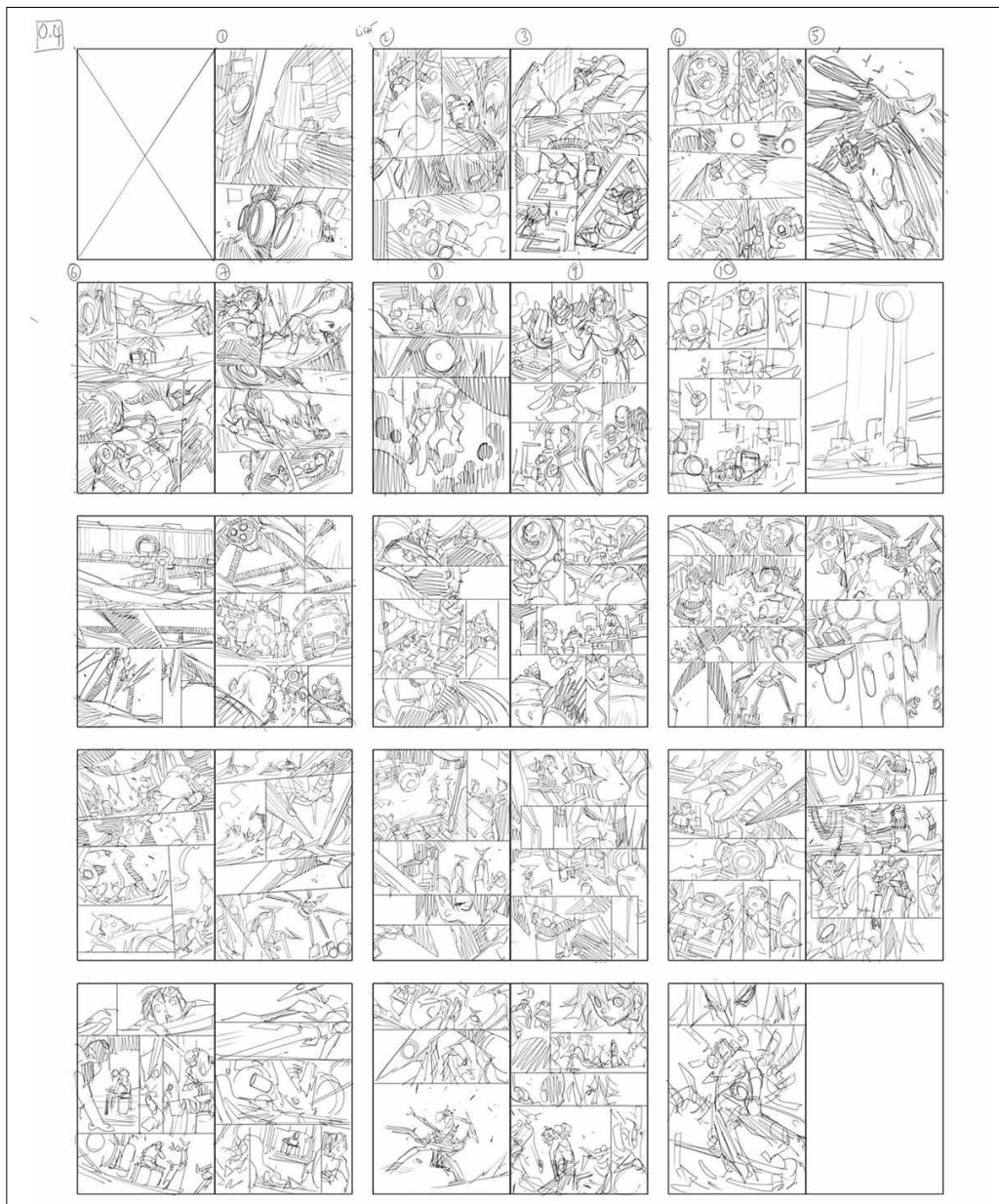
When I'm not sure which direction to take, I start with thumbnails. Working at a very small scale allows me to quickly explore composition, pacing and layout without getting lost in details. On the first issue of Ghost Pepper, I wasn't yet under heavy production pressure, so I took the time to fully develop this step.

Thumbnails are personal tools. They don't need to look good or be readable by anyone else. A few rectangles and lines are often enough. The goal is simply to trigger an idea and establish a direction. The more free and intimate this stage remains, the more effective it is.

“Thumbnails don't need to look good or be readable by anyone else”

### 2 ROUGHS - THE TRUE CREATIVE STAGE

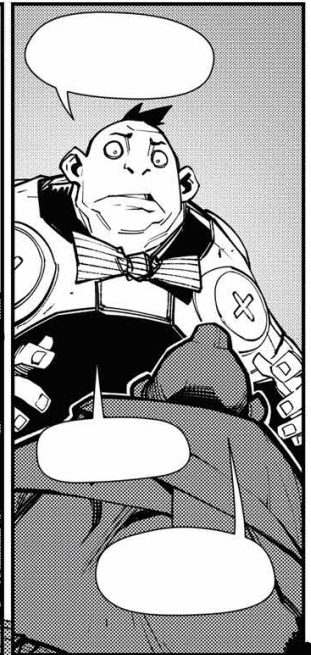
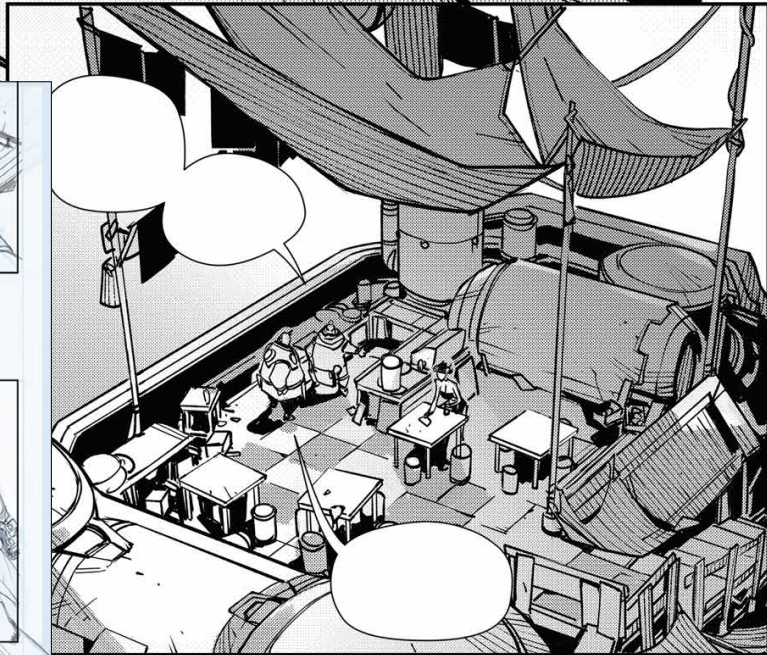
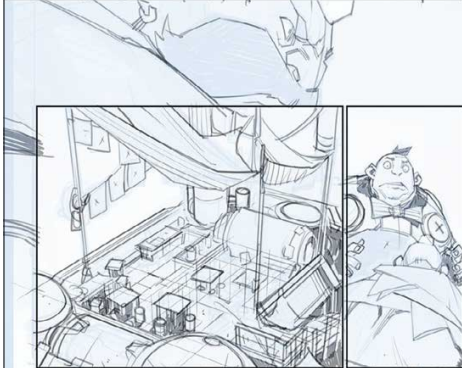
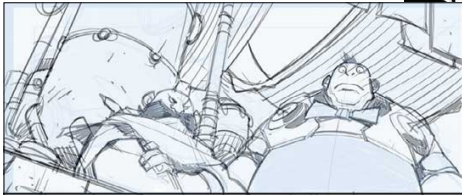
In my opinion, the rough is the most important stage of the process. This is where everything is decided: framing, angles, intent and storytelling. Early on with Ghost Pepper, I was still working on roughs at a smaller scale than the final page, sometimes even adding flat colours to test moods and atmospheres. During this phase, I test a lot. I erase, redo and change angles constantly. This is never wasted time. As long as I'm in the rough stage, nothing is locked in. My goal is to find a solution that fulfils the narrative needs while remaining enjoyable to draw. ➔



## 3 CLEANING AND INKING: SEPARATING CREATIVITY FROM TECHNIQUE

In this 'easy' method, I strongly recommend separating creative phases (thumbnails, roughs) from more technical ones (clean lines, inking). The clean stage is meant to clarify the rough, not to produce a final drawing. It prepares the ground for inking.

Alternating between these phases helps avoid burnout. Switching from creative thinking to a more mechanical task often gives the brain time to keep working away in the background. It's a healthy and efficient way to move forward without getting stuck.



“ Alternating between these phases helps avoid burnout ”



## SMART PRODUCTION WORKFLOW

If working on a comic with a sustained production schedule, adapting your process becomes necessary. With experience, certain steps can be merged or even removed

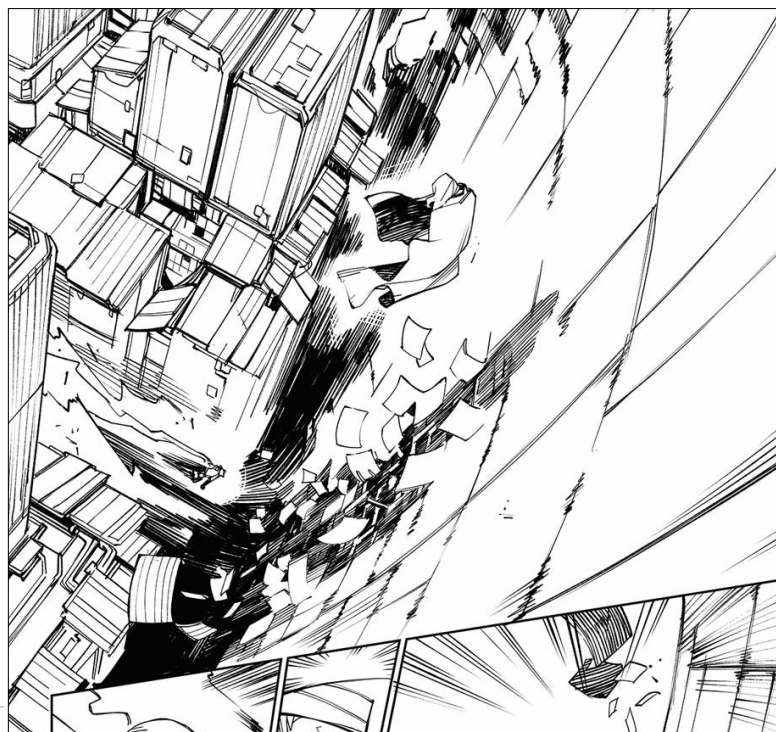


### 1 ROUGHING DIRECTLY ON THE FINAL PAGE

I begin by laying out my rough on the final page. It's a very free phase where I test compositions and framing, without hesitation to erase or start over. I block out a specific amount of time, to secure strong foundations. I only move on when I feel a genuine desire to continue. That feeling is important: it means the solution is clear and the drawing can progress smoothly.

### 2 CLARIFYING WITHOUT OVER-DETAILING

The clean stage is not a finished pencil drawing. It's a clarification of the rough, designed with the upcoming inking in mind. Since I ink my own work, I don't need an overly detailed clean pass. Doing too much at this stage only slows the process down.

