

SCIENCE FICTION ARTIST IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

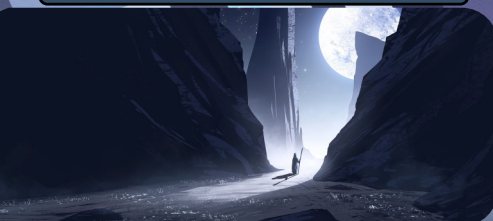
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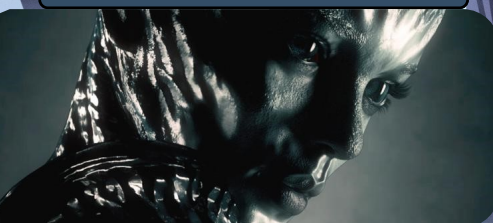
MONO ISSUE



LOGAN STAHL



'KVACM'



'KOOKI99'

ISSUE 49 | MAY 2020



VUE • TERRAGEN • POSER • DAZ STUDIO • REAL-TIME 3D • 2D DIGITAL PAINTING • 2D/3D COMBINATIONS

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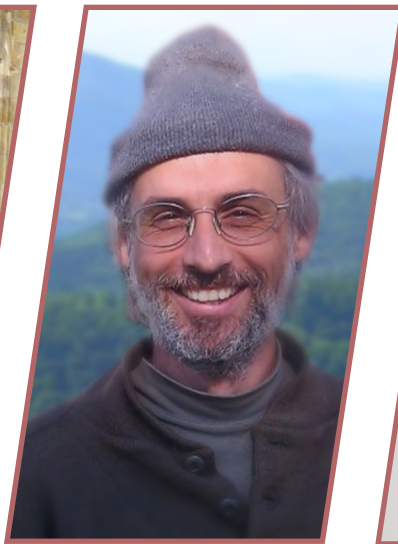
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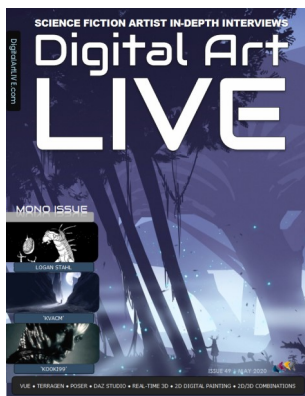
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Front Cover:

Detail from
"Mushroom
Forest" by
'Kvacm',
interviewed in
this issue. Made
with Photoshop.

THE 'MONO' ISSUE

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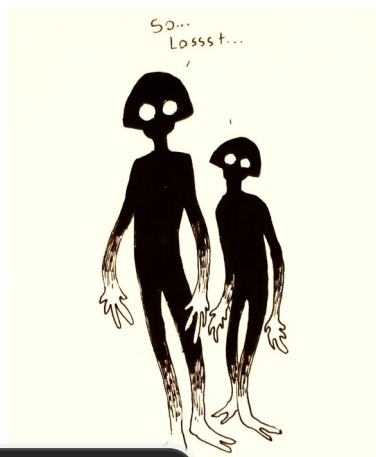
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LOGAN STAHL

Logan is a superb pen & ink artist and maker of comics. He explains his unusual recent move from digital to physical art.

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"It's weird, I think I'm following the opposite trajectory of most artists. It's more common to start out traditional before moving to digital. But I just have a lot of fun making marks on a paper. The permanence and unforgiving nature of it makes me strive harder."



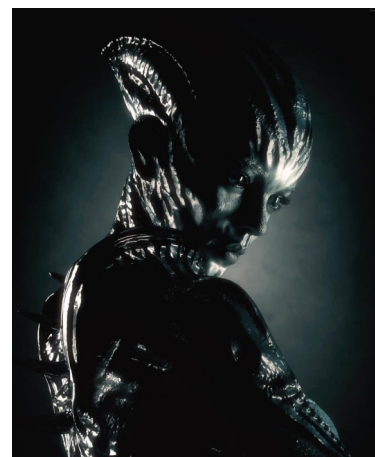
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'KVACM'

We visit South Moravia to talk with Michal about the joys of making pictures in a constrained style, and the value of preparation.

PHOTOSHOP

"I choose the synthwave style. But actually not because I like it — and I do love it — but because it's easiest. I can't draw characters. I wasn't able to draw even a face. So silhouettes were the right choice to learn painting — easy, fast, effective, ready for stylization."



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'KOOKI99'

We talk with Kooki99 in France about the joy of making hyperrealistic 3D portraits with relative ease, using DAZ Studio.

DAZ STUDIO

"At first I was reluctant to do black and white. I was like: 'I have great shaders, great SSS, why should I lose all that detail!?' But when I accidentally dialled a wrong button when postworking, I ended up with a highly contrasted b&w picture... that has so many details!"

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Credits for pictures, from top left: Detail from "Wizards" by 'FoxyTomcat', interviewed in this issue; detail from the fractal art "Space 8" by Nic022, featured in the Gallery of this issue; detail from sunrise at Saturn image, NASA.

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WELCOME...



Welcome to the 'Mono' issue, celebrating imaginative art made in monochrome, silhouette, lineart or black & white.

To say that science fiction is a child of the Age of Modernity is also to say it was a child of the Age of Monochrome. The two periods are more or less the same, roughly 1874 to 1974. From mass literacy and the new popular magazines, through to the mass arrival of colour TVs in 1970s living-rooms — and a collection of 1970s rock albums and American comics in the back-bedroom. The imaginative kids who came-of-age during that century learned to see in black & white, but to dream in colour. Of course there was some rare colour: on exotic picture postcards; on book jackets; on the covers of a Christmas Annual; or in picturebooks for small children. From the late 1960s one could also see science fiction in vivid colour on rock album covers, and record shops became art galleries of the fantastic. In the same period one might marvel at imported American comics, and a few times a year an all-ages sci-fi film might screen at the local cinema. But even into the early 1970s colour was still a relative rarity in one's imaginative everyday life. Then the Age of Monochrome collapsed, after a few vibrant 'last stand' movements such as op-art (optical illusion), which briefly seemed part of the future of science-fiction. Or the stark photocopier aesthetic of the original British punk rock. Both op-art and punk graphics were alluring in their energy. But by 1985 colour was everywhere, and sleekly desirable. The neon colours of cyberpunk and anime ushered us into a brighter future, accompanied by the wild multicolour music videos of post-Kraftwerk synth-pop.

Black and white was dead, to all but a few bewildered '90s goths. And yet it still haunts artists with its possibilities, and the simple joy of creative restraint. The stylishness of *film noir* and expressionist cinema retain a deep allure, and even the emergence of a TV Dalek from the shadows can feel scarier in a crisp black and white. The woodcut work of Frans Masereel and the shadow-puppet films of Lotte Reiniger have inspired modern classics such as the videogame *Limbo*, and the animation *Jasper Morello*. In comics the simple line-art and dash shading of Moebius still holds thousands of comic artists in deep thrall. The engraving-like comics work of John Buscema (the b&w *Savage Sword of Conan*) or Bernie Wrightson is far less easy to emulate, but artists such as Frank Miller and Mike Mignola have found new elegant balances between monochrome/silhouette art and colour.

Yet these are creative exceptions, and our technology now seems to pull us ever deeper into colour. At least one AI can do automatic colourisation remarkably well, and this can only get better. Krita can auto-colour by matching greyscale shades to colours. Clip Studio has auto-colorization in recent versions. But what if we had equally powerful de-colourising technologies that took things the other way, and in an elegant manner? Perhaps there's an aesthetic in that idea, for our post-lockdown age — desaturate, contrast, simplify.

DAVID HADEN

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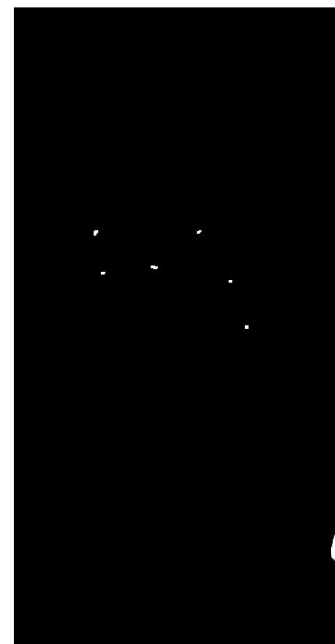


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LOGAN STAHL



We talk with **Logan Stahl**, aka 'FoxyTomcat', about the importance of daily skill training for lineart and colouring, his unusual move from digital toward traditional methods, and the limited options we have in online communities.

DAL: Logan, welcome to the *Digital Art Live* in-depth interview.

LS: Hi! Thanks for having me.

DAL: Looking at your DeviantArt Gallery, I see you keep the early work from 2011 online. As such, the Gallery forms an excellent and encouraging example of how an artist's style and ability can evolve across about ten years. I assume you have had to consciously work hard at developing your talents. What specific ways did you go about doing that, and what worked best for you?

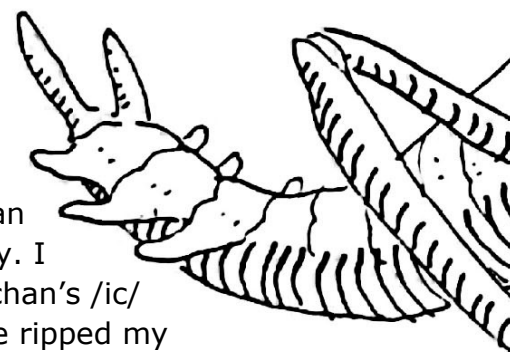
LS: It's changed a lot over the years. When I was a kid I would just draw what I wanted to draw, sometimes looking at other artists, sometimes just trying my best to figure it out on my own. When I started really taking art seriously, I had a very rigid schedule that I would follow every day. Making sure to draw with a timer on, so I wouldn't slack off. And every couple of weeks reworking the schedule, to meet new goals. I'm still like that now, when I can afford to take the time. I'll do some warmup exercises and targeted studies for 45 minutes to an hour, and then work on something bigger — a finished piece or a big study aimed at hitting a couple of my weak points. The most important thing, I think, is

making sure you're practicing consistently, and constantly criticizing and re-evaluating yourself so that you don't stagnate.

DAL: Great advice. Have you found any mentors or communities who helped and encouraged you, when you were starting out? Or was school useful for you?

LS: I was about 19 I think when I began to take art seriously. I started going on 4chan's /ic/ board where people ripped my beginner art to shreds. But also gave me the resources and tools to improve, and that was exactly what I needed. Before that, I'd thought I was really good at drawing and I had just stagnated pretty much since middle school. Once I understood that I was bad, but I could improve, things began to finally progress for the first time in years.

I had some art classes as a kid, but I don't think I retained much from them. I didn't have any formal art education until about a year and a half ago when I started an oil painting class.



Picture: "Treasure".

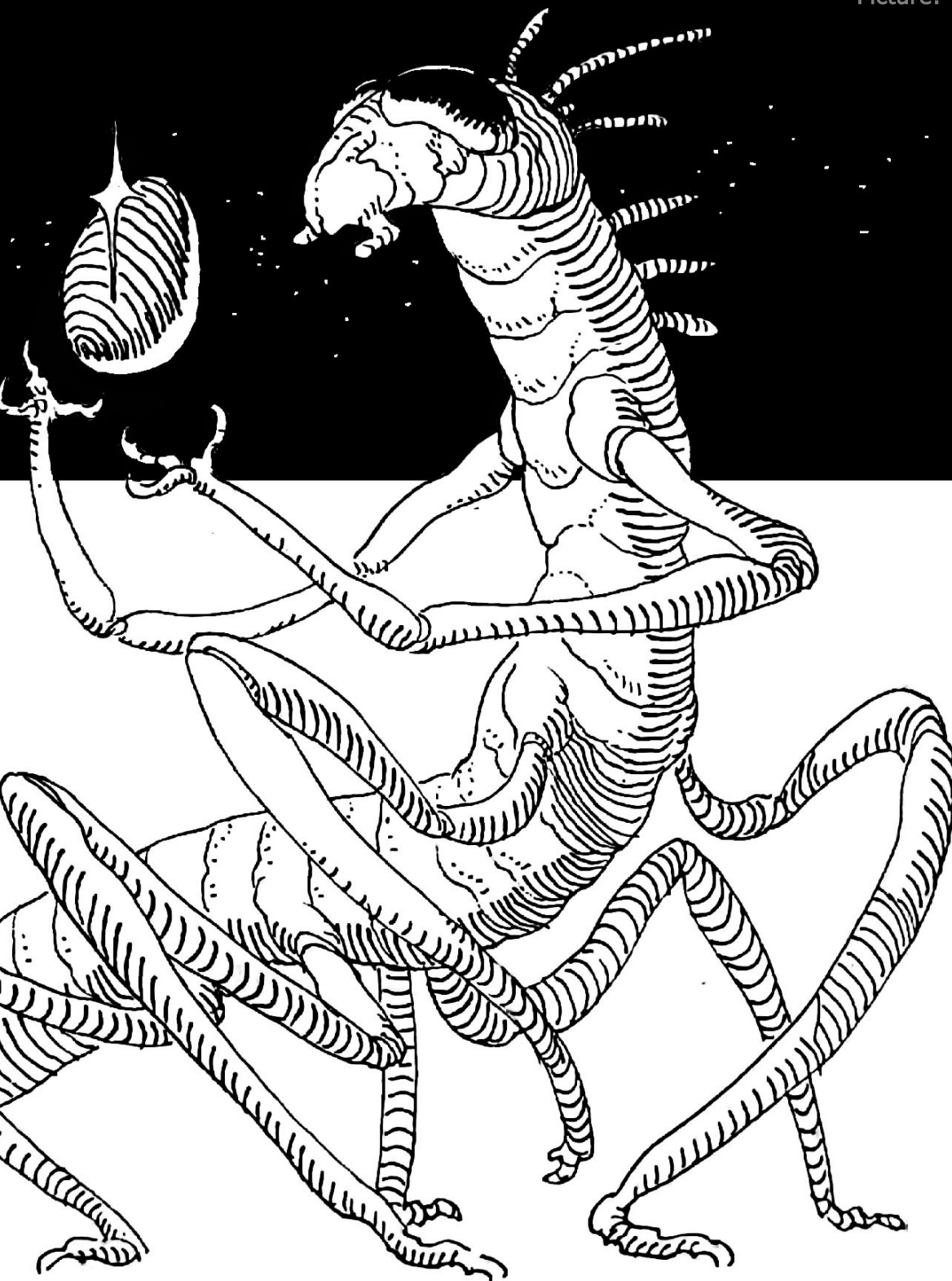


LOGAN STAHL aka
'FoxyTomcat'

USA

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"I want to push myself to do more mini-comics — because they're really fun to work on, people seem to enjoy them, and they're great practice for the future."