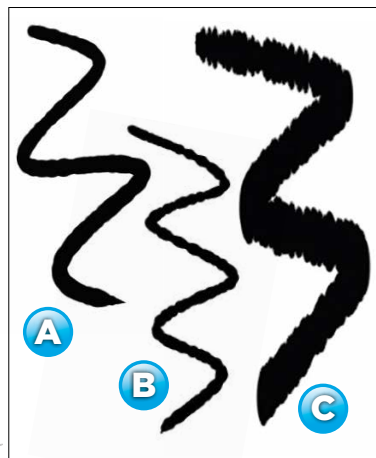


### 3 INKING, SCREENTONES, AND MANGA INFLUENCES

Inking already carries a large part of the final readability and visual impact. On Ghost Pepper, even though it's a comic, I've developed an approach closer to manga, particularly through the use of screentones. This comes from both my influences and my main tool, Manga Studio/Clip Studio Paint. Screentones allow me to manage values and depth while maintaining a strong, readable graphic style. ➡➡

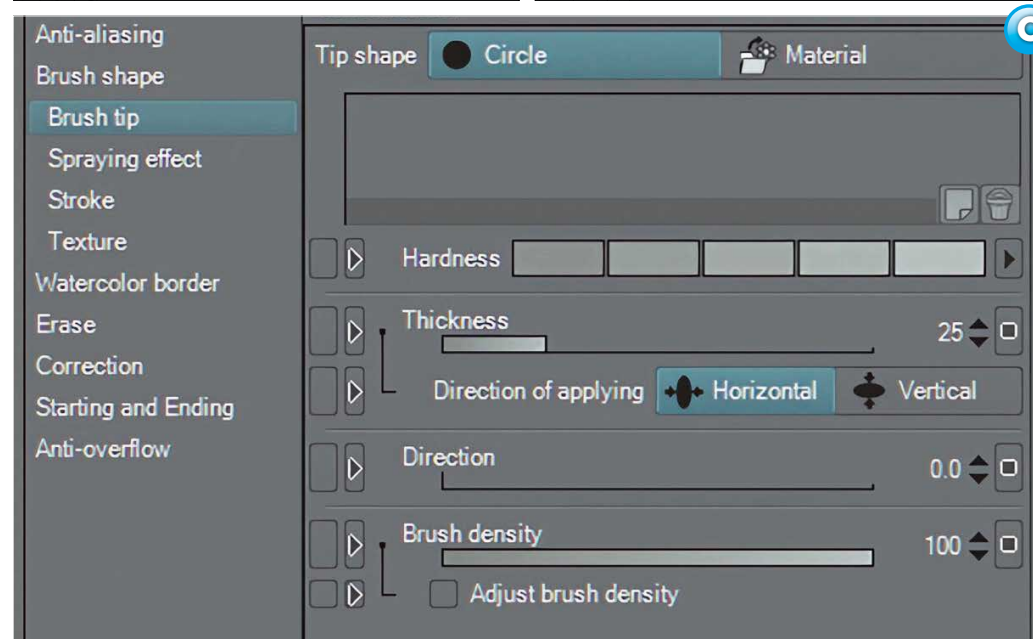
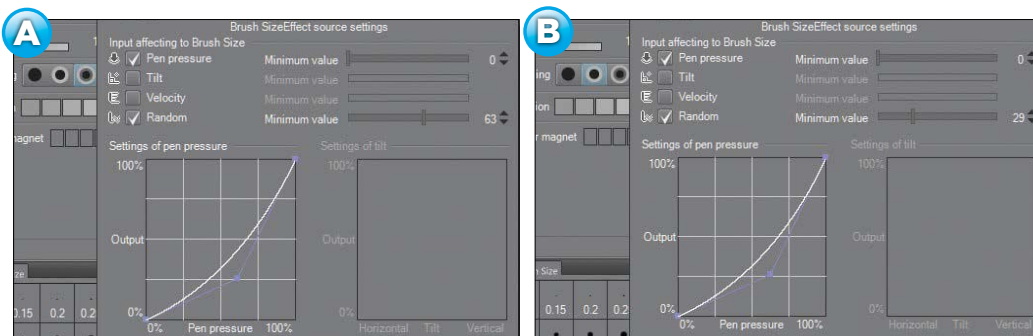
## DETAILED INKING, DONE RIGHT

Make use of my years of experience in the industry to learn how you can master the final stages of creating comic panels: the inking



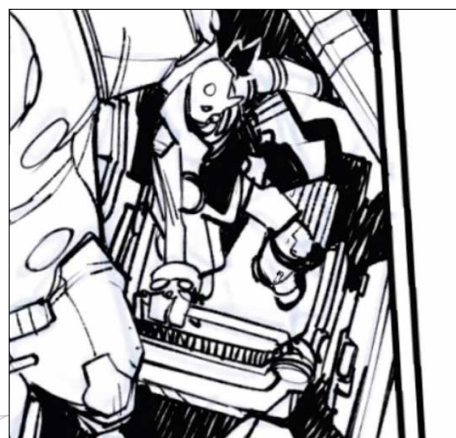
### 1 INKING TOOLS

I mainly use the G-Pen tool, customised into three different versions. The first is my primary tool, slightly adjusted using the Random setting to give the line a more natural, grainy feel. The second is an even more textured version, which I mainly use for hatching and grey areas. The third is based on the first, but with the Thickness setting modified to create a more chiselled line.



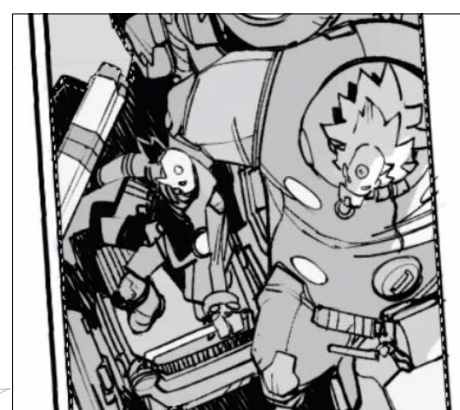
### 2 BASE INKING

I start by grouping the rough and clean layers into a folder and lowering its opacity. On a new layer, I do the base inking using my primary tool. This pass establishes the core structure of the drawing.



### 3 REFINEMENT AND HATCHING

Once the base is done, I turn the rough/clean folder blue, because I rely on it less at this stage. I then use my second tool to refine the drawing, emphasise volumes with hatching, and work in a more spontaneous way.



### 4 SCREENTONES AND DEPTH

On a layer placed beneath the inks, I work with greyscale values to create screentones. Manga Studio allows me to convert these greys into tones using the Tone option. I vary the dot size based on the depth of elements to reinforce spatial reading.

## 5 FINAL POLISH

Finally, I return to the ink layer with my third tool. This is a short but essential stage. Just a few minutes of adjustments can make a big difference. I like to compare this phase to seasoning a dish; small tweaks, and sometimes happy accidents, give digital inking a more organic and lively feel. ●



“ Small tweaks give digital inking a more organic and lively feel ”

## COLOUR DEVELOPMENT



## SKETCHES



### Technique focus

## STAY ON TARGET

**Artem Chebokha** says it's important to keep your final goal in sight through every stage



"This piece was a cover for a book by Stuart Heinrich. I started by making sketches that followed detailed descriptions from the client. After creating three options, they chose one that I refined and added colour to. To help the client imagine the

outcome, I made several versions with different colour schemes. Once a detailed sketch has been approved, I finalise the artwork. Sometimes the process gets so engaging that you end up deviating from the original plan. That's what happened here. I had to fix a lot of my work so that it was closer to the approved sketch." ●

### Artist PROFILE

**Artem Chebokha**

LOCATION: Montenegro

Artem has been working as a digital artist since 2006. Previously, he was the lead 2D artist at Lesta Studio.  
<https://bit.ly/4IDNRIM>



# The Gallery

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



## Deniz Defne Acerol

LOCATION: Türkiye MEDIA: Watercolour, acrylic, ink WEB: [www.instagram.com/deniz\\_acerol](http://www.instagram.com/deniz_acerol)

The festive subjects of Deniz's highly detailed paintings are created under the influence of nature and the artist's own environment. Deniz prefers to work with water-based mediums such as acrylic and ink.

### 1 THE HUNT

"Two best friends, hunting for the beast that has been troubling the village. I used acrylic ink on canvas. I am very happy with the gloomy atmosphere that I created."

### 2 POOL PARTY

"I usually get inspired by ancient Anatolian civilisations. There's a rite taking place in this composition. The small animals are about to bring goods to the old river gods."

### 3 AT THE PUB

"Friends are gathered at a pub to discuss business. Their dinner seems to be odd. Perhaps some leftover human flesh from a minor disagreement they had from last night."

### 4 GEEVA FLAVA ARTWORK

"A band album cover called 'Botanical', which is about a toucan and a shepherd. I enjoyed working on this project because of the whimsical atmosphere I could create."



72

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1



## Daniel Katz

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Oil paints WEB: [www.dankatzillustration.com](http://www.dankatzillustration.com)

Daniel is a freelance traditional and digital illustrator who creates art that combines imagination and real-world content, including photos and his own models. The result is a realistic, fantastical, and expressive aesthetic.

### 1 CONTEMPORARY DRAGON - COMMUTE

A scene from a personal series with dragons co-existing with people in the modern world. I thought the two living together would transform everyday life and create amazing moments.

### 2 WALK THE PLANK

A scene from a series with airships. It also takes maritime situations and shows how different they'd be in the sky, whether beautiful or dangerous.

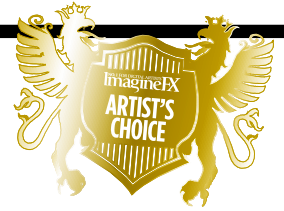
### 3 RICHES AND RUIN - THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO

Based on the scene in The Count of Monte Cristo where Edmund Dantes finds treasure and becomes super-rich. A moment that would bring huge joy to others isn't enough to satisfy him.



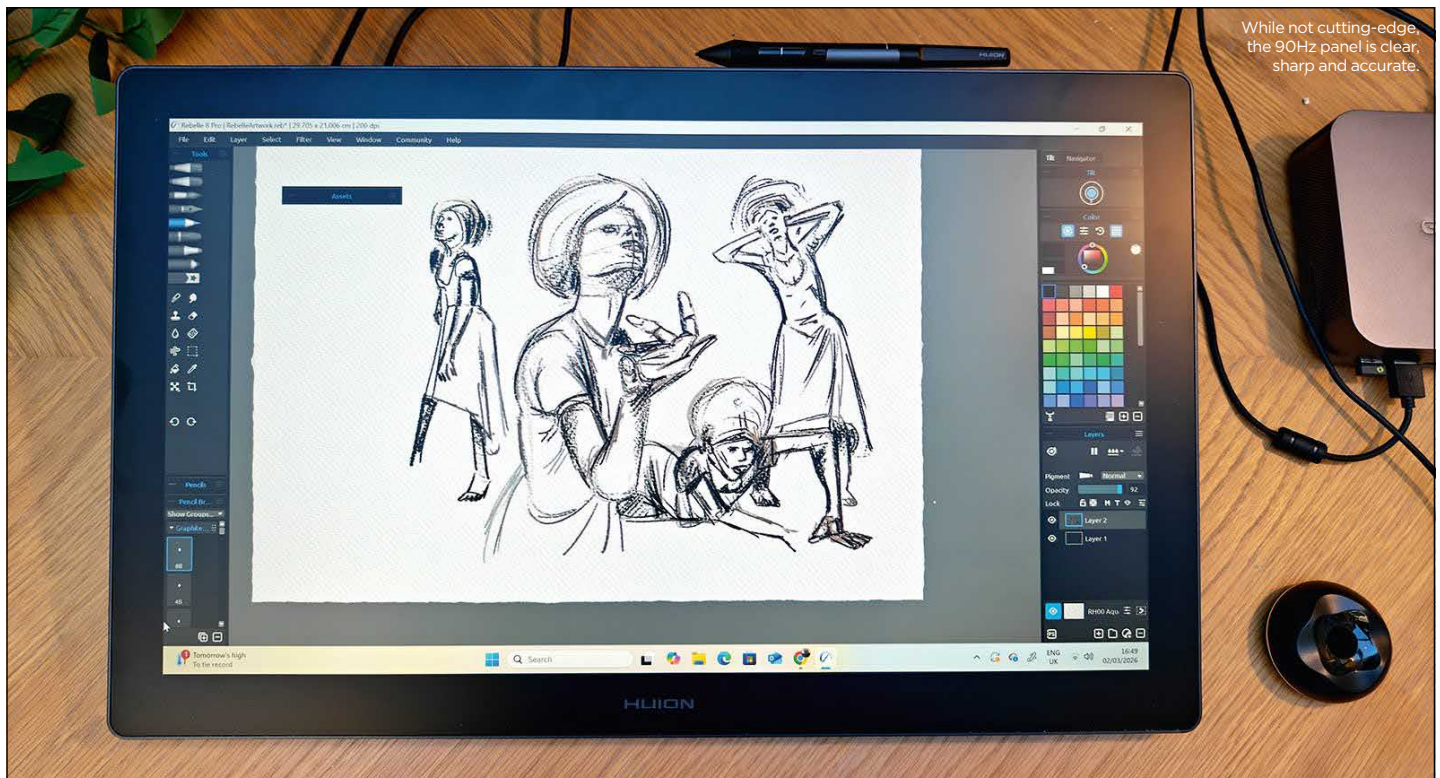
**Do you want to see your art on these pages?** Then email five pieces of your work and a short explanation about each artwork, along with a photo and a few details about yourself, to [fxpose@imaginefx.com](mailto:fxpose@imaginefx.com)