That's helped me a ton, even if I don't post my paintings that much. I've been able to apply the concepts I've learned there to everything else I do. If you can find a reputable art class and can afford it, then I recommend going.

DAL: Yes, and of course there are also plenty of online training alternatives, now that face-to-

face is not viable. How did you first find Moebius, and how did he fit in alongside your other early influences?

LS: Moebius was kind of a slow discovery for me. I'd sometimes see his stuff posted in the art forums I'd frequent. I thought they were cool and I'd save some for inspiration.

After a while when I started to recognize his style, I was seeing it in more and more places and I realized that I really REALLY liked it. So I started actively seeking his art out, bought a couple of his comics, and the rest is history.

My biggest influence before Moebius was definitely Wayne Barlowe, and he's still a huge influence on me. Obviously I'm not primarily an oil painter, so my stuff looks nothing like his, but the way he designs creatures and environments — they just feel so real and I constantly go back to his art for inspiration. Looking at Barlowe's work when I was in middle school is what introduced me to both speculative biology art communities, and 19th century Orientalist painters, and that's all stuck with me. His *Expedition* (1990) is definitely in my top ten all-time favourite books.

Also I've had an enormous appreciation for the art of Katsuhiro Otomo since I was in high school and I think it's interesting to note that Otomo and Moebius were both apparently fans of each other. Moebius did fanart of Tetsuo from *Akira* and Otomo did fanart of Arzach and I just think that's so cool.

DAL: Have you read up on 'the theory of Moebius' — there's a day or two of reading out there now, working out what his techniques and working methods were, and even analysing the styles of dash-shading and colouring. And there's a whole book of interviews with him coming soon in English. Or have you just whipped out the magnifying glass each day and made a very close study of what's on his printed pages?

LS: A little bit of both. William Stout at williamstout.com did a great, practical analysis of Moebius' techniques that I should probably re-read at some point. I've also read his interviews, interviews of people that knew him, and talked with other fans to try and reverse-engineer some of his techniques. And of course I have done many studies of Moebius' work — it helps a lot when I can't think of how to draw something and I can find a piece where he had drawn the same thing already. It's a great way to learn. I do that with other artists too, but Moebius is certainly one of my go-to's.

DAL: How have you explored the possibilities of digital, and digital inking in particular? Have you methodically gone through the inks in Clip Studio (Manga Studio), Krita 4.x, Expresii, Rebelle, and various Photoshop ink pens with a good reputation?

LS: I used to do a lot of digital drawing but over time I came to realize I feel much more comfortable working with pen and paper — I just feel like I have better control. These days I actually do very little digital inking — my lines are almost entirely traditional.

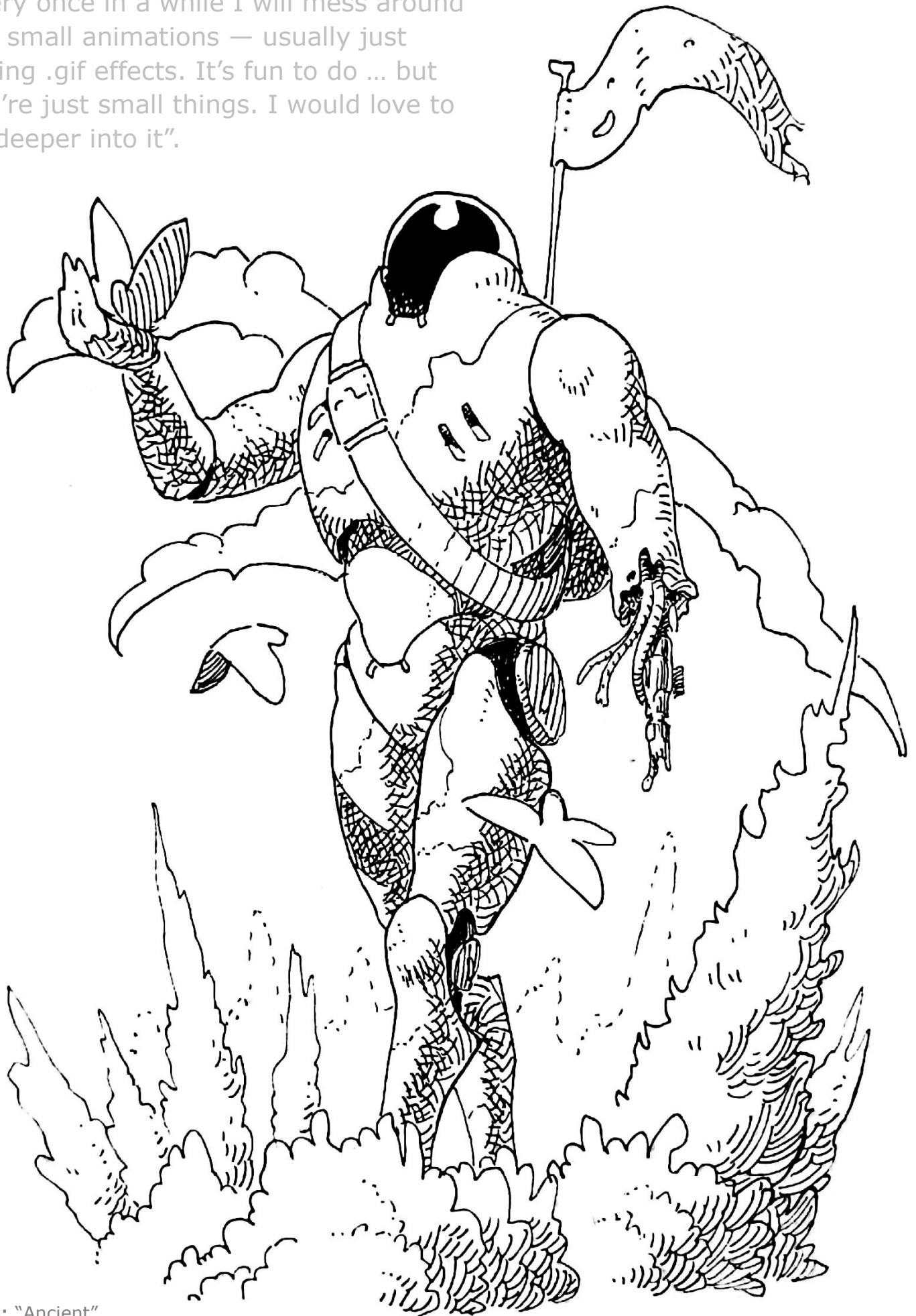
Photoshop is the only program I ever use and I would either use a simple hard round brush or the pencil tool. For hardware I just recently switched to a Huion tablet which I like a lot but I really only use it for painting. Before that I had a Wacom Intuos for many years which served me fine.

DAL: On Moebius's distinctive dash-shading and contour lines, do you find there's a certain 'knack' or 'hand' required to do these consistently and convincingly, and if so what is it? Also, do you find digital helps or hinders in emulating such a style?

LS: I'm definitely not an authority on this, but I'll try my best to answer! /Laughter/ I think with hatching and lineart you need to be giving a lot of thought to *every single line*. You shouldn't ever be "guessing." You have to control the speed at which you make a line, so that you're not so fast that the line is inaccurate but not so slow that the line is wobbly. You need to think about the pressure you're putting on your pen and how that affects the line weight. With hatching you need to think about the direction of every line, so that the hatched area is pleasing to look at rather than scribbly and so that the overall look of the hatching matches whatever material you're trying to render. You have to think about the density of hatched lines and make sure they're creating the desired value. It's a lot, and I know I still have tons and tons to learn.

I've found that digital hinders this style — at least for me. I can never seem to get the same intuitive control over line weight in Photoshop that I can with a real pen and paper.

"Every once in a while I will mess around with small animations — usually just looping .gif effects. It's fun to do ... but they're just small things. I would love to get deeper into it".



Picture: "Ancient".

I've also had a lot of problems with software glitching and creating unintentional lines when I try to lay down bits of hatching very quickly. That could be specific to my hardware/software setup but it definitely helped to turn me off of inking digitally.

DAL: Yes, there's a certain level of hardware, software, pen drivers and brush types and canvas sizes, that then all has to be fine-tuned and gelled together into a streamlined workflow. That said, it's becoming easier for a beginner to just leap in, perhaps with a fat cheque, and get a desktop solution all nailed down in a few weeks. And there are the newer digital drawing surfaces and suchlike, too. We're hoping to get a review unit of one of those later in the summer.

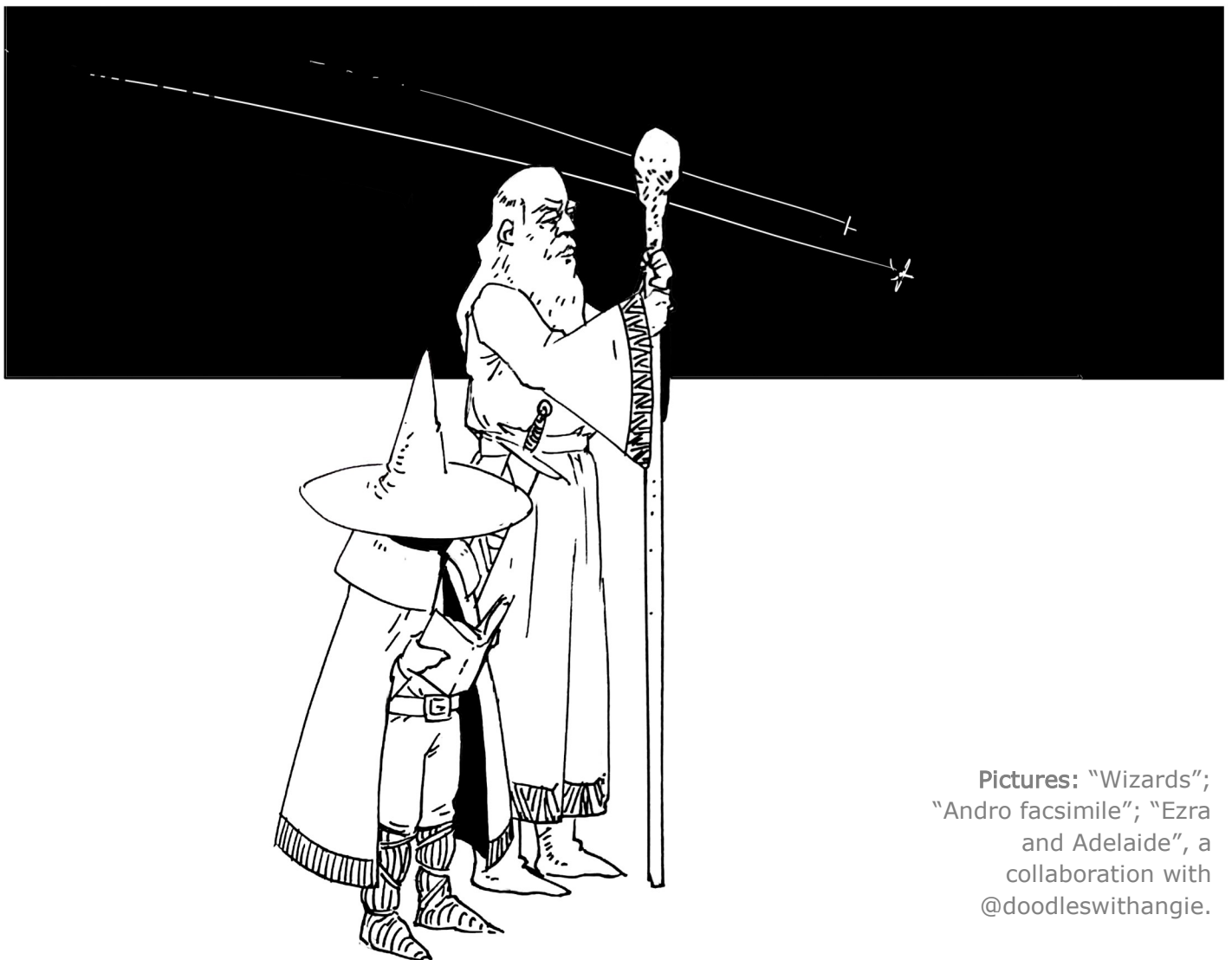
LS: Yes, there are plenty of artists much better than me that do extremely impressive digital lineart, so if it works for you then go for it!

DAL: And how have you approached colouring your line work? I assume that's either 'scan in pen-and-paper inks for digital colouring', or an all-digital workflow?

LS: Yes, scanning in paper and colouring digitally has been my typical workflow for a couple years now. Recently, however, I've been beginning to switch it up and start colouring more traditionally with markers and coloured pencils.

It's weird, I think I'm following the opposite trajectory of most artists these days. It seems more common for people to start out traditional before moving to digital. But I just have a lot of fun making marks on a paper. The permanence and unforgiving nature of it makes me strive harder, I think.

DAL: Yes, it's no doubt great if you can afford the stream of art supplies and have an art-shop nearby, and/or have clients who'll buy the



Pictures: "Wizards";
"Andro facsimile"; "Ezra
and Adelaide", a
collaboration with
@doodleswithangie.

physical work. I've heard several comics artists say that they like to work physically as it means they'll have the art boards to sell at auction in 20 years, to fund their retirement. Talking of comics, you're also a maker of comics. At a quite high level, given some of the samples you've shown. Do you plan to team with a writer, or are you developing your own stories as a writer-artist?

LS: I have a couple ideas for stories I'd like to tell in comic form and one of them is completely written. But they're all very *big*, much bigger than I'm ready to commit to at the moment. I have a sizeable backlog of unpublished art projects in various states of completion that I want to finish up first before tackling a big comic. But in the meantime I want to push myself to do more mini-comics — because they're really fun to work on, people seem to enjoy them, and they're great practice for the future.

I would love to team up with a writer, but no one's offered! I've talked about it with some of my friends but they've all got their own stuff to do at the moment. Maybe someday...

DAL: What might the finished form of "big" look like? Would you be happy to self-publish in digital-only, or would you also want a print edition?

LS: I think some time, in maybe the next year, I'd like to start doing a self-published digital comic. But at the moment I'm finishing up a non-comic artbook that I want to have done before I start another big project. That book is supposed to be published in print by a small start-up publisher, but depending on how it goes it might end up being digital. We'll have to see! */Laughter/*

Very long term I would definitely want to get more of my stuff in print. I've contributed illustrations to a couple print books in the past.



I'm very proud of that. There's something wrong with me where despite spending most of my waking life online I can't stand to read anything on a computer screen — it's all physical books for me!

DAL: Wow, you really are getting the 'physical' bug. And I see that you're also very much into music. I can see your work interfacing quite well with that — gig posters, album covers, badges (buttons), mini-comics featuring the band, and so on? Have you had much interest from the music scene, or is that a direction you could go in commercially?

LS: I really *really* love music. I play a couple instruments and I spent a lot of time in college going to basement shows, so that definitely influences what I draw. I got to do an album cover back in 2017 for some local bands, and that was really cool because you can see it on Spotify — search for Elephant Jake / Stand and Wave / Shark Club split EP. It's something I would definitely like to do more of, just for the fun of it. I love interacting with musicians and other artists in general and it's cool to see my drawings actually used for something.

DAL: Great. Who inspires you in 2020?

LS: Oh man. I find new artists every day. In terms of big names, I love artists with strong lineart — Katsuhiko Otomo, Katsuya Terada, Sergio Toppi, and Franklin Booth are all people I've been looking at for inspiration lately. More contemporary artists that I adore are Cosimo Galluzzi and Simon Stalenhag.

I don't actually read that many comics, surprisingly. I love Alan Moore's stuff and I've already mentioned Otomo, but everybody knows them. My favourite comic that I don't think gets nearly enough love would have to be Mark Schultz's *Xenozoic Tales* — such a great blend of *Weird Tales*-esque pulpiness and early 90s gritty action. And Schultz is a terrific artist. In terms of storytelling, though, I definitely get more ideas from books than comics. I read constantly and voraciously.

I also get a huge amount of inspiration from other small artists. Way too many to name and obviously they're not super famous. But other people just drawing what they want in their own style, outside the constraints of industry specifications or trying to really appeal to any specific audience — I think that's where you can find loads of cool art. And make a lot of friends, too.

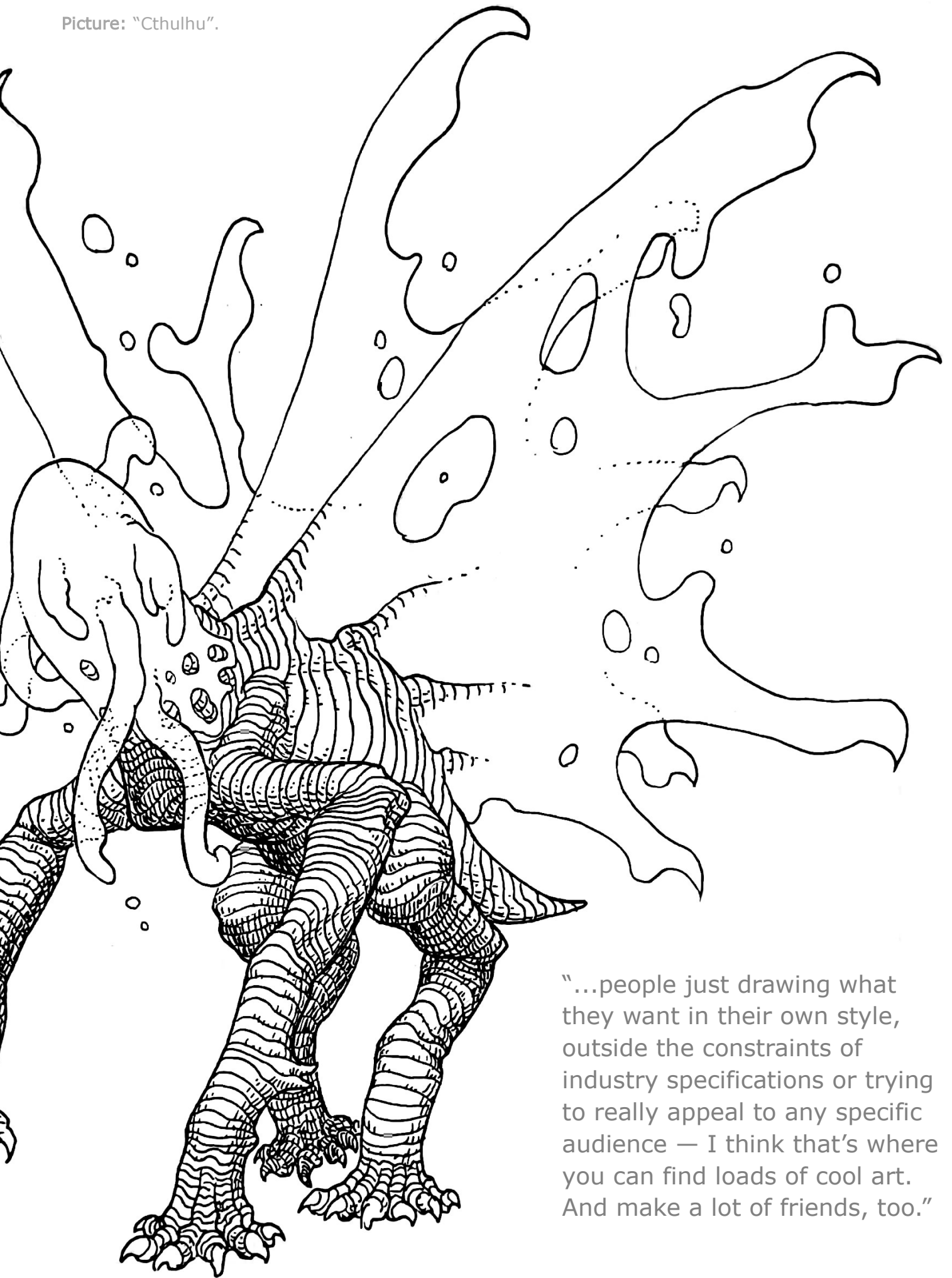
DAL: Yes, there are some nice digital outlets for that that too, such as Itch.io's Comics section. And there's also a Miyazaki influence in some of the subject matter for your work — the movies *Nausicaa* and *Princess Mononoke*, for instance. Does digital animation attract you, as a creator, or do you think you will be content with comics as a storytelling form?

LS: Every once in a while I will mess around with small animations — usually just looping .gif effects. It's fun to do when I have a clear idea of what I want to make, and I also have the time to do it, but they're just small things. I would love to get deeper into it, but for the time being art is just a hobby for me — I'm lucky if I get one or two hours a day to draw.

Animation I think requires a ton of knowledge and practice, and I just don't have the time to really teach myself and still have fun with it, sadly. If I could do art as a full-time job then animation might be the hobby I would do for an hour or two out of the day.



Picture: "Cthulhu".



"...people just drawing what they want in their own style, outside the constraints of industry specifications or trying to really appeal to any specific audience — I think that's where you can find loads of cool art. And make a lot of friends, too."

DAL: Yet, it's a massive time-sink if you're going to tell a story with it. Now, you've recently posted online about the dangerous lack of friendly chatty art-forums open to newcomers, with DeviantArt basically the only one left, for now — and even that always vulnerable to some corporate cash-crisis, or some clunky policy change on 'acceptability'. What would be your ideal friendly imaginative community, what would it look and feel like?

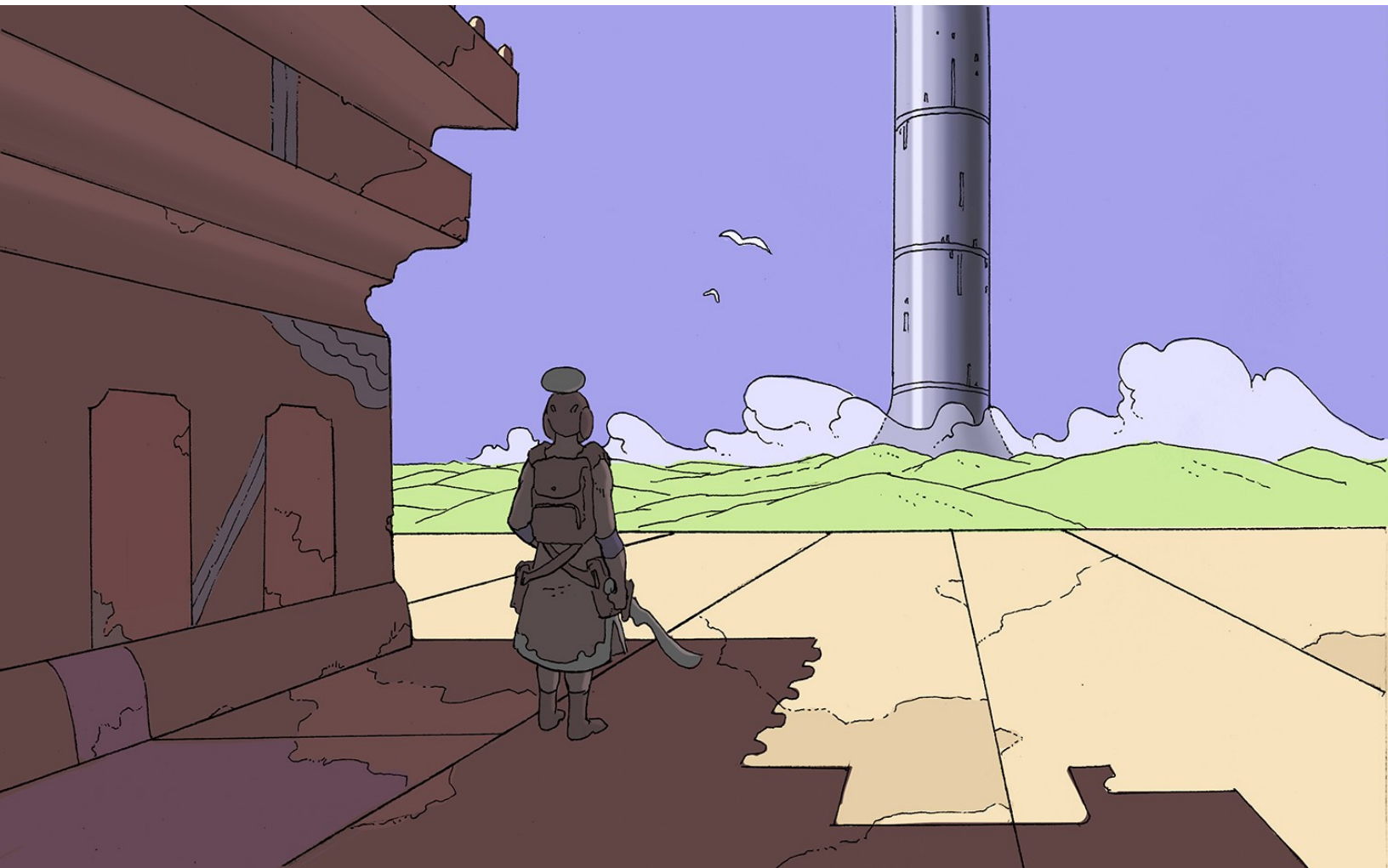
LS: I'd like a set-up geared toward hosting small, active art communities. I've given a lot of thought to how when I used to browse DeviantArt back in middle school that's kind of how it worked — people who drew similar stuff all sort of knew each other and everyone was always hosting contests and working on collaborative projects.

I think mainstream social media killed a lot of that off — people left for different sites that, structurally, weren't really capable of hosting communities like that. And then DeviantArt kind of degenerated into a punchline, once a lot of the professionals left and it became known for the large amount of niche fetish art that

quite often is the first stuff you see when you log in.

DAL: Yes, though thankfully the foot-fetishists and suchlike can be very quickly perma-blocked from search-results and the site, with browser add-ons such as [DeviantArt Filter 6.0](#) and the UserScript [dA_ignore](#). Filter 6.0 is newly updated for Eclipse. With DeviantArt Filter installed, it's 'just one click' and the unwanted artist is perma-blocked.

LS: I've had some success participating in art-related Discord servers with friends online. The problem with those is growing them — once they get too big, it just becomes a giant group-chat that you can't keep up with, and there's no way to really get to know anyone. I think ideally I'd like a website where every user would have their own individually-curated gallery and where it would also be really easy to set-up and join customizable group pages. Groups could have their own galleries, forums, group chats, etc. I don't know if it would work, I don't know a thing about web design. But that's what I'd like to see. Something to facilitate dialogue and collaboration.



DAL: Yes, I something wonder if Facebook is not missing a trick. By not offering a re-skinned Facebook that's far more suitable for artist use on a desktop PC. The underlying stuff would all be the same, but the layout and presentation would be geared to art and online galleries. But I guess that's not what they're about. WordPress is perhaps the most likely company to spin out something like that, and have the strength to make it work.

Of course there's also Instagram, but it's not ideal, and it's only just become somewhat usable on a desktop PC. As I mentioned, Itch.io's comics section is also rather fab as a store, but I don't think there's any real social interaction. Flickr is shaky in terms of its continuing existence, and 500px is hardly the ideal replacement. I've tried it. Too expensive, too geared toward stock photography. So we're stuck with DeviantArt + the DeviantArt Filter. It used to be that that add-on slowed down the scrolling once you get beyond about 50 permablocks. But now there's a new beta version for Eclipse that works much more smoothly even when you