# Reviews



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

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



## Huion Kamvas 22 (Gen 3)

**DRAWING ATTENTION** With its 2.5K, 90Hz display and premium build, this tablet stands out in a crowd – but factor in buying some extras for the best experience

**Price** £649/\$599 **Company** Huion **Web** <https://store.huion.com>

**T**he 22-inch pen display often feels like a compromise, being too large for basic entry-level tablets, yet not quite advanced enough to lure pros away from bigger, sharper screens. From an early look at the new Huion Kamvas 22 (Gen 3), it's clear Huion aims to rewrite that narrative, addressing the issues many have with mid-range drawing tablets.

With a 2.5K display and 90Hz refresh rate, along with Huion's latest

PenTech 4.0 stylus, this tablet aims to deliver balanced performance that genuinely improves everyday creative work, all at a mid-range price.

On paper, 2.5K and 90Hz might not sound awe-inspiring, but as this review shows, while it may not beat every rival at everything, it does offer what many hobbyists and new digital artists need, while also delivering just enough to make some professionals take note.

We've been using the Kamvas 22 (Gen 3) for around two weeks now,

and it feels more refined than its £649/\$599 price tag might suggest. Huion understands its audience: hobbyists, students and prosumers who want a better drawing experience without the premium tax.

### FULLY EQUIPPED

Huion gets one of the basics right here, because everything you need is in the box when you open it. Alongside the tablet itself, you'll find a full set of cables, including USB-C to USB-C, so you're ready to go without rummaging for adapters. The new Huion PenTech 4.0 stylus is packaged with the tablet and a stylus stand.



The stylus has a good feel and all three buttons are programmable.

© Huion

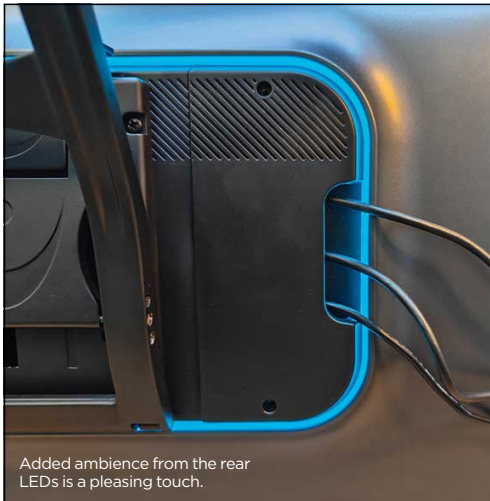


76  
ImagineFX



The Kamvas 22 ships with a metal stand, not something you always see at this price point.

A puck-shaped stylus stand also houses spare nibs and removal tool.



Added ambience from the rear LEDs is a pleasing touch.



One particularly nice touch is the built-in metal stand integrated into the display, a level of thoughtfulness you don't often see at this price point. Likewise, there's a little stylus holder that can be clipped into the tablet's frame, another addition often seen on higher-priced tablets.

That 90Hz refresh ensures a faster, smoother drawing experience with lower latency, meaning an improvement over most older 1080p rivals (both from Huion and XPpen), and it now competes much more directly with Wacom's refreshed mid-tier Cintiq offerings, though those still carry advantages in pen feel and build quality at their respective price points.

## “The etched glass surface gives a smooth feel, and the wide bezels are on trend”

It feels noticeably more substantial than many mid-range tablets. It's a heavy pen display for its size, and then a solid metal frame and built-in stand give it the kind of heft you often find on flagship tablets (the stand can be removed and a VESA mount added, if you have one).

The etched glass surface gives a smooth feel, and the wide bezels are on trend for drawing displays, providing a comfortable hand rest. Looking closer at the built-in adjustable stand, it feels genuinely ergonomic and can be easily adjusted by pulling the clamp lever.

A nice touch worth mentioning is the addition of atmospheric lighting cast from behind the tablet. There's a neat LED that curves around the tablet's rear panels, framing the cable housing and stand, and emitting a soft blue light by default, giving the Kamvas 22 (Gen 3) a pleasant,



The 90Hz refresh rate helps make the Kamvas 22 (Gen 3) feel smoother than its competitors.

premium feel. What makes the Kamvas 22 (Gen 3) feel more than just a spec bump is how its display and pen technology work together in actual use. The 2.5K panel strikes a nice balance between sharpness and performance; finer details look clear without the push to a full 4K display. Line work feels defined, UI text is crisp, and you never feel like you're wrestling with a soft or muddy picture, as with some older mid-range tablets.

## STEPPING UP

The 90Hz refresh rate is another practical upgrade and a step above tablets in this mid-range sector. It isn't as snappy as the premium Wacom Cintiq Pro at 120Hz or 165Hz, or the XPpen Artist Pro 24 (Gen 2) at 120Hz or 165Hz, but it's noticeably smoother than the 60Hz panels most competitors use.

Pressure curves are consistent and predictable, with a natural transition from light to heavy strokes. Tilt support behaves well, especially with shading brushes, and calibration is straightforward; the tiny initial nib offset we saw was fixed in moments.

Colour performance is very good for a mid-range tablet. The factory test shows an average Delta E of just 0.90 (anything under 1.0 is effectively imperceptible to the human eye) and is calibrated to 6,500K with a 2.2 gamma curve.

We did miss the lack of Quick Keys, whether on-frame or via a remote, since this isn't a touch display. We're not pro artists and don't rely on a huge spread of shortcuts, but things such as zoom, brush selection and size, and colour picking are needed. You can program the three buttons on the stylus, or rely on a keyboard, but it's not the same. Luckily, you can buy an accessory for adding shortcuts.

However, if you want a solid main display that feels good to work on day after day, with a smaller footprint on your desk, this is a very strong choice. What the Kamvas 22 (Gen 3) proves is that compromises are needed to find a new place in a very crowded market; this pen display offers great features – 2.5K at 22 inches, with 90Hz refresh – in a premium-feeling design, but that lack of touch and a packaged Quick Keys remote is a trade-off many will take. ●

Ian Dean

## VERDICT

This pen display raises the bar for mid-range drawing tablets, combining thoughtful design, enjoyable performance and a 2.5K, 90Hz display. It may lack touch and a remote, but its display and build redefine what we can expect from a mid-range drawing display.

### Pros

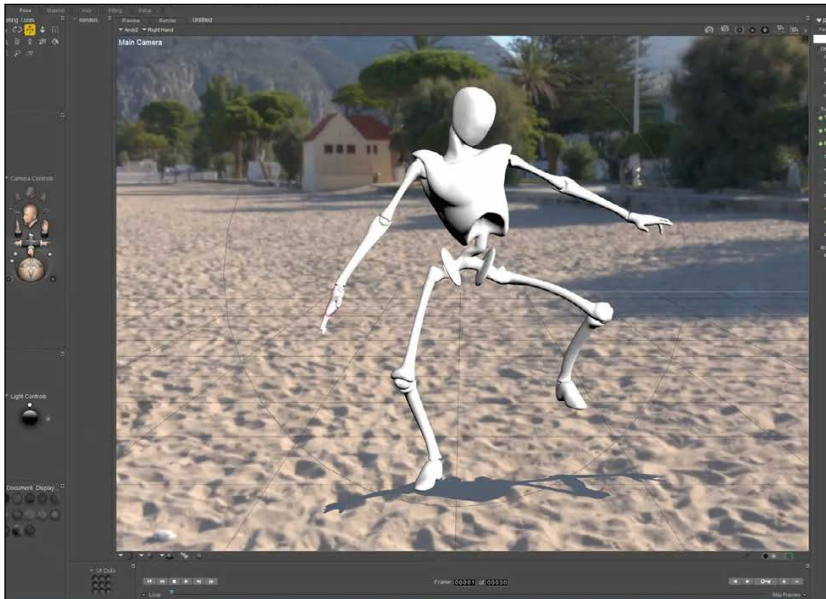
- Fast, smooth, and easy to use
- Sharp display, good colour output
- Fantastic premium build

### Cons

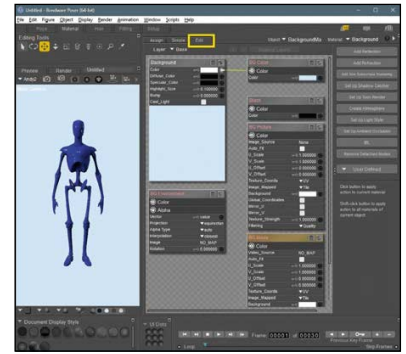
- Not a touch display
- No Quick Key remote included

### Rating





There are plenty of options for lighting and setting a scene.



The interface may be a little dated, but it's clear and not overly complicated to use.



Posing can be as simple as grabbing a limb and moving.

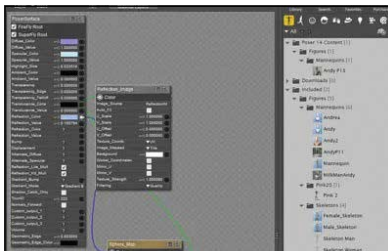
## Poser 14

**STRIKE A POSE** 3D animation software that delivers modern power trapped in a dated interface

**Price** \$99.95 upgrade for Windows or \$175.00 for full license **Company** Bondware Inc **Web** [www.posersoftware.com](http://www.posersoftware.com)

**P**oser 14 is the latest iteration of the 3D figure animation and illustration software that provides users with pre-built human models which can then be posed, morphed, styled, and rendered. This workflow is in contrast to the likes of Sculptiris and ZBrush, where you have to sculpt characters from scratch from a digital block of clay.

With built-in figures, hair, clothing, props, scenery, and lighting, Poser 14 delivers everything you need to bring your stories, dreams, and fantasies of all genres to life. You can think of it



Scene management is simple, as is adjusting attributes and navigating the library.

as a virtual photo studio where you are the director, photographer, and stylist all at once.

Poser 14 provides a new Poser Cloth system with hybrid clothing and bullet physics. Poser Cloth boasts hybrid clothing functionality that glues clothing to the figure based on proximity. This allows clothes to follow poses and morphs more naturally during simulations. It also boasts a simplified material with support for physically based rendering.

In Poser 14, you can now drag and drop texture maps directly onto a character without manually connecting complex nodes. You're also treated to improved rendering technology and more modern export options, with these introductions including glTF/GLB and improved FBX/Collada.

The interface itself functions like a virtual photography studio, with the Document Window providing a view into the character. This window houses the Stage, which is where



### VERDICT

Poser 14 offers a streamlined, budget-friendly alternative to professional suites, making it an excellent choice for those who need to pose and render pre-built assets quickly for their digital storytelling.

#### Pros

- Easy posing and lighting
- Pre-rigged figures
- Affordable base software cost

#### Cons

- Dated interface
- Characters lack realism
- No macOS release

#### Rating

★★★★☆

you pose figures, adjust lights, and position cameras. Navigation around this 3D space is easily achieved using shortcut keys and mouse movements for a smooth experience.

To help provide a logical workflow, Poser 14 is split up into specific tasks, with a dedicated Room Tab for each one. Selecting each tab will reorganise the UI so that you gain easier access to tools and properties related to that specific task. Rooms include the Poser Room, Material Room, Cloth Room, and Hair Room.

To pose an object, all you have to do is select one of the character's limbs and drag it around. In essence, Poser 14 is for creators who want simplicity and a massive library.

**Paul Hatton**

“You can now drag and drop texture maps directly onto a character without manually connecting complex nodes”

So small it can be hung on the back of a monitor, and includes a bracket to do so.



## Geekom A5 Pro

**TINY POWER** If you only need this for 2D tasks, it's good enough

**Price** £599/\$669

**Company** Geekom

**Web** [www.geekompc.com](http://www.geekompc.com)

**RATING** ★★★★★☆

If you thought the Mac mini was small, get a load of this. Geekom's lower end mini PC, the A5 Pro, is barely any bigger than an Apple TV box, yet it packs a six-core AMD Ryzen processor and 16GB of upgradable RAM into that tiny space. And it comes with the added benefit of low noise and power consumption, even compared to some laptops.

The A5 Pro is a tiny silver puck with rounded corners, looking very much like a Mac mini that's been through the wash at too high a temperature with its silvery finish. The Geekom logo is picked out in blue on top, and the power button is easy to access. It has fewer USB ports along the front than the A9 Max, but there are enough studded around its casing to handle most peripheral loads.

The main attraction of the Geekom A5 Pro is its tiny size. At just 112mm (4.5in) square and 0.47L in volume, it takes up almost no space on a desktop. There's an internal SD card reader and a 2.5-gigabit Ethernet port, with two full-size HDMI ports and the ability to output video through its USB Type-C ports too.

It's easy to see from the Geekbench 6 results that the A5 Pro isn't going to trouble top-table machines such as the Mac Studio. It's good if you're working with a limited power budget as it draws less than that used by laptops.

**Ian Evenden**

# Acer Swift Go 14 AI

**AI ABILITY** Just because it has 'AI' in the name doesn't mean it's an AI ninja, but the Go still has a lot to offer

**Price** £1,199/\$1,299 **Company** Acer **Web** [www.acer.com](http://www.acer.com)

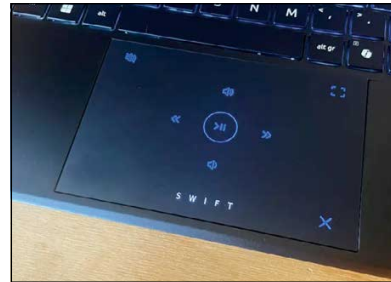
**T**his Copilot+ PC could be considered limited in terms of performance, choosing to prioritise features and battery life instead of raw power and premium build quality. But that doesn't mean that it should be condemned to the scrap heap.

If you want reasonable AI performance without a super high price tag, then the Swift Go 14 AI could be just what you need.

The Swift Go 14 AI features a metallic-finish chassis constructed primarily from anodised aluminium, which covers the lid, keyboard, and bottom panel. The material choice keeps the weight down to 1.24 kilograms, but at the cost of more premium durability.

The chassis is pretty boring compared to the OceanGlass touchpad, which is engineered to provide a smooth, glass-like tactile experience. This multi-control touchpad illuminates to provide context-sensitive access to media functions when it detects music or video playback.

In terms of display and audio, the Go 14 AI boasts a 14-inch, 1920 x 1200 pixel resolution display with a smooth 120Hz refresh rate. This includes 100% DCI-P3 colour accuracy and VESA DisplayHDR True Black 500 for professional-grade photographers and videographers.



Neat controls are built into the trackpad.

Despite its slim design, Acer has done a fantastic job with ports. It features two USB4 Type-C ports and DisplayPort, two USB 3.2 Gen 1 Type-A ports, a microSD card slot and a 3.5mm headphone jack. This is all rounded off with a HDMI port for external displays.

With AI resizing, image generation, and the like, the Swift Go 14 AI struggled to perform. It's designed for anyone who does a little bit of everything, including photo edits and website design, but not more power hungry tasks. And in that regard, it actually performs admirably.

A portable build must always be paired with excellent battery performance. Thankfully, the Go 14 AI excels in this area, reaching nearly 15 hours during a constant video playback test. The amount of juice eked out of it will be reduced during more intensive tasks, but either way, you're sure to easily get a full day's work out of this machine. 🍌

**Paul Hatton**

## VERDICT

The Swift Go 14 AI is a versatile, mid-range laptop that prioritises portability and display quality over raw creative power. While its 120Hz OLED screen and port selection are impressive, its performance is best suited for multitasking and light photo editing rather than heavy video or 3D rendering. It serves as a practical all-rounder.

### Pros

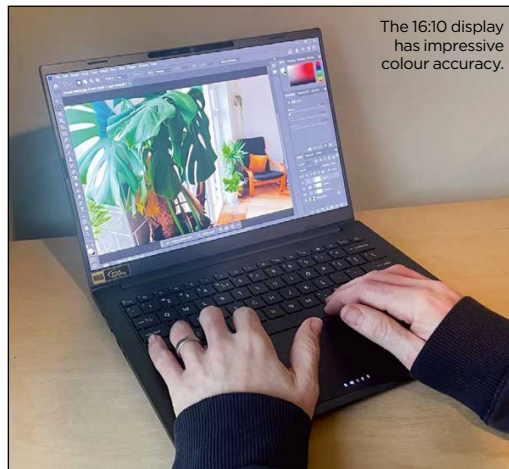
- OLED display
- An excellent port selection
- Portable and lightweight
- Outstanding battery

### Cons

- Mid-range build quality
- Some thermal fan noise during demanding tasks

### Rating

★★★★☆



The 16:10 display has impressive colour accuracy.

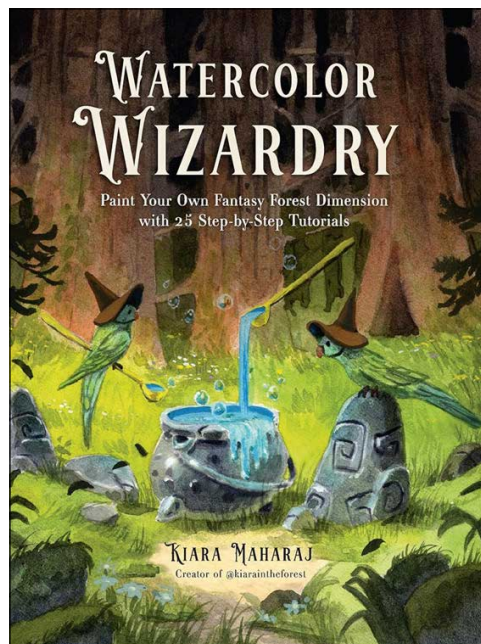


Plenty of ports for peripherals on both sides of the device.



The ports support legacy peripherals as well as modern ones.

The book's vibrant cover gives a glimpse into the kinds of magical fairy tale-inspired scenes you'll learn how to create within its beautifully illustrated pages.



Fantasy readers can make art inspired by their favourite stories using the elements shared here.

# Watercolor Wizardry

**MAGIC TOMES** Discover a range of techniques for painting whimsical fantasy art using watercolours in this paint-along guide

**Price** £23.99/\$26.99 **Author** Kiara Maharaj **Publisher** Page Street Publishing Co **Web** www.pagestreetpublishing.com

**F**antasy art can be painted using any media, and there are plentiful resources out there to help you boost your confidence in anatomy, perspective, and so on. But there's fewer on how to handle specific types of paint, and this is where **Watercolor Wizardry** comes in. As the name suggests, this book's goal is to get you up and running as simply as possible.

To do this, it starts with a guide on tools needed, including colours the author used for the original pieces, followed by a number of guides on technique. These are detailed enough to follow along, but not so in-depth that they're overwhelming. So if you want the lowdown on beading or drybrushing, among others, you get a great primer here and should be set for the main chapters.

From here on in, the book is broken down into a number of projects, with a particularly enjoyable flow to them. You start with an introduction and a simple full-page line drawing that you can transfer onto watercolour paper (there's a section on how to do this), followed by a step-by-step guide on painting the picture. These break things down into manageable chunks and reference the technique guides, making each step approachable and simple to follow along with. The chapters start with a list of materials used, but there's encouragement to adapt the drawings and colours to add your own unique tastes.

Across the 25 paintings, you'll learn how to render everything from wood and foliage to rock, lighting, and creatures, with it all adding up to give a fantastic grounding in how to present various materials, making for

Use your paintbrush to conjure beautiful fantasy forest scenes.



## VERDICT

Aimed at those new to watercolour painting, this book is accessible and friendly and gives enough to get started. It doesn't go into too much depth, but strikes just the right balance, with all the info a newcomer to watercolours needs.

- Pros**
- Beautifully printed on great quality paper
  - Easy to follow step-by-step layout
  - Full-size sketches to aid following along
  - Excellent guides to the key techniques

**Cons**

- Doesn't lay open very well

**Rating**  
★★★★★

an excellent lesson in watercolour painting. The imagery is all very whimsical, stylistically akin to Studio Ghibli, so if you're less a fan of the grimdark and more into lighthearted portrayals, this is the book for you.

It's weighted heavily towards environments and nature, including any characters, from the small furry ones to the larger treeman types, so don't expect to master any swords and sorcery type work, but do indulge yourself in a friendly but mischievous world while getting a strong footing in how to make the most of painting with watercolours.

**Rob Redman**

“The book is broken down into a number of projects, with a particularly enjoyable flow to them”



## Character Design: Illustrate an Expressive Creature

**ANIMAL ANTICS** Learn how to design animal-based characters full of emotion and personality in Photoshop with Sam Nassour

**Publisher** Domestika **Price** £20 (approx \$26.60) **Format** Online  
**Length** 24 lessons (5h 18m) **Web** www.domestika.org

**S**am Nassour is an art director with an impressive CV, with Cartoon Network, Netflix, DreamWorks TV, and Rovio Entertainment among his credits. His background is interesting, as he originally studied architecture before using the spatial training that provided to influence his first love: character and animation design.

This course should be seen as Sam showing how he works. It's worth following along with the specifics of why he uses Photoshop the way he does, but never be afraid to assign your own hotkeys for how you work. When Sam has gone through how he sets up Photoshop, he then focuses on industry standard character design, such as basic line blocking, character construction via simple shapes, and so on.