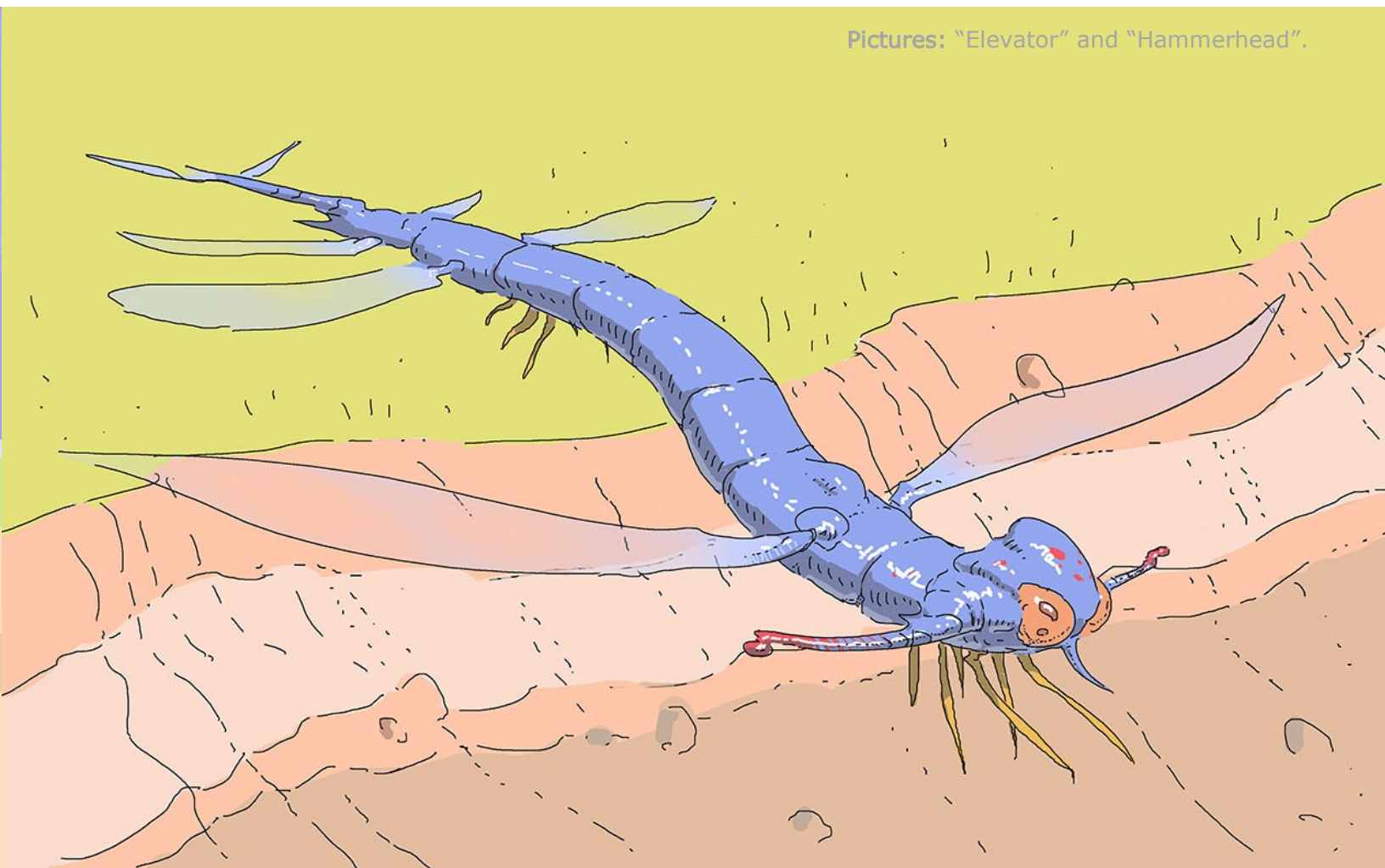
have 1,500 on your blocklist. There's even a version of the add-on for the Opera Web browser, which is nice. I'm not keen in the Eclipse makeover for the site, though.

LS: I don't mind the Eclipse update, although I know I'm in the minority *haha!* At least they're trying to keep the website relevant, so it's better than nothing. It is crazy to me, though, that they haven't been able to devise some kind of algorithm to keep fetish art and in general a lot of off-putting 'beginner art' off of the front page. I mean, Artstation doesn't have that problem at all, so it can definitely be done. At the same time though I feel like dA's weirdness adds to its charm — at least for me.

DAL: Yes, I guess it's in the name — Deviant... it's great that it even exists, and more or less continues to exist in the prudish world of 2020.

LS: One update I would like would be for them to let you change your username without paying for it — that way I could switch the dumb name I made up when I was fourteen ("FoxyTomcat") to the dumb name I use on every other website ("Lil_Tachyon").

Pictures: "Elevator" and "Hammerhead".



Twitter, I think, is the most fun mainstream website to post on at the moment. People will actually talk to you and tend to be relatively genuine — on Instagram I find people are a lot more reserved. Tumblr seems like it's dying out these days which stinks, because it was fun for a while, at the tail-end of it being relevant.

DAL: Yes, and I guess Pinterest could do something in the future. Maybe even Trello, which with a few tweaks could be good for 'see my workflow' artists. But let's talk more about you. What are you working on at the moment?



LS: I mentioned I have a small book that's probably around 85% complete. A couple of pages need to be re-drawn and I need to format it all and send it to the publisher, but I'm trying to finish it up. I've got a bunch of unreleased drawings and writings for a world-building project with my friends, that we're not sure how we want to release. Those are the bigger projects. Day-to-day I'm just trying to improve — I've got tons of weak spots that I need to hit. I need to put a lot more time into drawing environments, architecture, vehicles — I guess more perspective-heavy subjects.

DAL: I see. Now, obviously the virus is affecting the creative industries quite a lot. In a way that's good, as many things had become rather stodgy and settled, especially in the UK's funded art sectors, and in general there were far too many snoozing dinosaurs. It should theoretically shake things up again, and make room for nimble new creatives to emerge in due course. How have you been affected?

LS: It sounds bad to say it, but in a sense I've been really fortunate. I'm a mechanical engineer for a company that makes some of the components that go in ventilators, so we've been able to stay in business and I've been able to work from home which saves me two hours per day of commute time. I've had way more time to draw, now that I'm not doing all that driving and I feel like I've had more improvement in the last two months than in the whole year before everything went into lockdown where I live. But that's not going to stick — I'll probably have to get back to my regular commuting within the next month or two. It's okay though, I'm very thankful to have a dependable job at a time like this.

DAL: Great. Here in the UK the idea of 'a legal right to work from home' is being mooted. But where do you see yourself in 2030?

LS: In a perfect world I'd like to have found a way to support myself and my family by drawing. All I want to do is draw all day. Realistically I'll probably still be an engineer and draw at nights and on the weekends. That's life, I guess.

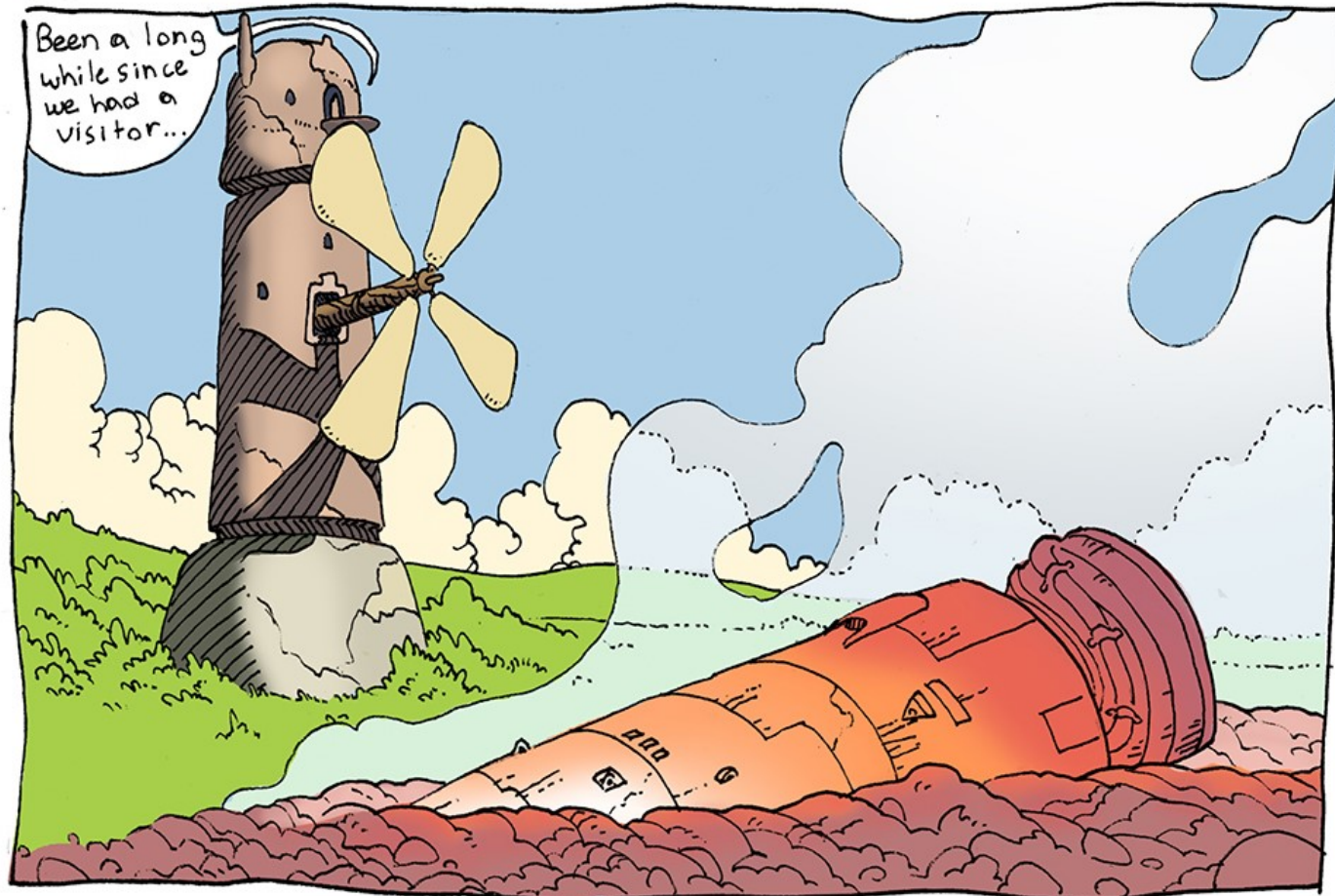
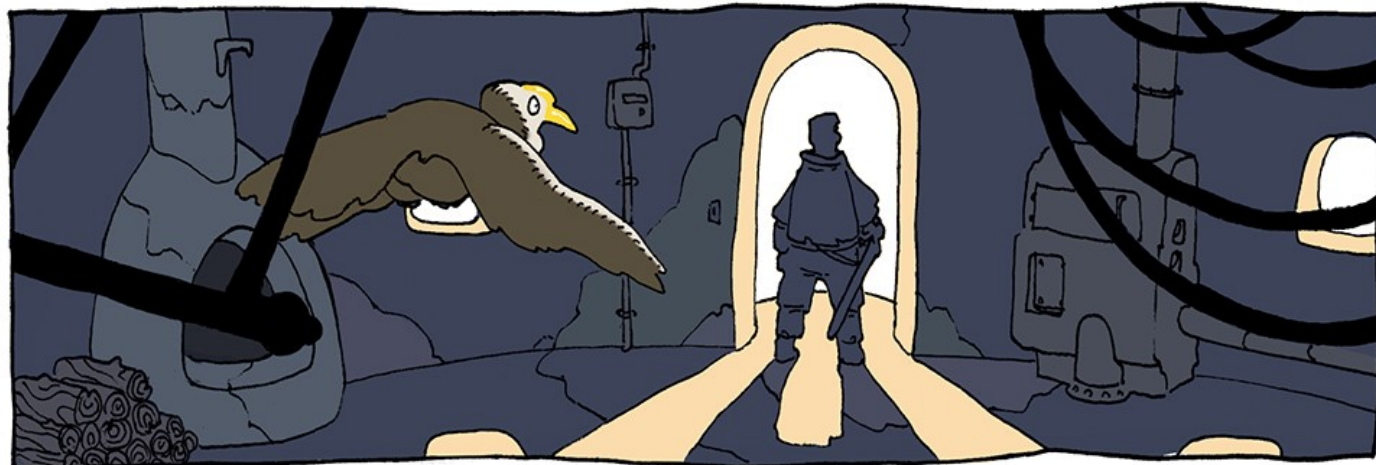
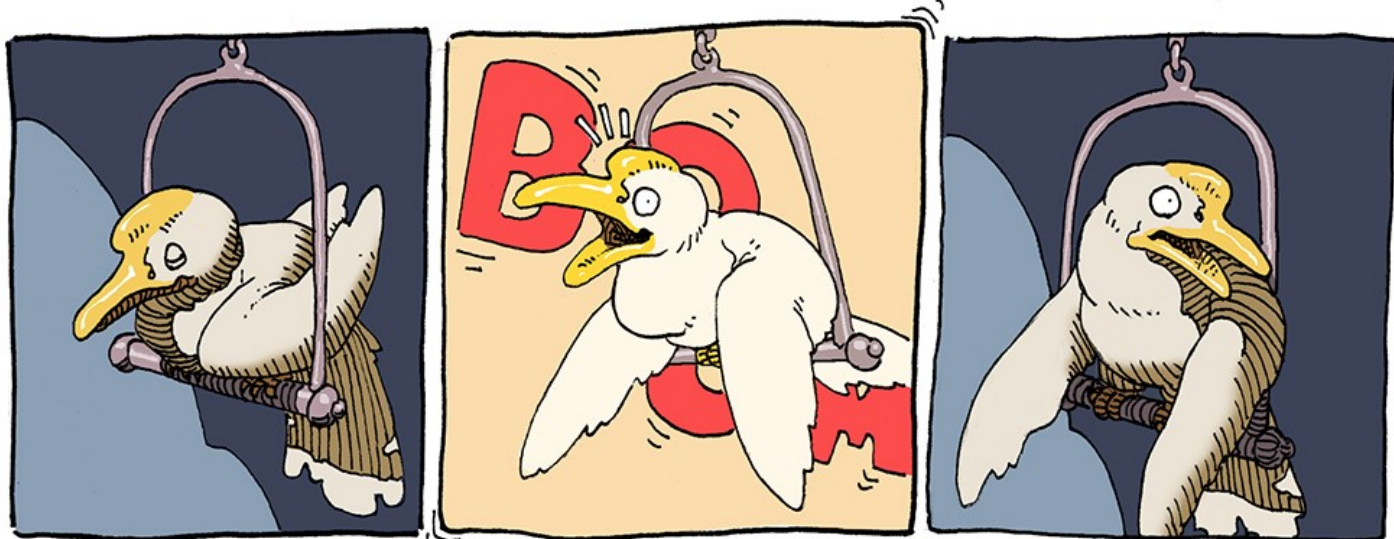
DAL: Great, well we wish you and your family all the best. Logan, many thanks for this in-depth interview.

LS: Thank you so much for having me. This was great!

Logan Stahl is online at:

<https://www.deviantart.com/foxytomcat/>

https://www.instagram.com/lil_tachyon/



Pictures: "Space Bass" (opposite) and opening page from *Lonely* comic.

AUTOCOLOUR

Want to go from black and white to colour? We take a quick look at some of the options for assisted and automatic colouring in 2020.

Commercial software to help colorize photos has been around for a while, such as **AKVIS Coloriage**. But it is far from offering complete automation. Instead it involves rather uncreative squiggly outlining in coloured markers all over the picture, and then dabbing on colour dots, to guide the software. Frankly the process is very tedious and fiddly, and it's difficult to recommend Coloriage at \$90 or the similar commercial-use \$300 **CODIY Colorizer Pro**. Especially now there's a better AI driven free solution that works in an instant.

The best cloud AI colorising service we tested is the new **MyHeritage.com** free **InColor** photo colourisation tool, though use of this does require a free signup to the ancestry site MyHeritage. InColor is the latest tweaked-up version of Jason Antic's amateur open-source project **DeOldify**, and it is amazingly good on most types of photo and even some greyscale and lineart — accurate, very quick, and totally automatic. The output is somewhat small, but you simply up-scale it before colour-blending its layer over your original in Photoshop.