Over five hours of instruction takes you through every step of character creation.



Sam finds an endless source of inspiration in the shapes, colours, and designs of the animal world.

Lessons such as 'What Makes a Design Appealing' are what make this course unique, as it gives genuine practical insights from an artist who has made this his living.

When the basics have been shown with practical examples from Sam's past work, you then set off on the journey to creating a character, in this case a small lizard. At over five hours long, this course could be a lot for some novices, but with over 30 minutes on lighting and shadows, there's more than enough detail to make this course stand out as demonstrating how to really work at polishing your characters.

It's also fantastic to see how other artists have shared their work after going through Sam's course, which he actively recommends. 🍷

**Mike Griggs**

### VERDICT

Unlike a lot of courses that focus on an agnostic approach to art creation, this course jumps straight into Photoshop and Wacom tablets. Don't feel intimidated, though, if you have neither of these, as this course is still a worthwhile creative investment.

#### Pros

- Strong focus on expression and character personality
- Clean, professional Photoshop workflow
- A background in architecture brings a unique eye to Sam's character work
- This also means that the environment is part of the creative process shown

#### Cons

- Assumes basic familiarity with Photoshop
- Animal-focused approach may not suit all character design goals

#### Rating



## Brushing up...

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



### City Brushset

**Artist** Devin Elle Kurtz

**Software** Photoshop, Procreate,

Clip Studio Paint **Brushes** 114

**Price** Free (pay what you want)

**Rating** ★★★★★

A generous cross-platform set of 114 cityscape brushes. With over an hour of demo video content and PNGs included for adaptation with other art packages, it's an easy five-star recommendation.

<https://bit.ly/4bQW5k4>



### Thick Paint: An Oil Painting Brushset

**Artist** Ittai Manero

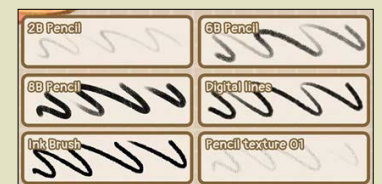
**Software** Procreate

**Brushes** 60 **Price** \$20

**Rating** ★★★

It may seem pricey, but the 3D canvas feature for Procreate 5.2 and above, along with 60 oil brushes built from real paint, a 28-page tutorial PDF and timelapse videos, make this solid value.

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



### Clip Studio Starter Brushes Vol.1

**Artist** Olguioo (Olga)

**Software** Clip Studio Paint

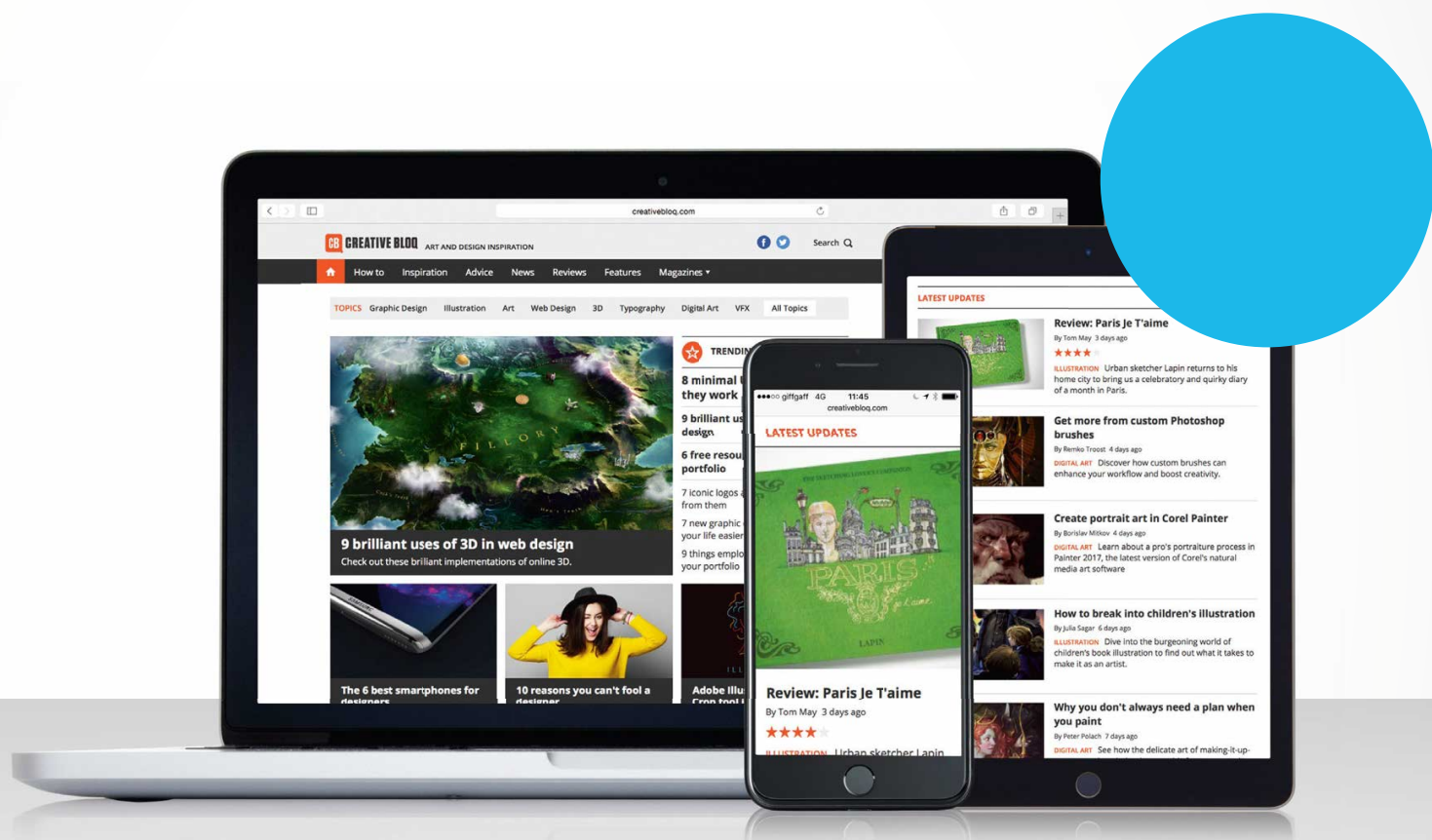
**Brushes** 12 **Price** Free

**Rating** ★★★

This free set of 12 well-curated brushes covers liners, textures, and colour mixing. It's a handy starting point for artists exploring Clip Studio Paint for the first time.

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

# The number one destination for **digital art** news, views and how-tos



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# 3D Artist

Your ultimate source for art, inspiration and know-how

88



## BUILD A CUTE ENVIRONMENT DESIGN PIECE

How to create a cute stylised concept from start to finish

84



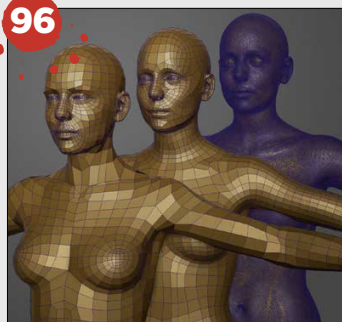
**The best 3D art around**  
Explore the incredible work of concept artists Marvin Hillmann and Wafi Aji.

94



**Use hybrid workflows**  
Discover how to divide tasks by type in order to increase efficiency in your work.

96



**Back to basics**  
Find out how topology affects animations, and what you can do to improve it.

98



**Five minutes with...**  
Max Bianchini explains how character backgrounds influence his designs.

# 3D Artist Showcase

BE INSPIRED BY THE BEST DIGITAL ART AROUND

IMAGINEFX  
ARTIST  
MONTH

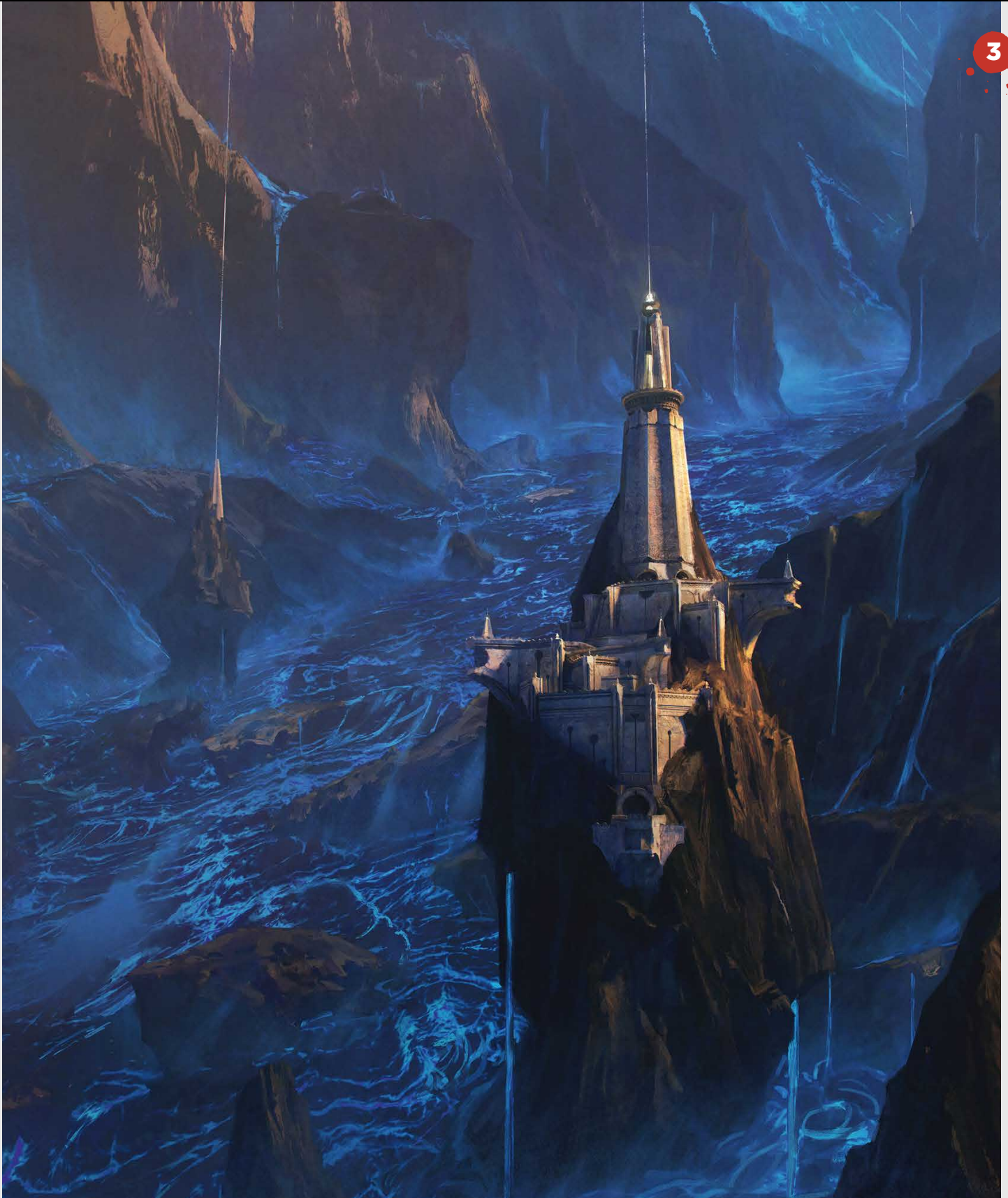


## Marvin Hillmann

**LOCATION:** Germany **MEDIA:** Blender, 3D Coat, Adobe Medium, Photoshop **WEB:** [www.artstation.com/marvinhillmann](http://www.artstation.com/marvinhillmann)

Marvin is a concept artist and illustrator who focuses on worldbuilding, environment design and architecture. He is inspired by fantasy settings and Impressionist painters, which is reflected in his work via modern techniques.





## 1 AGRICULTURE TERMINAL

"This piece is inspired by nature and solarpunk themes. Its design reflects the ladybug, which I like to think of as being wheat's natural pest control."

## 2 ICEVEIL - THE HUMAN SETTLEMENT

"Iceveil is a fantasy location that shelters humans that were stranded long ago. Its shape is inspired by both Norse mythology and icy architecture."

## 3 PATH OF THE BEACONS

"Beacons guard a magical source beneath the mountain, channeling its power into radiant light. This piece is inspired by blue-sulfur volcanoes."



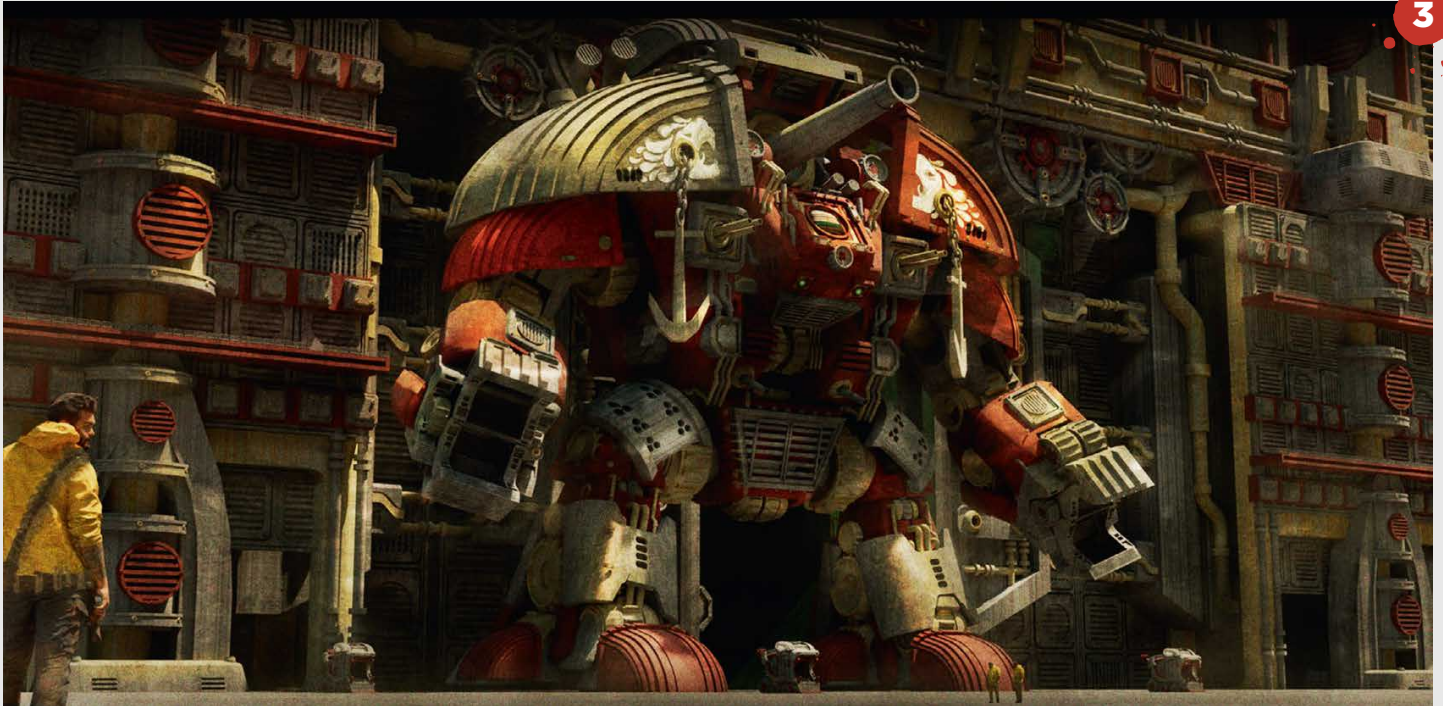
## Wafi Aji

**LOCATION:** Brunei **MEDIA:** Blender, Photoshop **WEB:** [www.artstation.com/wafi\\_aji002](http://www.artstation.com/wafi_aji002)

Wafi Aji, better known as WackerTheMaker online, started out as a comic book letterer before becoming a concept artist, which is now his main passion, after being exposed to other artists during lockdown.



3



4



## 1 THE ARCHELON

"The Archelon is a sturdy airship for charting unexplored skies, as well as being an idle ship to pilot over long distances."

## 2 SEA OF COMBAT

"In this corner of the arena lies the emperor's grand podium, the ideal spot for witnessing epic kraken battles!"

## 3 THE MERLION MECH

"The Merlion mech serves as a protector for humanity's last great cities in the world of Cinematallix."

## 4 RYUSHI TRUCK

"The Ryushi carrier transport are cost-efficient machines ideally suited for shipping around large cargo."

**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](mailto:mail@imaginefx.com)

# 3D Artist Workshop

ADVICE FROM THE WORLD'S BEST 3D ARTISTS



Photoshop & Blender

# BUILD A CUTE ENVIRONMENT DESIGN PIECE

**Tristan Jolu** shares his method for creating a cute stylised concept from start to finish, explaining how to work in a non-destructive way, so it's easier to change things



## Artist PROFILE

**Tristan Jolu**  
LOCATION: France

Tristan is a French stylised concept artist and illustrator for games and animated films. His clients include Flyos Games.  
<https://bit.ly/3NmGzD8>

This tutorial is all about creating a cute little fantasy house and turning it into a finished illustrated piece. The goal isn't just to end up with something that looks nice, but also to enjoy the whole creative process along the way.

Think of it like building your own tiny magical place. A small, cosy house where you can try ideas, experiment and learn new

techniques without stressing about mistakes. It's meant to be a fun and relaxed project where you can just explore and be creative.

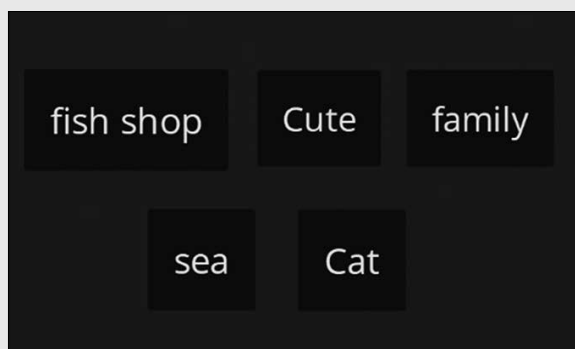
We'll start things off with some quick sketches, so we can play around with different ideas and find a design that feels both charming and unique.

Once we have something we like, we'll jump into Blender and turn

that sketch into a simple 3D model. Step by step, we'll build the main shapes of the house, add a few details and set up the scene.

In the finishing stages, we'll bring everything together to create the final illustration. With a lot of painting on top, we'll give the scene a warm and cosy vibe.

Most importantly, have fun and don't be afraid to experiment!



### 1 Define a brief for yourself

For this first step, try to pick something you genuinely like, so you can stay excited and motivated while working on your piece. The idea is to keep your brief short, simple and clear – ideally, just one sentence. For example: "Cute cat family fish shop by the sea." Keeping it concise helps you to remember every word and makes it easier to ensure that each element appears in your environment.



### 2 Related ideas

Just have fun with it and don't be afraid to get a bit crazy. Look for playful or silly ideas that make your concept more fun. For example, I wanted to work with cats – and cats love fish, right? So why not cats selling fish? And what kind of fish? Catfish! Little ideas like that make the project more entertaining.

**RESOURCES**

## WORKSHOP BRUSHES

**PHOTOSHOP**

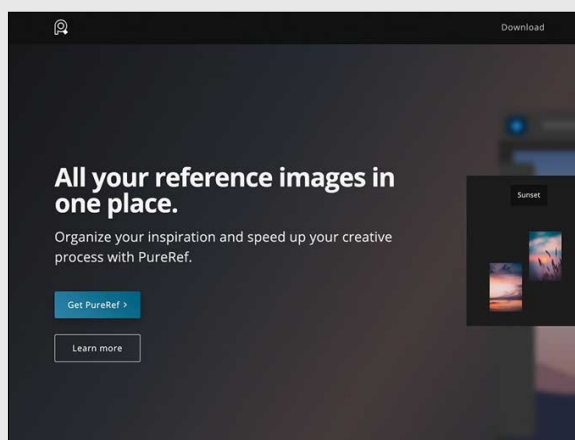
**DEFAULT BRUSH: SOFT ROUND**

I mainly use the Soft Round brush to build up volume and establish the forms in the painting.

**CUSTOM BRUSH: PAINT BRUSH**

Once the main forms are in place, I switch to the Paint brush to refine and shape the details.

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



### 3 Break down references

For this stage, I really recommend using PureRef. It's a simple app that lets you keep all your references on one board while you work, which makes it much easier to stay organised and keep your ideas in front of you. Once your brief is clear, this step becomes one of the most fun and relaxing. Just take the key words from your brief and split them into small categories to search for references, such as fish shop, cats or sea landscape. Then collect images that match your idea and don't forget to add a benchmark image to keep everything close to the world you want to create. For example: "Supercell".



### 4 Search for interesting references

I really recommend using AI filters when searching for references, so you don't get flooded with AI images. At this stage, it's better to stick to real photos, because they bring more soul and authenticity to your artwork. Try to find older references of photos, videos, anything that helps you feel immersed in the world you're creating. And don't forget audio references! For example, playing sea sounds while working can really help you get into the mood and make decisions based on how the environment would actually feel.



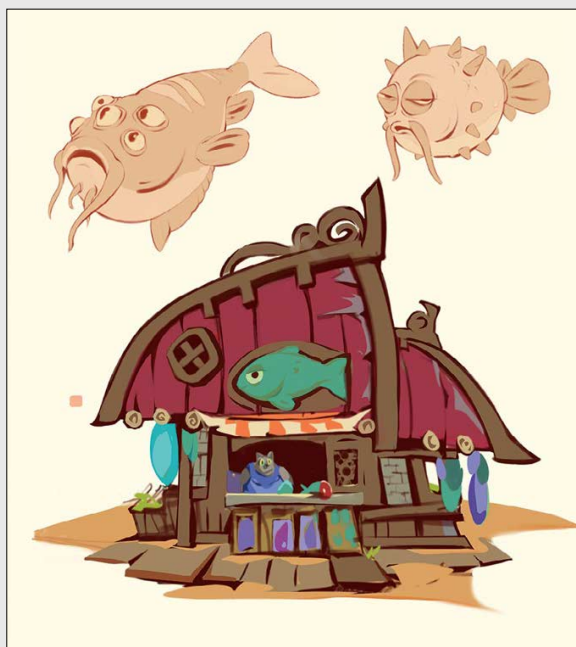
## 5 Early sketching

At this point, don't worry about making things look perfect. The goal is just to explore ideas, not to create a polished sketch. Most of the time, no one will even see this part. So experiment and have fun with it. I recommend using a simple flat design so you can stay efficient and focus on the main ideas. Don't overwork anything – keep it rough and loose.