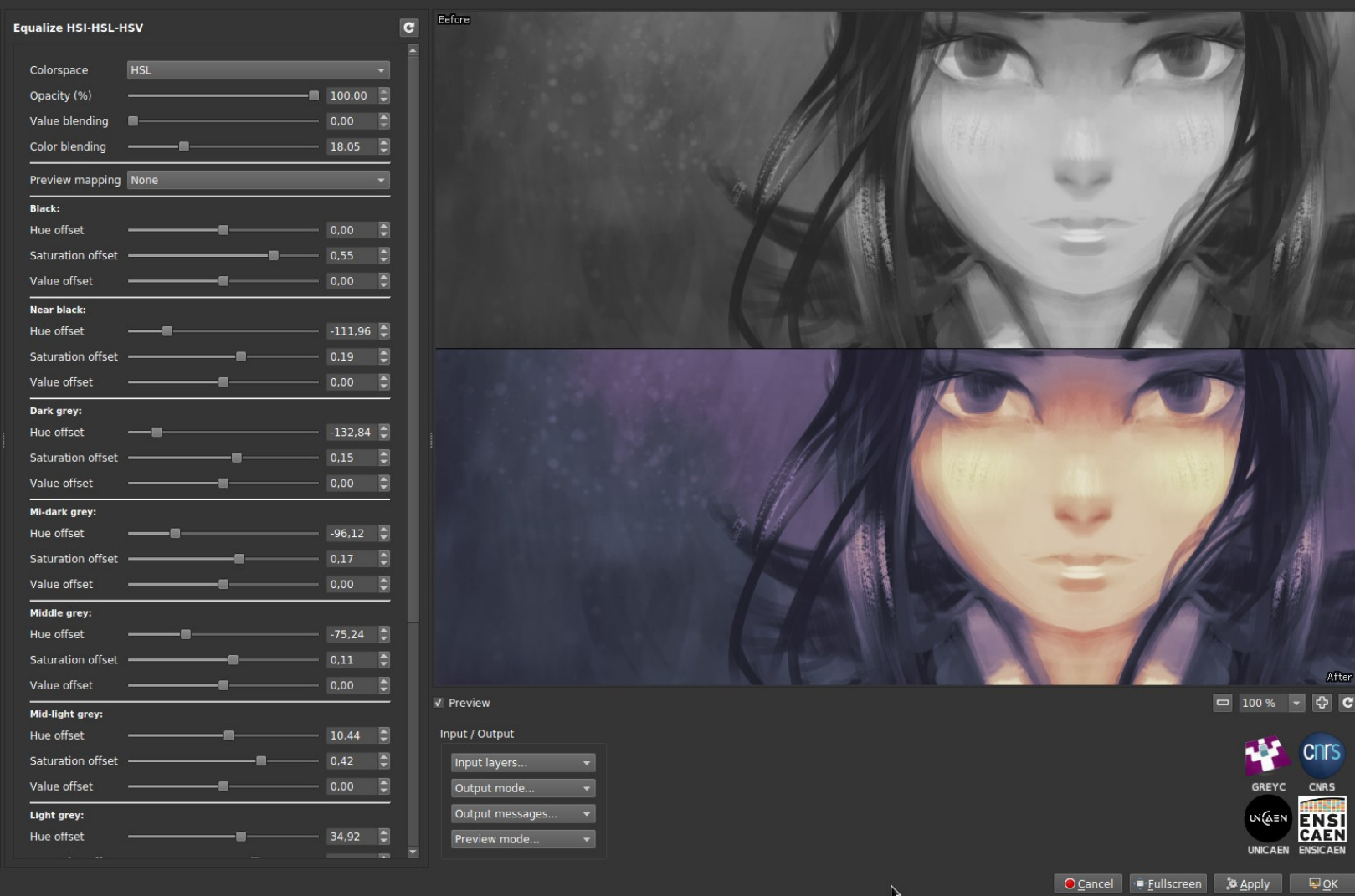
So far as we know there is not yet a desktop implementation of auto-colorizing AI, certainly not at this level of excellence. Although we hope that Topaz Labs is eyeing this possibility for a future release in its 'AI' series of software.

For photos the one consumer-level software we would recommend you keep an eye on is Adobe **Photoshop Elements 2020**, currently at \$100. Unlike the big Photoshop, Elements offers auto colourising of photos. But in our testing Elements 2020 simply didn't live up to the marketing promise and — with AI-driven cloud services like MyHeritage's InColor offering far better for free — the trial was uninstalled. However, given Adobe's muscle and researcher connections, it's possible this Elements feature could improve in the next few years.

Of course it's not that difficult to colorise many simple old black-and-white photos by hand, ideally using a pen and pen-monitor. Once you get the hang of how it's done, and get a few Photoshop Actions for rapid setup, you can then use a tool such as InColor and DeOldify as a **time-saving 'quickstart'** for a full colourisation by hand. Their automatic skin-tones are especially useful time-savers, but watch out for missing ears and hands that remain grey.

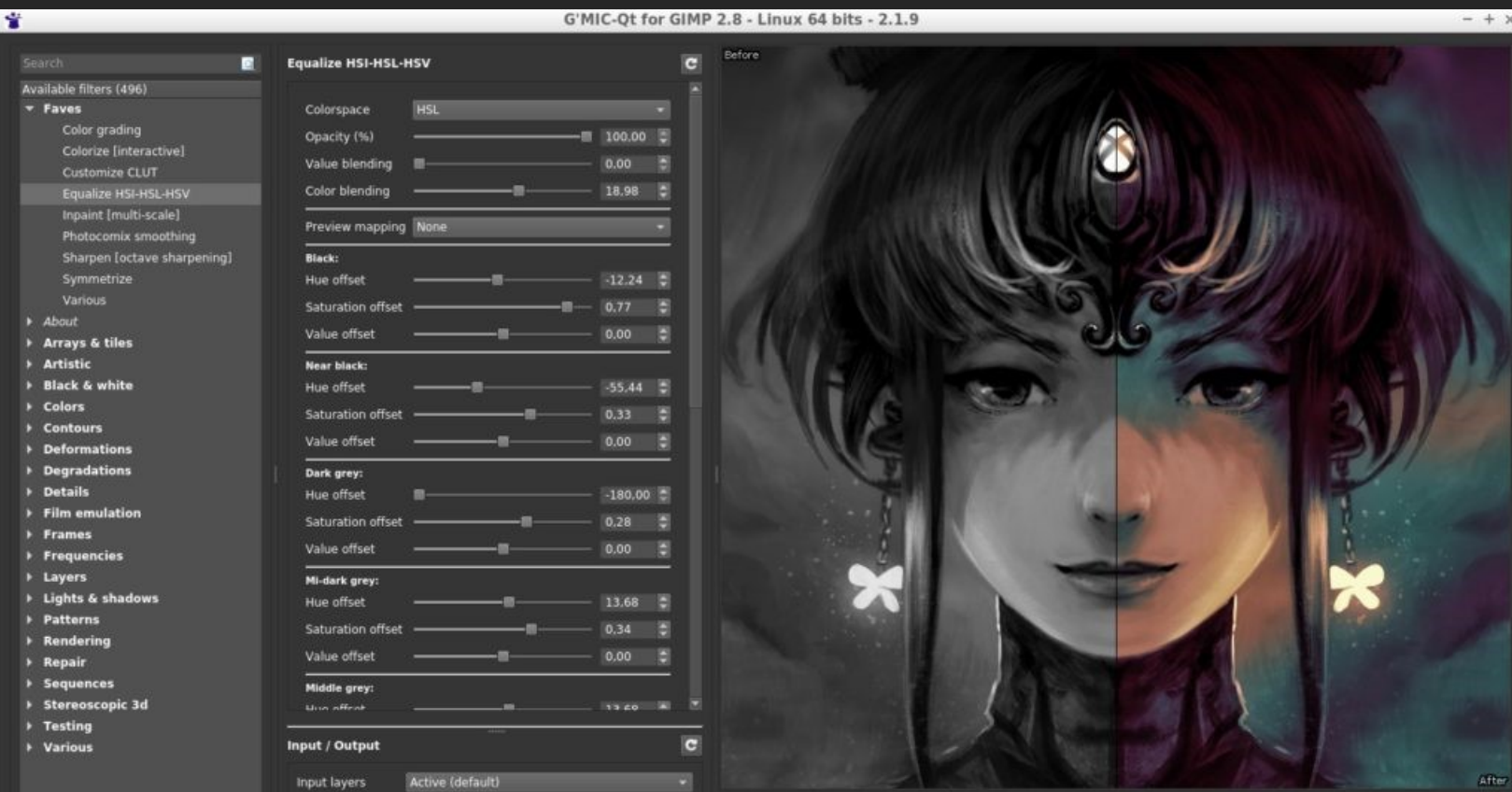
There are also colouring assistants for b&w lineart. For instance in April 2019 the free **GIMP** got a Bucket Fill tool that colorises lineart semi-intelligently, by using a new algorithm that detects 'a shape to fill' even if the lines have gaps between them. The free **MultiFill 2.1** plugin can do much the same for any version of **Photoshop**, though **Krita** is now the better free choice for semi-autocolour of lineart. In paid software, the affordable \$50 **Clip Studio** has a new **Colorize (Technology preview)** feature. This is nicely implemented and easy, and usually gives somewhat impressive results — but it is still not 'production ready'.

There are also interesting things happening in the world of colour-grading cinematic movies with **LUTs** (Look-Up Tables) which work best after basic colour corrections, but that's beyond the scope of this short article. There's also a **new algorithm** for marine scientists that removes the murky 'cast' from underwater photography, so we can see marine life properly without hauling the poor beasties to the surface. It's not difficult to see where such things might lead us in the next few years, as cast/murk removal and re-grading technologies are fed into the AI colourisation mix. Better edge detection, removal of chromatic glitches, and de-spillover at the fringes of shapes, are all likely to become further refinements for next-gen colourising AIs by 2022.



The free Krita has a couple of auto-colour features. Above we see David Revoy's settings for the Krita **GMIC Equalize HSI/HSL/HSV** filter. The artist paints the picture digitally using only certain levels of grayscale, then automatically colorises by assigning a color shade to each gray value.

Krita's GMIC implimentation also has the better known **Colorize lineart (smart-coloring)** filter, with **Autoclean**. GMIC filters are also available in the free GIMP (see below), but Krita is the better grayscale painting tool, and Krita also runs its own flavour of the GMIC filter set.



MATT TIMSON

We interview veteran magazine cartoonist **Matt Timson**, now better known for his acclaimed horror comics. Today Matt uses Poser, SketchUp and Clip Studio to make and colour his comics work.

DAL: Matt, welcome to the *Digital Art Live* in-depth interview. We recently did a short interview with you, for our new sister title *VisNews* for comics makers — and you kindly also said 'yes' to another later interview for *Digital Art Live*. This 'black and white issue' themed of DAL seems a good opportunity to showcase your striking variety of dynamic work in that style.

MT: Hi, thanks for inviting me back.

DAL: Could you start by outline for readers what it is you do, and where you're appeared?

MT: I'm an illustrator who occasionally works in comics — although the comics seem to be slowly taking over. I've worn several different hats during my career: cartoonist; caricaturist; even cute animals on greeting cards. But I think I've been wearing the current hat, which is horror/sci-fi, the longest, now. My work turns up all over the place and, whereas I could've told you all about every job I've ever done at one time, they all tend to blur into one, these days! Notable clients in the last ten years would be Top Cow, SelfMadeHero, 451 Media and HarperCollins — comics, comics, comics and book illustration, respectively. I also do a lot of work for private clients, for various projects that never see the light of day — quite often because they're used as part of pitches for film and TV that simply end up going nowhere.

DAL: I see. Thanks. It's often said that good horror comes from something inside the creator, as well as from the conventions of the genre. Do you see any specific personal influences feeding into and fuelling your horror work?

MT: Some of my weirder stuff gets compared to Giger — which I sort of understand, but it's not something I'm doing consciously. I draw a LOT of dead astronauts, as it's my 'go-to doodle'. Which is linked to a dream I had in my childhood — which I later realised was based on a scene from an old film called *Moon Zero Two*, which I must've seen when I was really young and didn't understand what I was watching.

DAL: Wow. That shows young kids don't forget. So, who do you admire in b&w horror comics, and/or b&w illustration, and why?

MT: If we're just talking horror artists, then probably Bernie Wrightson, who was phenomenal. I don't know if you've ever seen his work on *Frankenstein*, but it's amazing.

DAL: Yes, the endpapers for his *Frankenstein* just sold for a cool \$250,000 at auction, just last week. So many will readers will have noticed that, even if they don't know the work.

MT: Virgil Finlay — an absolute master of stippling and general noodling. I'm sure you've heard of him already — but if not, you should definitely check him out.

DAL: Oh yes, I'm a leading expert on the life of H.P. Lovecraft, so I know Virgil Finlay.

MT: Great. And Sergio Toppi, who is probably one of the most incredible artists I've ever seen. Bill Sienkiewicz, Simon Coleby, Jock — too many to mention, really — I could go on all day!

DAL: And what's the most innovative approach to comics you've seen in the last few years? I don't necessarily mean AR elements, or motion comics, or lenticular foils and suchlike.

Picture: cover picture for the
horror comic *Self Storage* #3.



MATT TIMPSON

UK

POSER | CLIP
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WEB



MT: Probably Webtoons — which I suppose is really only new to Western audiences. I think they originated in South Korea. They can be very hit-or-miss in terms of content — but I love the format. I don't know if you've ever seen it, but instead of turning pages, you just keep scrolling down — usually on your phone — but it can be on a desktop or tablet as well. It can make for some very interesting storytelling and I've been experimenting with it myself, with mixed results. I might even publish some!

DAL: Great. And do you find any inspiration in the deep past? I'm thinking of pre-1945 lithographers, old woodcuts such those of as Frans Masereel, engravings?

MT: It's not really my thing, to be honest — but I've seen other artists do it and get good results.

DAL: Talking of the past... if you could make a long art-comic in purely b&w, perhaps from some public-domain horror or weird work, what would it be?