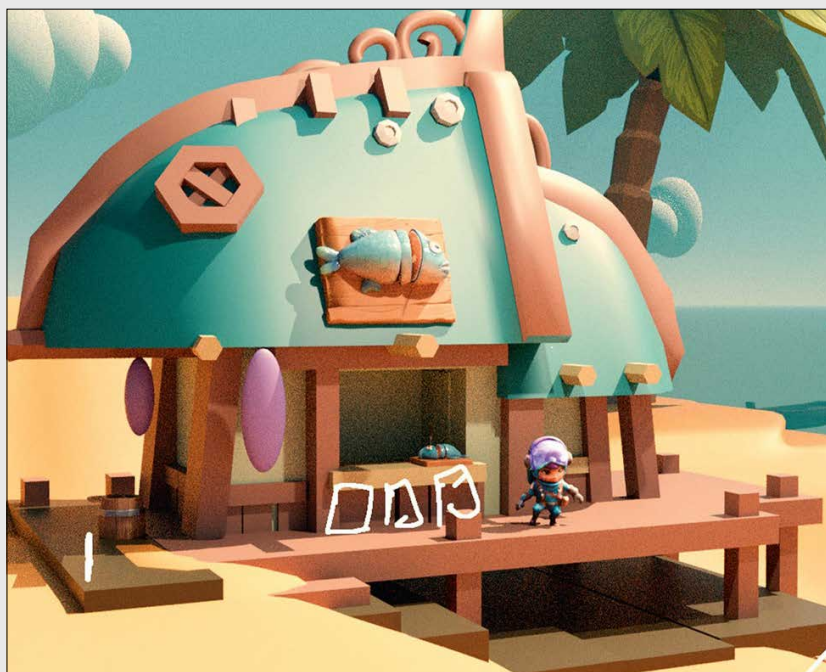
## 6 Research for composition

Now you need to find your composition. It's important, so you don't waste time designing things that will end up tiny or not even visible in the final image. Pick a composition that fits the mood of your story. If it's cosy and chill, keep the angle simple and calm. But if you want something epic, go for a more dynamic lens and stronger perspective. ➔➔



## 7 Refine your sketches

Refine the most important part of your sketch, which is the focal point. It's important to clearly understand what you're designing, so others can read it easily. Add the key elements you want directly into that area. At this stage, only design the focal point. In my case, it's the shop and some fish. Don't go into too much detail, just focus on a clear, readable design.



## 8 Block out your scene in Blender

Now it's time to build your scene in Blender. Start with a quick blockout using only simple primitive shapes. This helps you place everything and check your composition in 3D. You can also add quick local colours to your materials to better read in the scene. The goal here is just to see if the concept works in context. Don't hesitate to change things if needed – this stage is all about improving your design with better perspective and overall depth.



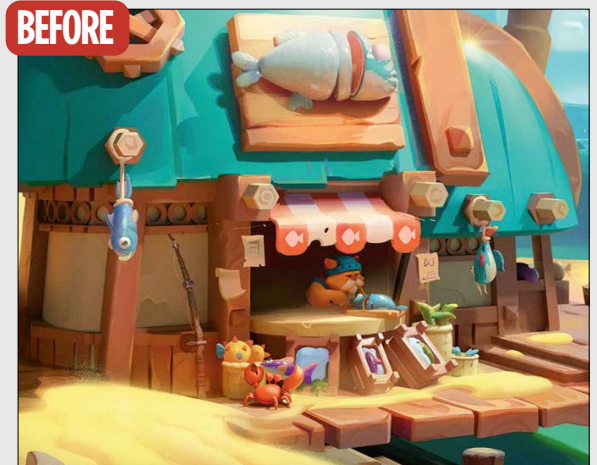
## 9 Colour key

Time for a little paint-over! I recommend making a small colour key to explore what the illustration could look like. The idea is to quickly test rough ideas that are faster to try in 2D than in 3D. It saves a lot of time. And if it's just for you, don't be too precious about it.



## 10 Build your final scene

Keep pushing your scene with the new ideas you explored. Also keep in mind that a lot of small details can be added later in 2D. For this style, I didn't go too crazy in Blender, because it's often easier to paint some things afterwards. But feel free to push the 3D as much as you want. You can also use assets from Sketchfab, such as a small boat or trees, especially if they're not in the focal point. The goal is to save time, and you can always paint over them later to adjust the design and make it feel like yours.



## 11 Paint your scene

Let's paint! After exporting my render from Blender, I usually paint directly on top of it, but feel free to use whatever workflow works best for you. This stage is about bringing together all the ideas from the previous steps. I like to start by setting the mood, because it makes it easier to place the other elements afterwards. While painting, remember that the goal isn't to replace the 3D but to add what 3D can't. Always ask yourself if what you're adding is actually improving the piece.

## 12 Add textures

You're almost done! Now it's time to paint the textures. This is the moment when you can finally zoom in and start adding those little details that push the piece further. Take your time with it – work on the transitions and the light carefully. Don't hesitate to look at references, so you stay close to the style you're aiming for.



## 13 Know when to stop

Make sure every shape in your image is clear and easy to read. Your focal point should have strong definition, with clean edges and nice crispy textures. Don't be afraid to push the contrast in values, colours and shapes, so it really stands out. Extra punch in the shapes and lighting can also bring the whole piece to life. If everything looks good and readable, you're done!



## 14 Presentation!

Finally, keep your presentation clean and simple. Avoid fancy text or unnecessary effects. It should be clear and straightforward, so people instantly understand what they're looking at. If you're unsure how to present your work, take a look at posts from studios on ArtStation. It's a great way to get inspiration and see how professionals showcase their projects in a clean and appealing way.

## Artist **PROFILE**

**Nick Hiatt**

LOCATION: US

Nick is an art director, concept artist and matte painter who specialises in film, television and videogames. He blends a traditional fine arts background with advanced digital techniques to create immersive environments and captivating worlds. [www.nickhiatt.com](http://www.nickhiatt.com)



## Technique focus

# MAKE USE OF HYBRID WORKFLOWS

**Nick Hiatt** on how he divides tasks by type in order to increase efficiency in his work



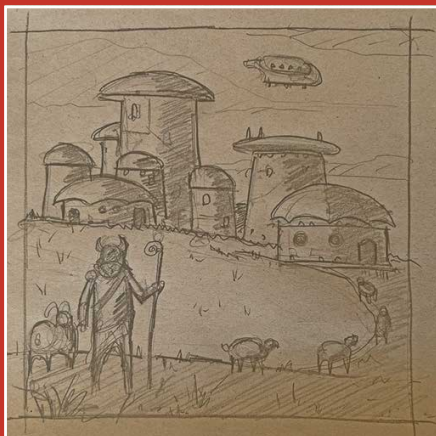
"This is an early concept piece I created to visualise the world and its characters for an IP I am developing. I created this image through a hybrid

workflow: initial building sculpts were modelled in VR with Adobe Medium, then imported into Maya for clean-up and texturing. The shepherd and sheep began as a Photoshop design, with the 3D model built using Maya combined with Meshy. After all of my assets were created, I imported them into Unreal Engine to leverage its powerful lighting and foliage systems to block out the environment and compose the scene. I rendered the image in UE and created the mood-enhancing paint-over in Photoshop." 🍷



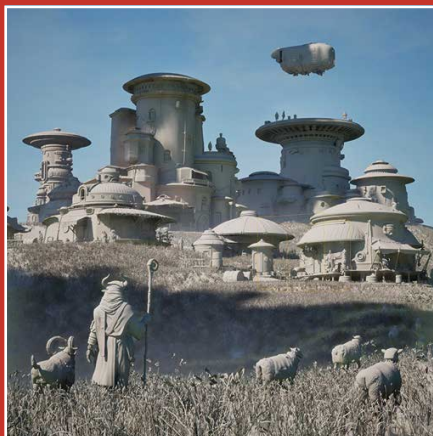
## How I create...

# A FUTURISTIC PASTORAL SCENE



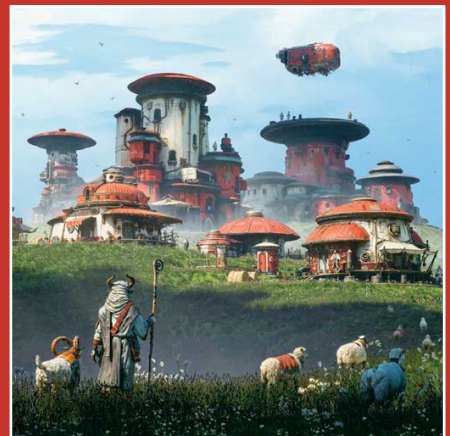
### 1 Thumbnails

The first thing I do when I am creating an image is thumbnail exploration. In this phase, I am blocking in the layout of my scene and focusing more on composition and narrative. A clean and easy-to-read composition is critical to the success of an image in terms of attempting to convey the desired narrative.



### 2 Lighting and atmosphere

After I lock down my layout, I focus on lighting and atmosphere. Lighting is critical for establishing the mood, but it's also fantastic for making your subject easy to read and breaking down the scene into clear elements. Having a character in light over a background in shadow helps get an easy read of your subject and narrative.

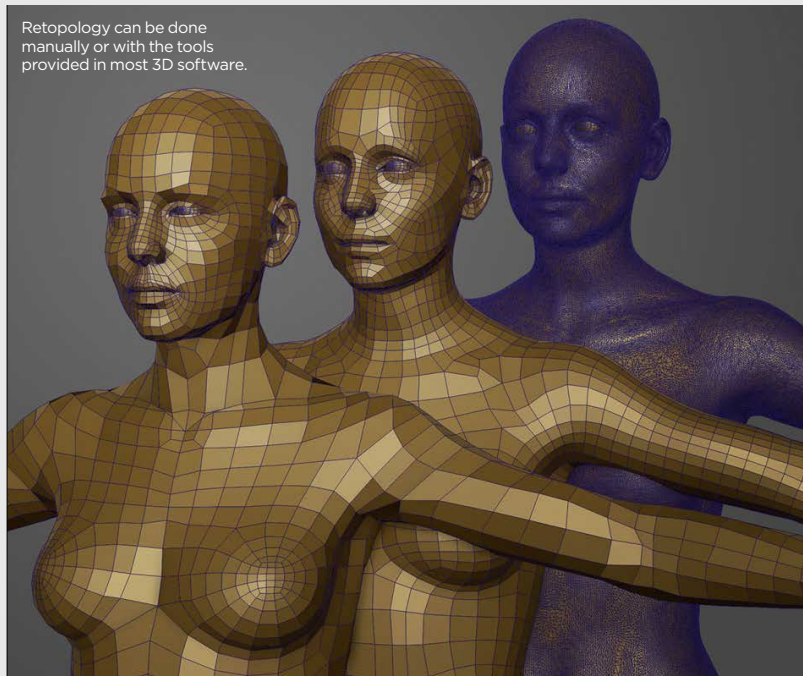


### 3 Details

With the composition and lighting sorted, now I focus on adding the final details to my scene. It is critical to save this until the end, because adding detail to a composition that does not work will not result in an image that is easy to read for the viewer. Quite often, I use atmosphere or cloud work to help frame my subject.

# 3D Artist Back to basics

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



## TALKING ABOUT TOPOLOGY

Topology is a word we hear a lot in the 3D industry, but what is it? **Antony Ward** explains how it affects your animation, and what you can do to improve it



So far, we've looked into the different aspects of a 3D model, but one of the most important areas is its topology. What this term refers to is how the model is constructed, so the way the edges flow into each other, how the polygons are organised and how well it's optimised.

You see, a dense model full of triangles, like scan data, isn't efficient,

plus wouldn't be ideal for animation, especially in game development. When faced with a mesh like this, the next step is to take it through a process called retopology, which is essentially rebuilding the model with fewer polygons and much cleaner topology.

This may seem daunting but many 3D applications now have tools that do this automatically. This results in cleaner topology, but the overall flow

of the edges still needs reworking to make it more suitable for animation, something we will look at next month.

For now, let's have a quick look at the steps you can take to improve your own models' topology.

**Antony Ward, aka antCGi, has created digital content for over three decades. Be it game development, rigging or recording in-depth courses for his YouTube channel, he boasts experience in most areas of 3D.**

## Three steps to achieving cleaner topology in your models

### 1 General retopology

The first step in reworking our model is to do a general retopology first pass, which will rebuild the mesh but with fewer



polygons. Most 3D applications have their own built-in tools to automate this process, but you can also opt to do it manually, because it gives you more control.

### 2 Remove unused geometry

Next, work your way all around the model, removing any geometry that isn't actually required. This would be edges and



polygons that don't help with the overall shape of the model. A good way to test this is to check the edges of the model's silhouette to see how it looks before and after.

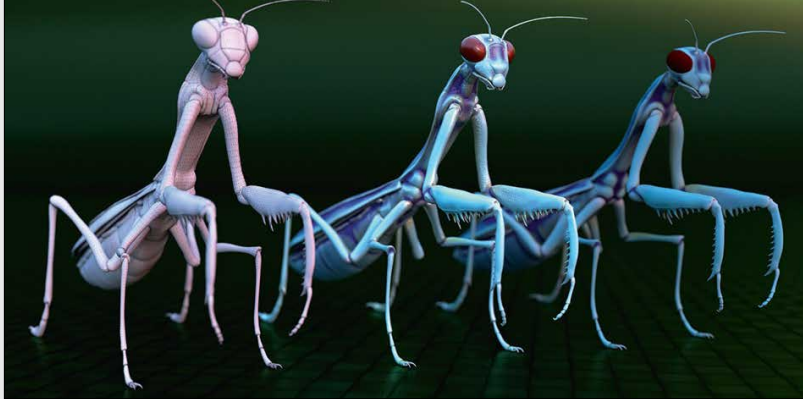
### 3 Check for deforming areas

Finally, if the model is to be animated, you need to go over it again and check for any areas that deform. Ideally the edge



loops need to flow correctly, matching the natural outlines of our own muscles, plus extra polygons will be needed in areas that bend, such as elbows and wrists.

Understanding how rendering works is essential for turning your 3D scenes into finished images.



## HOW DO I TURN MY 3D SCENE INTO AN IMAGE?

**Mike Griggs** on how to make a fully usable image from a 3D application using rendering



Let's start with what can be the most counter-intuitive element of working with a 3D application. What you see while working in your 3D app is not the final image. The viewport shows a simplified preview, sometimes in wireframe depending on the application, so the software can keep pace with you as you edit. Even if your 3D application has a mode to use the render engine to get the actual result, to output an image to your desired specifications you'll need to formally get the 3D application to render the image.

Rendering is the process where your 3D application's render engine works out how best to render the scene. 'Best' in this case means that specific render engines do different things – some are great at real-time responsiveness at the expense of

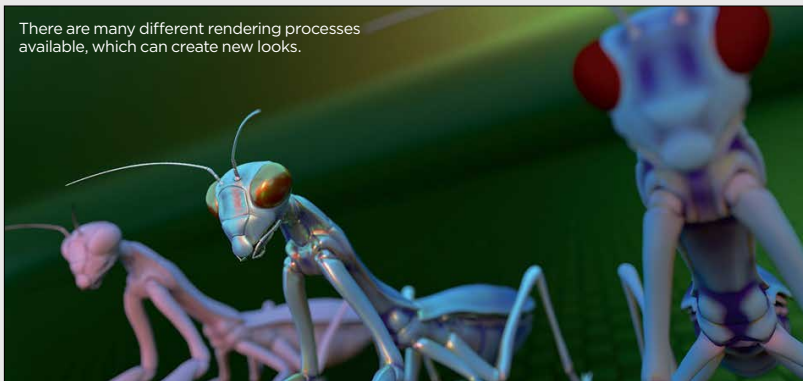
hyper-accurate transparency and reflection, and other render engines can factually work as real life does, but that potentially makes them less adaptable to different graphic and animated looks, which again require a render process.

So far, so confusing, but also hugely powerful. Rendering can make not just the final image, but a whole range of helper images to work with from mattes (masks), or images that show only the reflections or the base colour. All of a sudden, from a single render process there's a toolkit of imagery available to iterate with.

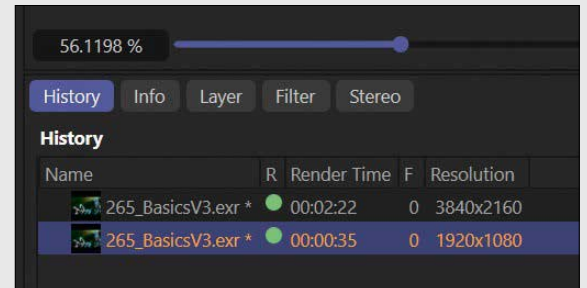
Even though rendering is counter-intuitive, it's also the ultimate stepping stone into enhanced creativity with your 3D application.

**Mike is the founder of Creative Bloke and has experience in content creation, workflow design and emerging creative technology. [www.creativebloke.com](http://www.creativebloke.com).**

There are many different rendering processes available, which can create new looks.

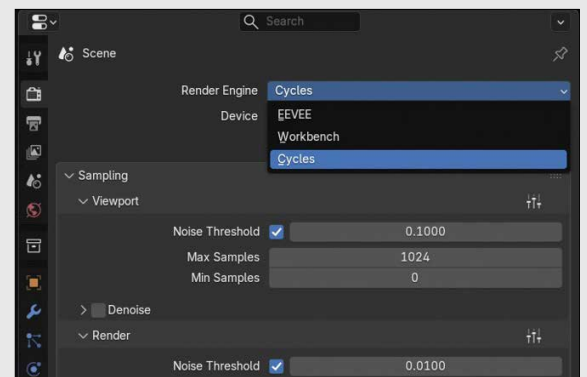


## Using the render engine to get the style you want



### 1 Processing time

Rendering can take a surprisingly long time, even if you have been using an interactive render preview. This is because a render captures all the information at the desired output resolution. An HD image is 1920 by 1080 pixels, whereas a 4K image is 3840 by 2160 pixels. This is four times the resolution, and therefore would take potentially four times as long to render.



### 2 Engine types

There are a wide range of render engines, from ones that can use science to make their lighting hyper-accurate to others that will give you a stylised cartoon look. Each one is a specialist in its own area. Most 3D apps come with at least one or two render engines that you can play with. The ones in Blender, for example, are based around speed (Eevee) and quality (Cycles).

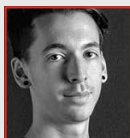


### 3 Render passes

An array of helper images can be produced alongside your main render, showing only reflections, base colour, atmosphere, and so on. These can then be blended in a 2D application to your liking without having to go through the time cost of a new render every time you want to make an iteration.

## FIVE MINUTES WITH MAX BIANCHINI

The Italian artist on how character backgrounds help his designs



**What is your main source of inspiration?**

My inspiration usually comes from game or manga/

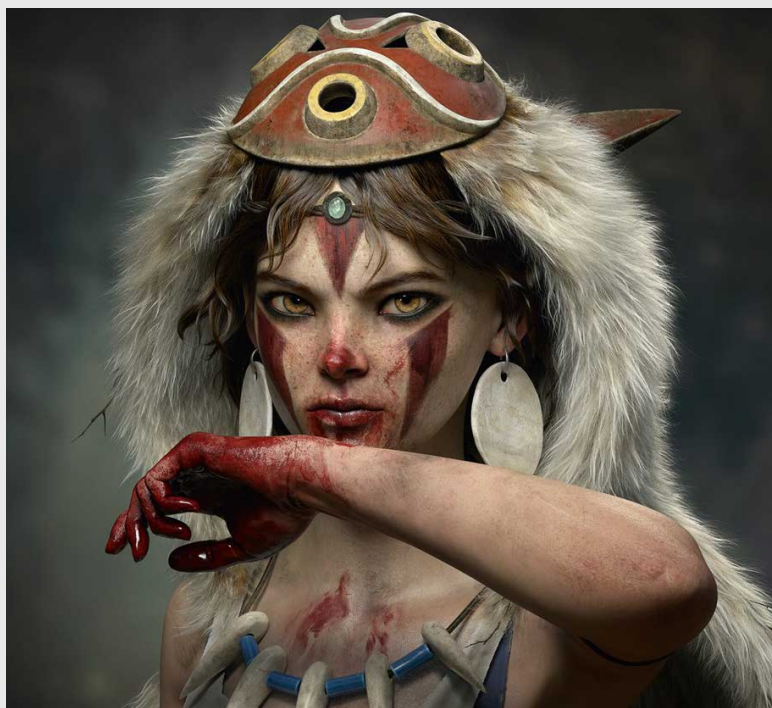
anime characters, specifically their artistic design and storytelling power. When I like a character, I research all their background, how they were developed and all the curiosities about their creation. I'm fascinated by the artistry behind expressive faces and lore. I love studying the small details – the way a scar tells a story or how colour choices reflect personality.

**What plays in the background while you work – music, podcasts, movies or something else?**

I actually listen to 90s cartoons in the background while I work. That era's energy and the iconic art style keeps me inspired. It's nostalgic and artistic without being distracting, and honestly, it just puts me in a great mood to create. And when I'm not listening to the opening of 90s

### PRINCESS MONONOKE

"Fan art of San, completed in 2022. I have seen all of Studio Ghibli's animation movies, and San from Princess Mononoke particularly struck me for the strength and uniqueness of its character."



cartoons, I listen to the soundtracks of my favourite video games.

**What's the most recent piece that you finished working on?**

The last piece I did was a 3D portrait of Ellie from The Last Of Us. It's not the first time I've done this piece, the first time was 5 years ago. I decided to do it again because she's a character I really love, and to test myself with the experience and

everything, I can't imagine my professional future any differently.

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

I mainly work in 3D, but I sketch sometimes, too. Since I usually do fan art, I tend to sketch anatomy stuff as study material. It helps me understand structure, proportion, and movement – things that I can directly apply when I'm sculpting. But it all started with my passion for drawing, which I've had since I was a kid.

**Do you have an ongoing passion project of some kind?**

Yes, I'm currently working on some Berserk fan arts. It's a passion project that lets me study Kentaro Miura's incredible character design while adding my personal touch. I love Berserk because of its unmatched depth and brutality. Miura created a world that is dark and unforgiving, yet incredibly human. The intense expressions and emotional weight of the character it's what I enjoy the most. It's just pure creative freedom, honouring art that deeply inspired me.

**Max is an Italian character artist currently working as a Texture & Lookdev Artist at Platige Image, where he creates realistic shading and textures for cinematic game characters.**  
[www.artstation.com/massimilianobc](http://www.artstation.com/massimilianobc)

**“I love studying the small details, such as the way a scar can tell a story”**



### ELLIE FROM THE LAST OF US

"This is a remake of a previous portrait of Ellie I did in 2020."

knowledge I've gained after years working in the industry. In addition to this portrait, in past years I have made portraits of Joel and Abby, also from The Last Of Us.

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

Making a living as an artist has been both harder and more rewarding than I imagined. The freedom to create daily is incredible, but the business side – marketing, deadlines, client communication – can be challenging. Still, seeing my work connect with others makes it worth it. It's a constantly evolving world, and sometimes it's hard to predict where it will end up. Despite



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We're here  
for young  
wheelchair  
users



Jasper,  
age 11

I'm young, disabled, but not so different

## The right wheelchair is the real difference

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