MT: I'm not especially religious, but I've always fancied a go at the Bible. I suspect I'd soon get bored with the idea, though. There's actually some great visuals in there, but it's one of those jobs where you'd have to take the rough with the smooth. For every 'Jesus being tempted by Satan' sequence, there must be a dozen passages that would be quite tediously dull to draw, I'm sure. I can't think of any off the top of my head, though, because I'm now busy thinking about David and Goliath — or the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

DAL: Fascinating. Yes, there actually are a whole series of Bible comics now, they've done the whole thing, new and old. And they hired good DC and Marvel comics people to do it, so it's not naff. But, yes, it offers such a wide scope for adaptation. Just Job, looking over Sinai and hearing god in the branches, and the whole 'God arrives in a whirlwind' thing and all that. I can imagine that as a comic. One would probably want to go to the really good old German poets who worked up Bible scenes to poems, and translate them, to provide the text. Rather than just jump on the King James version and be totally intimidated by it.

MT: I've also toyed with the idea of *Frankenstein* a couple of times as well- or *Jekyll and Hyde*.

DAL: Yes, actually there's a novel going public domain in 2021, Ralph Straus, *Pengard Awake* (1920). It was an amazing modern weird-horror take on *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Well, let's hope a potential patron or commissioning editor sees the suggestion and hires you for *Frankenstein*. Now, I see you're a keen proposer of the idea that "anyone can draw", that it's "a learned skill". What the best way of stepping through that learning process in 2020, would you say? With an eye to digital rather than traditional.

MT: It's the most boring secret in the world — but just practice. That's it. Very occasionally, I will agree to try and teach people to draw. They're always disappointed that I ask them to draw a shoe or an apple, rather than, say, a vampire. When they've drawn a shoe (or an apple), they want to know what they're going to draw next. The disappointment when I tell them we're going to draw the same thing again is glorious! After the eighth or ninth shoe (or apple), they're either starting to understand why I'm making them do it, or they've given up, the lesson never learned. It's all very 'Mr. Miyagi' in the Timson school of drawing.

DAL: Right. And I guess they ask: are there any ways, today, of speeding it up a bit? I'm thinking of 3D models and the convincing lineart produced from them in real-time by the likes of SketchUp and Poser 11?

MT: Yes. Although that speeding up tends to lead to cramming more detail in, which then eats up all that time you've created. I've been a big fan of SketchUp since the early 2000s and it's my go-to tool for building sets for my projects. Theoretically, building a set for places you're going to keep revisiting in your story saves time in the long run — but I'm not entirely convinced it wouldn't be faster to just get better at drawing them freehand and remembering where everything should go. I don't do that, though — and I've spent so much time *not* doing it, that I think I'd struggle without it now.



Poser I use a bit less — but it has its uses. Sometimes I'm more likely to video myself jumping about and grabbing stills from that to work from. I also use ZBrushCore to sculpt character heads — again, mainly to keep them consistent from panel to panel. As with set building in SketchUp, there's an argument for just being better at drawing — but the more you use this stuff, the more you begin to rely on it. For standalone illustrations, I don't bother. But for comics work, I nearly always do it. I've been tinkering with Blender, during the lockdown. I *sort* of like it, but I don't think I have the patience to learn another 3D program. It's probably the epitome of overkill at this point.

DAL: Indeed. Now, I get the impression you're someone who experiments, and strives to push forward in what you do. Have you made any successful experiments, recently in b&w? If so, what were the outcomes, both aesthetically and in terms of skills development?

MT: I do a *lot* of brush tests while I'm working, and by working, I really mean procrastinating. And I often come up with some great new ways of doing things. My doodles are often more inspiring than my actual work because of this — but turning those new ways of working *into actual work* is often counterproductive. What looked great in that doodle or brush-test often looks forced when you try to apply it to an entire page — and I usually end up falling back on my regular tricks instead. Again, if it's just a single image, it can work, but comics are a bit different and I quite often end up cursing myself as I have to redraw pages that just don't look right. I love making and testing new brushes and tools, though.

DAL: I see. Talking of tools, I hear that the latest Clip Studio EX v.1.99 has a significant user interface makeover? Have you made the leap, and what do you think of it?

MT: I haven't yet, no — I'm still on 1.97! I tend to let other people work the bugs out first. But this is a bit lax, even for me.

DAL: I see. More generally, have you been pleased with the progress that Clip Studio (*formerly Smith Micro's Manga Studio, readers*)

has obviously made in the last five years or so? What have been your favourite developments or changes there?

MT: Obviously, the move to Manga Studio 5 from 4 was a quantum leap forward, and it killed Corel Painter for me almost instantly. Clip Studio, as it's called now, eventually even replaced Photoshop as well. Something I never thought possible.

DAL: Wow. I'm going to take another look at soon-ish — certainly this summer — not having looked at it for about four or five years. I didn't realise it was *that* persuasive.

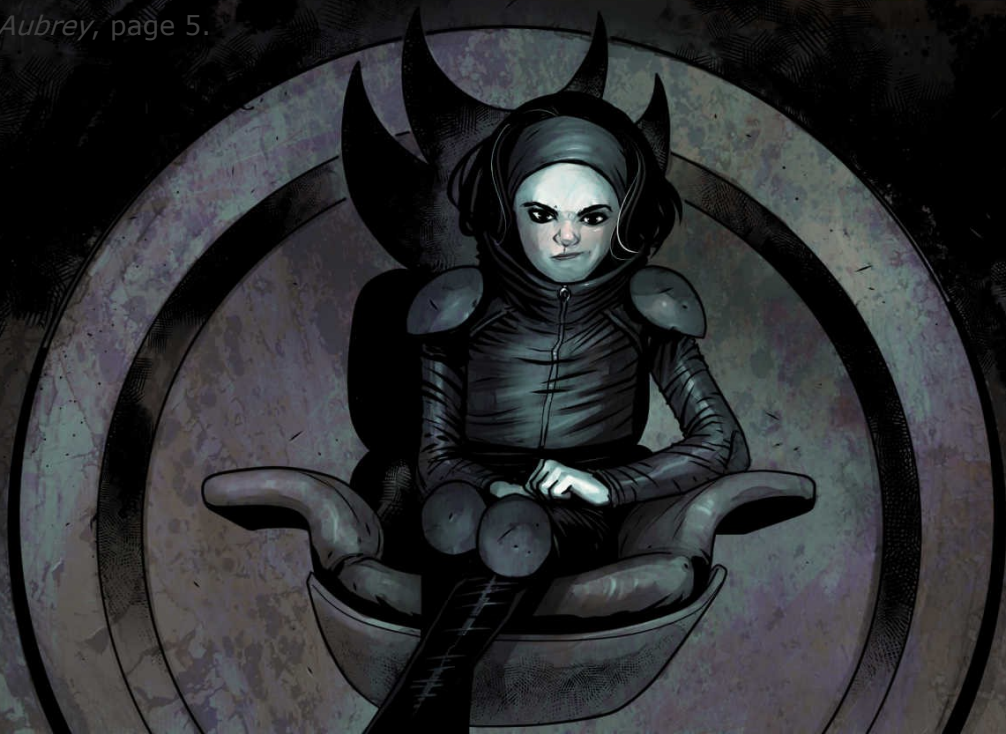
"Even my coloured work starts life as black and white with grey tones — in fact, the colouring is generally the hardest bit for me and pleasing results are usually a bit of a happy accident. Work that I really like in the grey stage can become torturous when I start adding colour. It's not as easy as it looks!"

DAL: It's difficult for me to pinpoint my favourite developments, mainly because my own personal use hasn't changed that much. I wish they'd sort the lettering out, though. It's ok, but nothing a real letterer would ever use. Who knows, though — maybe they've fixed it in one of the updates I've missed!

DAL: Right. I haven't heard anything about improved lettering in Clip Studio. But is it a software you'd recommend to beginners? It's rather complex and expensive (in its multipage EX pro version) and I wonder if you might have another option for the aspiring 16 year old, which would better suit a beginner?



Picture: *Aubrey*, page 5.



MT: I'd absolutely recommend it. I think it's a great all-round tool, even if you can't spring to buy the multi-page version. For anybody who has a compatible iPad and Pencil, I'd recommend Procreate. It's only about a tanner (*approx \$14*) and some of the work I've seen people doing on it is amazing.

I keep promising myself an iPad Pro, but while we're all on lockdown... and I've already got a Cintiq, that just seems like an extravagance too far! If I did get one, Procreate would be the first thing I bought, though, closely followed by the iOS version of Clip Studio, which I hear is identical to the desktop version. In fact, I'm just about to buy an Apple Pencil for my daughter, who's been happily doodling away on her iPad with a bog-standard stylus. I'll be getting her Procreate as well.

DAL: Great. Ok, turning from software to aesthetics now. What are the pleasures of b&w for you? Have you ever sat down and itemised and analysed it? Or is it just something visceral and emotional, a 'know it when I see it' sort of thing?

MT: For me, I think there's a lot more freedom. Even my coloured work starts life as black and white with grey tones — in fact, the colouring is generally the hardest bit for me and pleasing results are usually a bit of a happy accident. Work that I really like in the grey stage can become torturous when I start adding colour. It's not as easy as it looks! Maybe I should hire a colourist? That said, pure black and white is probably the hardest of all. Some people, Mike Mignola, for example, make it look effortless. But I struggle with that even more than colouring, I think.

DAL: Interesting. Yes, and I guess that — for some — it'll also relate to what they grew up reading. If it was the 1970s Britain then they were happy to read b&w strips in the British weeklies, underground comix, indies like *Warrior*, the old *Heavy Metal* which was only half in colour, etc. Maybe it's not the same for those who came of age in the 2000s and encountered colour *everywhere*. Do you have any special memories of any particular b&w British strip from your childhood?

MT: Mainly *2000AD* — but I loved *Warrior* as well, and a short-lived offering from Marvel UK, called *Daredevils*, which I can still put my hands on right now, if I want to. That last one was mainly black and white reprint material, *Daredevil* and *Spider-Man* initially, and Alan Davis on "Captain Britain". Oddly, I remember hating that at first, but over 30 years later — Davis is still a go-to reference for me when I'm stuck. I've had a few, "what would Alan do?" moments over the years.

DAL: Wow. Yes, I remember they tried to make it look like Kirby was drawing it, at the start. I don't think I followed it for more than about six months. It was the tail end of my British comics days, a weekly buyer. Yes, a lot has changed since those days.

Talking of big changes, obviously this horrid virus is likely to have a big impact. Obviously the virus has put rather a crimp in what had become an 'accepted route to fans' for some of the more outgoing and pushy type of creators — I mean the convention table, printed copies and hand-selling. How do you see that the effects of the lockdown playing out, and where might comics production and distribution be in future, perhaps... by circa summer 2023?

MT: It's hard to say, isn't it? Personally, I don't see the world returning to normal anytime soon. I certainly don't envy all those businesses trying to get their home-workers to head back into the office again after all this. Why would anybody want to spend two hours a day in the car, to do a job less effectively from the office, when they can just do it from home?

DAL: True, and the UK government was at one point mooting 'a right to work from home' law.

MT: As for conventions, there's always the running joke about getting 'con-crud', which is the dreaded, mysterious lurgy everyone seems to come away with after any given convention — but that's taken on an extra dimension now. The thought of sweaty convention halls and hanging out in the bar doesn't seem very appealing at the moment — and I wonder if it ever will again. I mean, I suppose it will at some point, it just all seems like a long time away at the moment.

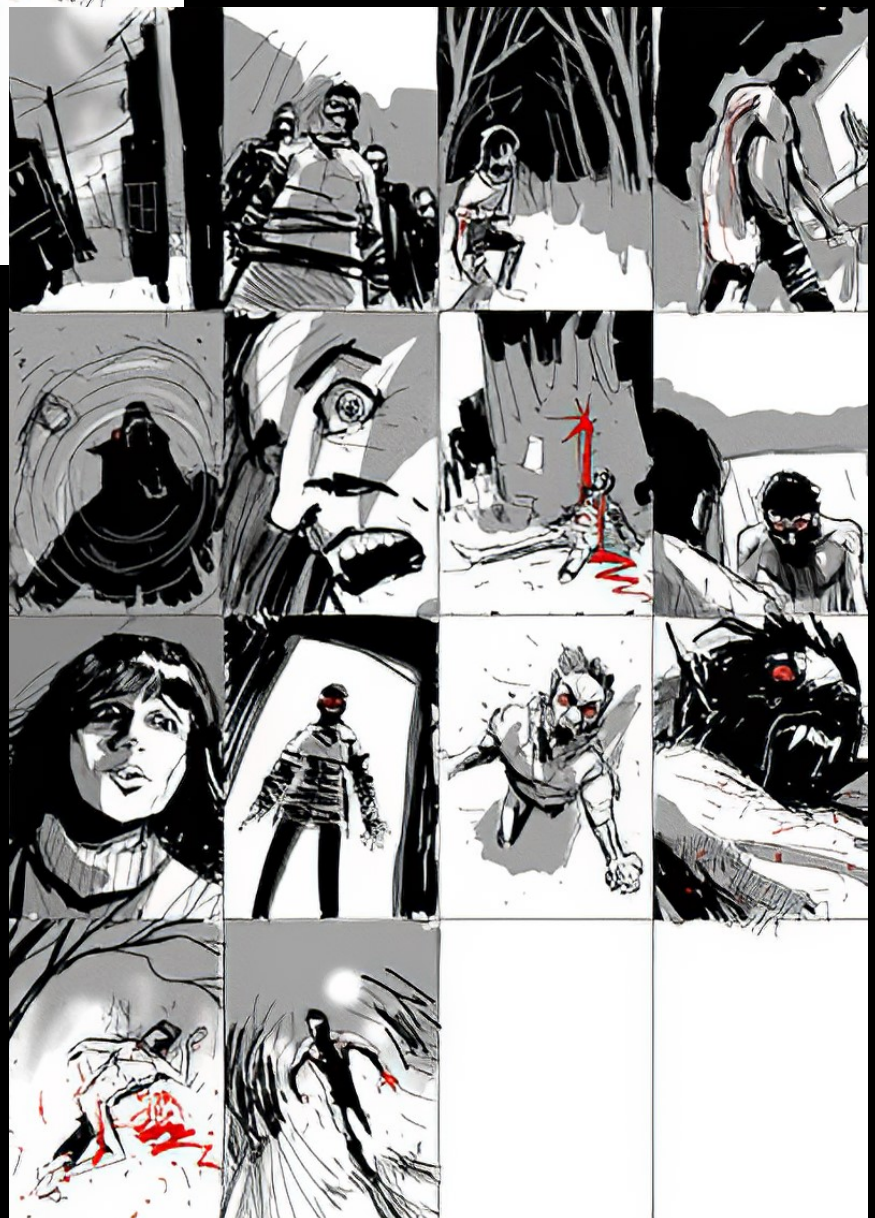




This page: Here we see two draft sets of thumbnail sequences for a horror comic sequence by Matt. The first set shows the initial panels sent for approval, and the second shows how the set was — after editorial freeback — subtly tweaked for maximum reader impact and storytelling clarity.

Note that the changes are fairly subtle for the most part — adding more emphasis on things like jaws, blood, fangs, and (in one panel) on a scared face.

Inset and opposite: Final cover for the horror comic *Self Storage*, and opposite is a sample interior page from the same comic.



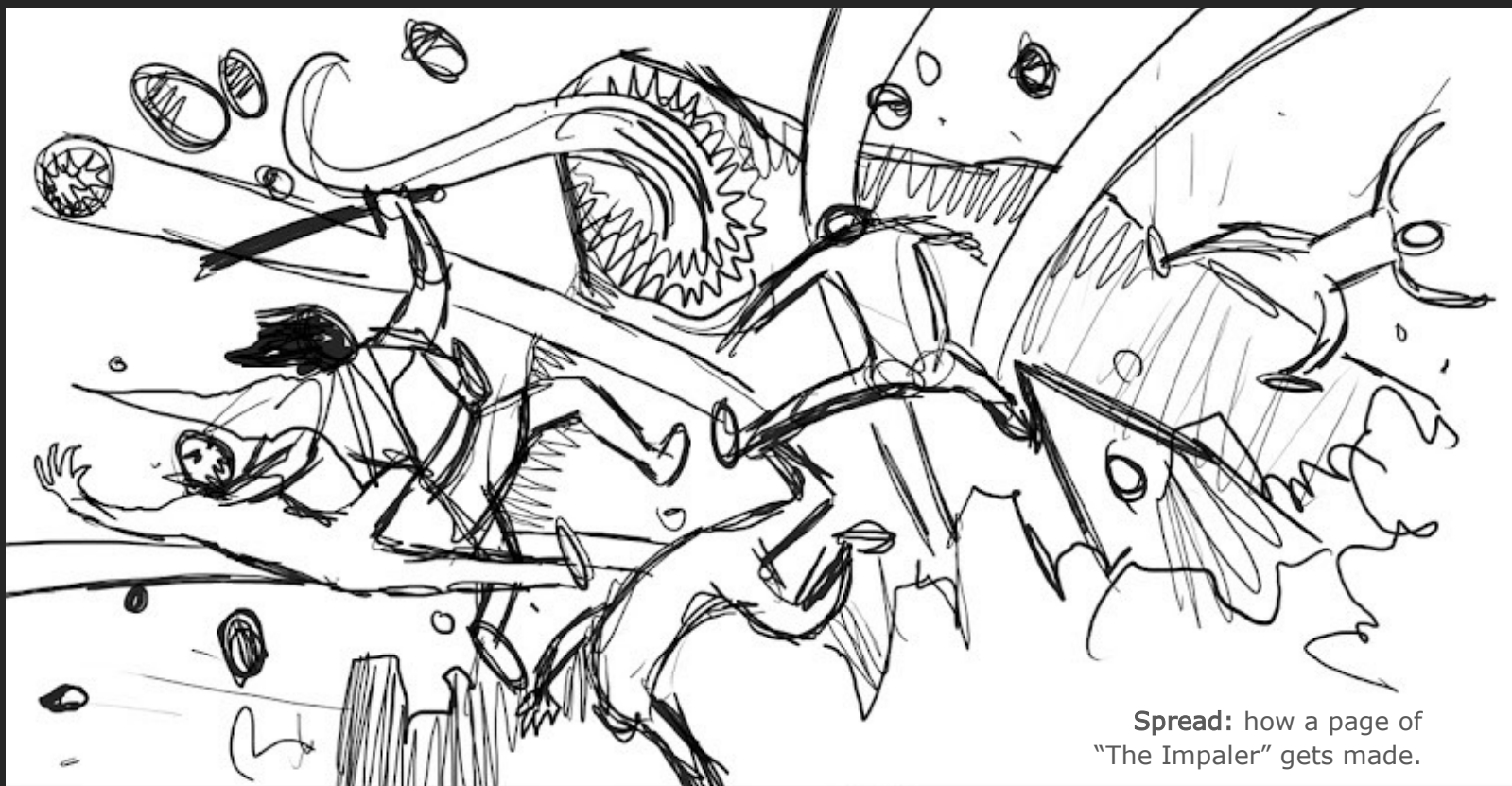


Maybe not being able to butter editors up at the bar will level the playing field for the less adventurous artists out there — who knows?

DAL: Yes. If we get a second and third waves then, it'll be very difficult for face-to-face gatherings to come back from that. But maybe it'll all just vanish in August. Do you see anything quite positive, as well as negative to come in the near future?

MT: I hope it'll make people a bit kinder, a bit more thoughtful. I've definitely noticed a difference on encountering people in the wild, in the few times I've actually left Fortress Timson to go for walk.

With my sloping Neanderthal skull, baldy head and menacing frown, I've become used to people avoiding my gaze over the years — but people of all ages say hello now. From the



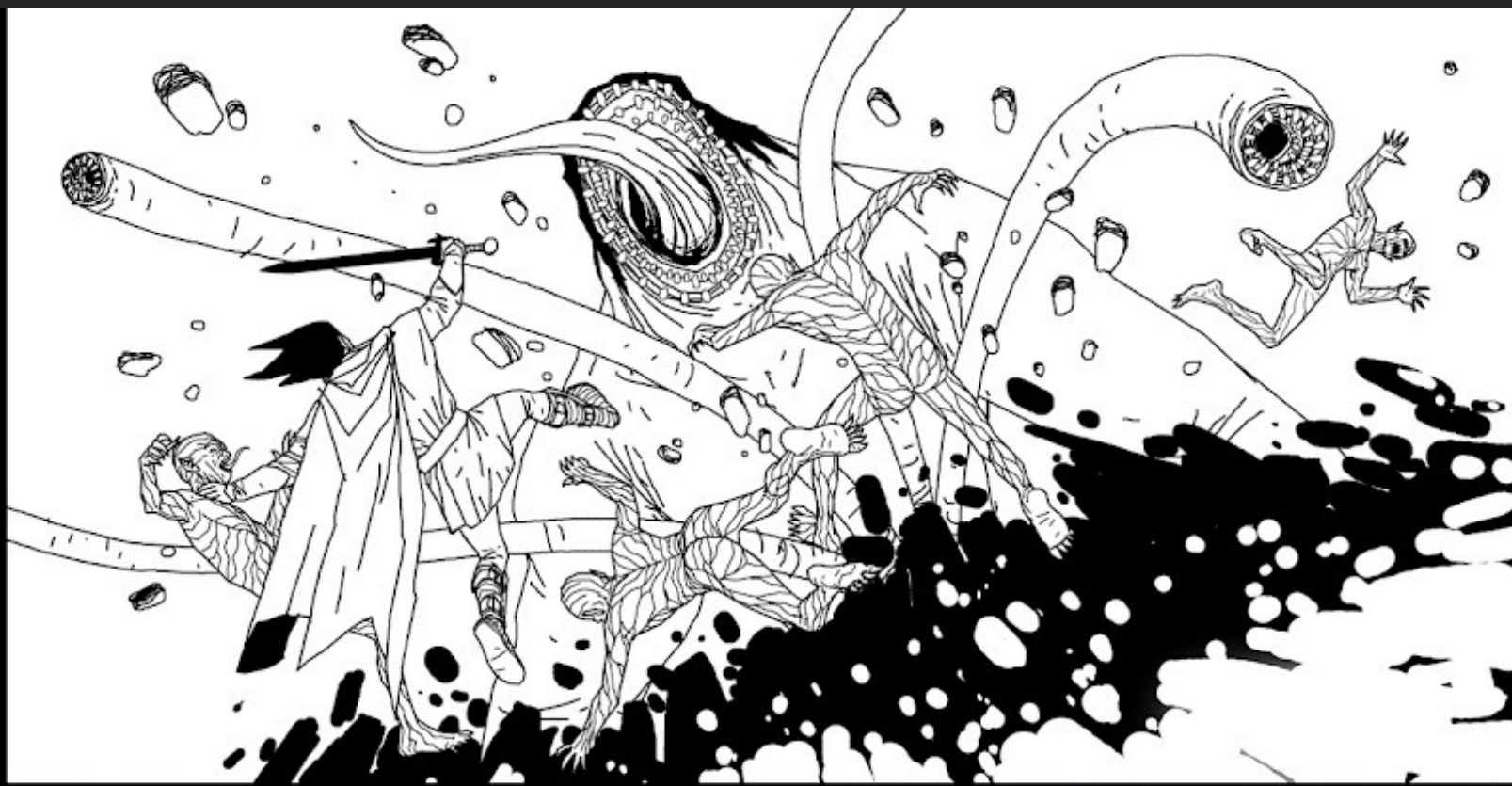
Spread: how a page of "The Impaler" gets made.



other side of the street, of course. And I've stopped using my phone as an excuse to ignore them in return.

DAL: Oh that's probably good. All those shiny nooks and surfaces, constantly being pressed and slapped against your cheek. Though I should say we don't actually know what the main virus transfer method is yet, surprisingly — talking face-to-face or touching surfaces.

MT: I quite often find myself having missed messages and emails — simply because I'm less interested in my phone. Of course, I missed a potential client last week as well — but I'm telling myself it would've been a terrible job and it was a good thing I missed it. I've spent more time just sitting with my wife in the garden on sunny days. We've got chickens, for eggs, initially, but I've grown quite attached.



We let them roam freely if we're in the garden. That's actually brought me more joy than I'd ever have thought was possible. My favourite is Terry, who is magnificent, but who also doesn't lay and so, ultimately, is really quite useless. She's very chilled out, though whereas the other two are like crack addicts looking for their next fix. I'm sure they would eat me alive if they could.

The only real negatives of lockdown in the UK are for my kids. They miss their friends, miss going to school. Even TheBoy, who maintains he hates school, is clearly missing school.

Home-schooling is not for the weak. He hates it, I hate it — but it has to be done. I mean, I say we both hate it, but we built a fairly amazing working model of a waterfall the other day, so we're doing things together we wouldn't normally do.

TheGirl is a bit older, so doesn't really need our help at all and basically just gets on with it. Mrs T. has what we affectionately refer to as 'a real job'. She's been able to work at home pretty much from the outset of the pandemic, though. Something we all really appreciate.



We realise that not everybody has been as lucky as we have, although all this talk of sitting in the garden, while marvelling at chickens that don't lay, is painting a life slightly more idyllic than the one we are actually living. And we're not taking it for granted.

DAL: Yes, it'll all fade away by July I suspect, and by August it'll seem like a dream. That was how the 1918/9 Flu Pandemic was dealt with in the early 1920s. They just seem to have collectively forgotten about it, acted as though it never happened. That's if there's no second and third wave, of course.

But in the short term, what's the industry like?

MT: In terms of work, like a lot of artists and illustrators, my work has largely ground to a halt — especially in comics. I was due to start my next job for a client who was suddenly laid off, putting that job on indefinite hold. Retailers are feeling the pinch while Diamond aren't shipping any paper comics. Some alternatives have come to light, though, I think — and maybe that'll be good for the long term. I can see more creators selling digitally — which probably isn't the best news for retailers — but it'd mean more content out there overall.



DAL: Yes, and I think one positive aspect *may* be that many Gen Alpha kids (i.e. the kids now age 8, 9, 10), and the tail end of Gen Z, will have spent some of the nine week lockdown developing “taste muscles”, learning to better discriminate good from bad without *quite* so much peer pressure — and that may also be promising for the future too. Also, ‘boredom begets imagination’, so we can only hope.

MT: To be honest, I don’t know what other kids are doing, but TheBoy is mainly working on his *Fortnite* skills with his friends. Although he *has* burned his way through *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels*, so maybe that’s a good thing. TheGirl has mainly just been revising for her end-of-year exams. She did pick up her guitar and start playing and singing one of my favourite songs the other day, though — which was nice. My workroom is opposite her room, so I get to hear whatever she’s playing. I’m hoping that when we get TheGirl her Apple Pencil, the boy will ask for one as well. He’s actually really creative, they both are, he’s just quite good at hiding it! /*Laughter*/

DAL: Yes, kids in midde-childhood do a lot their parents don’t hear about. What are you working on at present, or plan to work on in the near future?

MT: Well, as I said before, I’ve just had a job cancelled, but I’ve also just been paid for another job. So I’ve actually got a small window of opportunity to do whatever I like for a bit. I’ve been working on a couple of things in my own time and I’m thinking of adapting them for the Webtoon platform. This seems like the perfect time to do that.

DAL: Great. Ok, Matt, many thanks for your time on this and also your recent *VisNews* interview with us.

MT: It was my pleasure, thank you for inviting me. You can cut all that stuff about the chickens if you like, but you should keep this bit in, so people will always wonder what ‘the chickens’ was all about!

Matt Timson is online at:

<https://nosmit.com/comics/>



“High concept from start to finish” —
Newsarama.com.

“unbelievable artwork ... Panels
literally jump off the page at you
causing the book to almost flow
together as a film ... Hands down one
of the best books on the market
today” — Aintitcool.com.



Pictures: "Nosferatu".
Opposite, *Impaler*
covers. Previous pages,
Clip Studio experiments.



INDEX

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Inset: Issue 28 ('Future Oceans' issue) cover art by Artur Rosa.

Issue 1 : October 2016 : **Designing Future Cities.**

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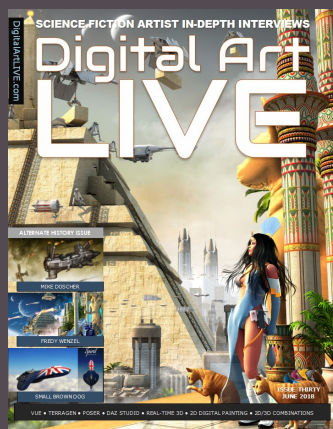
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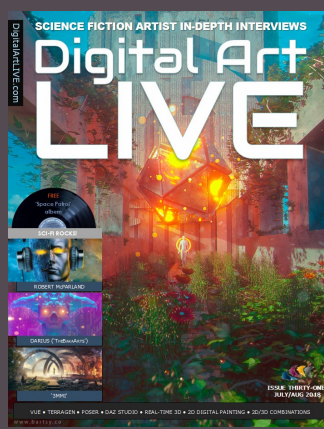
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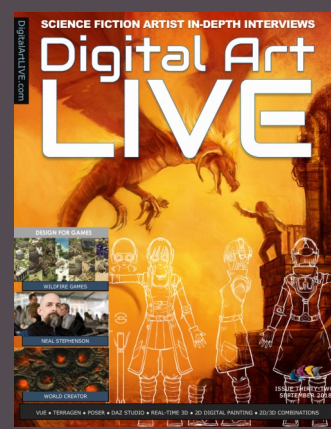
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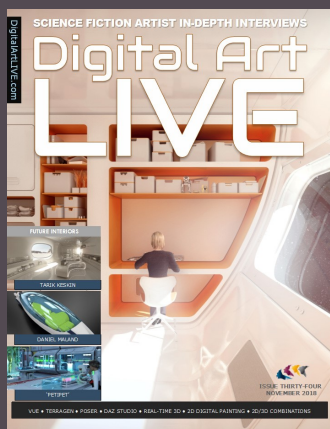
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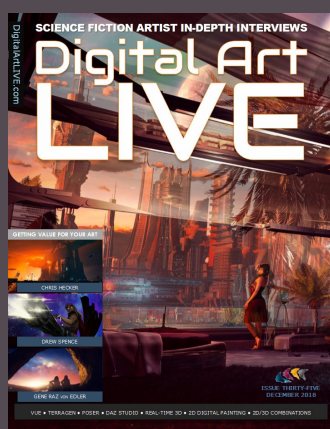
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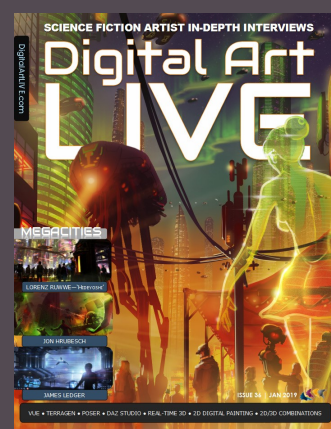
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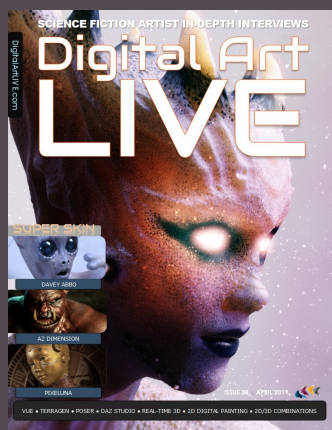


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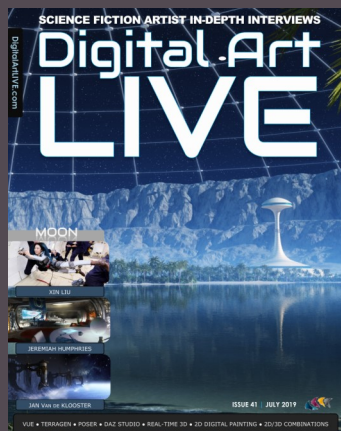
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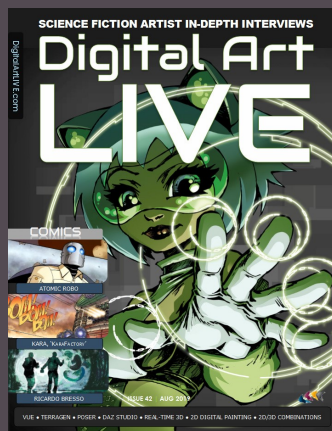
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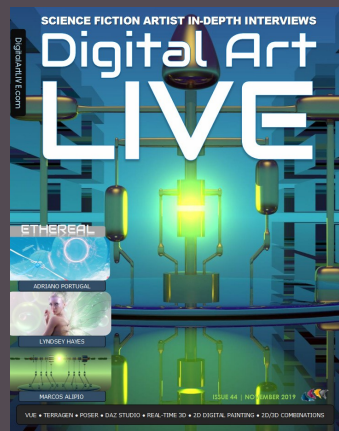
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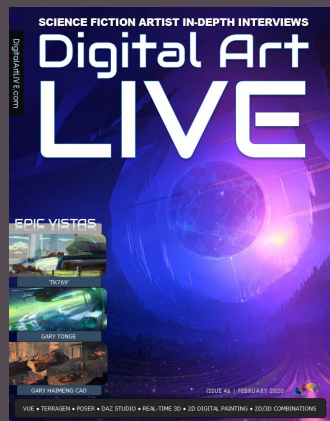
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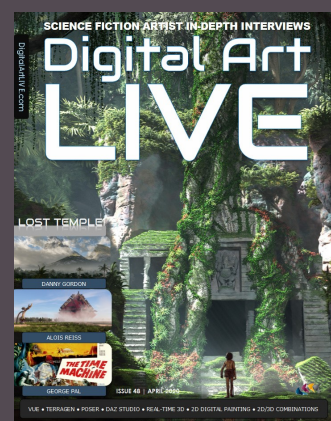
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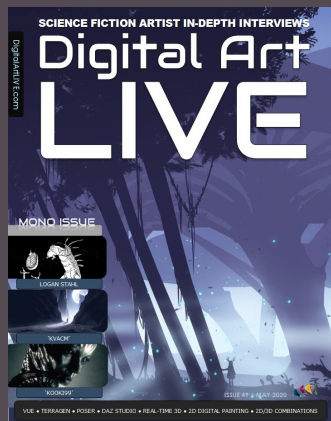
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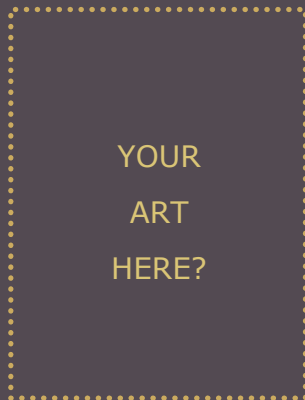


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50th issue



Issue 51 August 2020
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Issue 52 Sept 2020
Interface

Are you interested in being interviewed in a future issue of the magazine? Or presenting a webinar for our series? Please send the Web address of your gallery or store, and we'll visit!

paul@digitalartlive.com

MojoWorld 3.11

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Crossdresser

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HP Z600 Workstation

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EXPRESii

We review a very convincing watercolour emulator for the Windows desktop, which also has realistic inking and outstanding brush calligraphy. It has a free perpetual 'Lite' version!

Expresii 2020 is a specialised painting software for Windows desktop PCs and Microsoft Surface. Developed by dedicated developer Nelson Chu, Expresii is a polished and highly capable niche art software. It has been developed over eight years to take advantage of the simulation and rendering offered by modern graphics cards. Expresii harnesses three of Chu's engines to emulate traditional organic brush and water painting, specifically Eastern brush painting on thick watercolour paper. The initial interface is simple and welcoming, but this is software that does have power hidden deep down if you go looking for it. We won't detail how the three engines work, but they work fine and they work together seamlessly. Water and ink slide and merge in real-time with emulated fluid dynamics. Add more ink, and it 'adds' right into the ongoing 'flow effect', just like it would in real life. There are also a wealth of other realistic watercolour emulation features, from granularity to paper absorbency, to colours darkening as they 'dry off'. You can even slope the paper and watch the 'dribbles'.

Obviously all this works best with a pen and pen-monitor, ideally with tilt sensitivity, and this is where the second engine comes into play, making your single brush either a soft Flowing type for natural organic strokes, or a hard Needle type brush. Again, both types of traditional brush are highly realistic. The ink on the brush even 'loads' via a 'dip' onto the Palette, and the longer you hold it there... the more ink or water you 'load' to the brush-tip!

Having just a single brush, with easily variable parameters, means you won't suffer from going 'Brush Box Bananas' as you can in some painting software — where you're faced with

50, 100 or 250 brushes! The same is true of layers — there are only three layers to work with, and a reference layer. The third engine enables seamless zooming in and out of the canvas, without any nasty pixelisation or slowdown. You can also emulate 'wetting' the paper, or dry out the paper to get a 'dry brush feel'. When making a picture there are three layers to work with, and a reference layer. The drawback to these sophisticated real-time effects is that the software needs a powerful PC and a good graphics card. But perhaps not a ninja \$800 card — the Expresii YouTube channel shows a user fitting a \$90 NVIDIA GT 1030 in their PC for good results. We also ran fine on a HP Z600 workstation which had no graphics card to speak of, but oodles of RAM and 12 CPUs / 24 threads — all that was needed was to reduce the canvas size a bit.

Cost: Expresii currently sells for \$69 for a perpetual licence, with a Trial version and a free Lite version. Windows development continues at May 2020, and we've seen occasional small-ish store discounts.

Trial or Lite? As you might expect, Expresii is great for stylised painting, inking and calligraphy, especially in black and white. But the drawback is the hardware requirements. So be sure to try the free trial or perpetually free Lite version, before you buy. The Lite version limits the user to one colour per layer, and there's no way to save or export your creation other than making a screenshot. Expresii has basic brush stablizing, but use Lite to reassure yourself that Expresii can work with the Lazy Nazumi Pro brush-stroke stablization software. It should do so.

<http://www.expresii.com/>



ALTERNATIVES: Other options to consider are:

© **Rebelle 3** by Escape Motion — \$90, very elegant and easy user interface, with excellent watercolour effects. Needs a strong recent desktop PC.

© **Krita 4** — free, open source, rapid development. Somewhat awkward interface, with non-standard names for its panels and tools. Latest version has new watercolour settings.

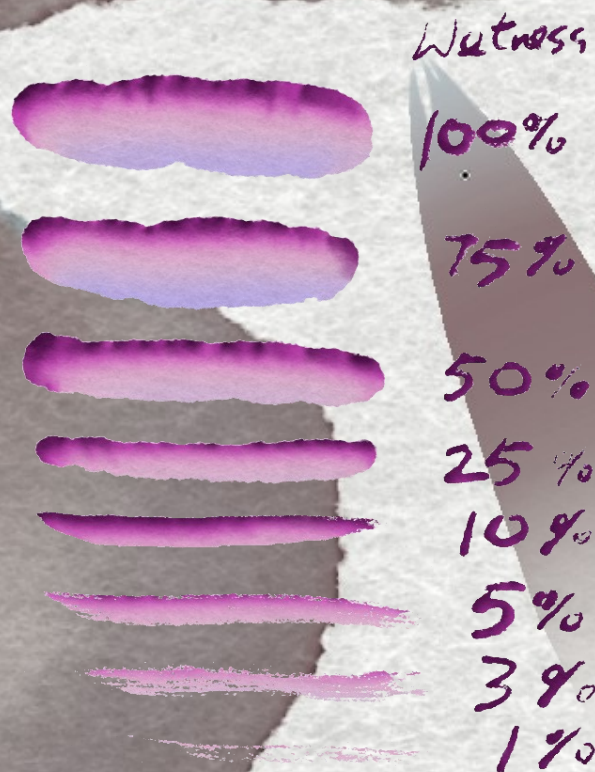
© **Verve Painter 0.99** — free, good watercolour emulation, but has a rather basic UI.

Shape painting?

Though not watercolour, we should also mention here two useful black and white / silhouette tools:

The free **Krita's Alchemy brush**, the successor to the standalone Alchemy 'shape painting' software.

Oleg Vdovenko's fine \$10 **Brainstorm**, which as a Unity-based shape randomiser software that is similar to the online **Artbreeder** service — but for inspiring sci-fi silhouette shapes.



CONTESTS



Here we offer our readers a small selection of recently announced contests and competitions, for your consideration.

SS20

NASA & HOUSTON CINEMA ARTS SOCIETY PRESENT

CINESPACE
NASA IMAGERY - YOUR VISION

A SHORT FILM COMPETITION THAT OFFERS FILMMAKERS, EDITORS, AND ANIMATORS AROUND THE WORLD A CHANCE TO SHARE THEIR WORKS INSPIRED BY, AND USING, ACTUAL NASA IMAGERY.

2020 CINESPACE CALL FOR ENTRIES

For More Information and to Submit a Film, visit
Cinespace.org

Deadline: July 15, 2020

HOUSTON
CINEMA ARTS
SOCIETY

NP-2020-02-001-JSC

CINESPACE

NASA and the Houston Cinema Arts Society have launched their sixth CineSpace contest, open to all film-makers and animators.

This year there is a new special category: "best film using exclusively NASA archival footage", which must use "100% NASA archival footage".

Other new awards include: "best film in a documentary format using NASA imagery": and "best film that celebrates 20 years of humans on the space station".

The contest offers \$26,000 in cash prizes, along with excellent publicity and prestigious screening opportunities for winners.

Applications are to be made via Tongal, the online content creation platform. Deadline: 15th July 2020.

www.cinespace.org

LANDSCAPES There's a new Challenge from NWDA, specialists in crafting top-quality digital landscapes. Create a "photorealistic traveller-themed" render "within a single application".

Entrants have a chance to win a share of prizes worth over \$8,000 — including licences for Terragen Pro and Gaea Pro and Vue subscriptions. Deadline: 6th July 2020.

Theme Challenge

New World Digital Art Presents

"TRAVELERS"

<https://nwdastore.com/theme-challenges/>

ART OF 3D GRAPHICS

'The Art of 3D Graphics' is a 3D art and design challenge from the museum of St. Petersburg in Russia, in partnership with NVIDIA and RebusFarm.

The winning 3D artworks will be exhibited at the museum in Autumn/Fall 2020.

NVIDIA's entry category is themed 'Future World and AI',

seeking pictures of futuristic environments in which human capabilities are augmented by AIs. Deadline: 31st of May 2020.

<https://art-of-3d-graphics.com/en/>

RACE INTO SPACE

The UK's Lakes International Comics Art Festival has a 2020 Comic Strip Challenge.

The challenge theme of 'Race Into Space' harks back to the first Space Race of the 1960s and 70s — but anticipates the next such.

Entrants are asked to submit a 4-6 page 'all-ages adventure' comic by 21st July 2020.

<https://www.comicartfestival.com/>



'KVACM'

We visit South Moravia to talk with 'Kvacm', aka Michal. He discusses how he has used Photoshop to marry style with simplicity, and nostalgia with futurism.

DAL: Michal, welcome to the *Digital Art Live* magazine interview. You have a fascinating blend of styles, mixing landscape with strong silhouette and also often with synthwave colours. An interesting mix.

KV: Hey guys, thank you very much for this opportunity, I'm so happy to be a part of this issue!

DAL: How did your interested in making art begin? Did you go through many types of art

by kv
www.kva



'KVACM'

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and approaches, or go straight to digital art?

KV: This love for art wasn't always with me. It's true that when I was a kid I painted some doodles, just as we all probably did. But it was only when I found anime — Japanese animation

— I started to draw faces. I loved both its simplicity and its effectiveness. I admired how someone could convey a complete expression or scene, with just few lines of the pen or brush. But I wasn't good at it.

Since then I have found that simplicity is also a part of every game or movie we play or watch every day.

DAL: Interesting. Yes, sometimes that's as much a speed thing as a style. It's about quick and effective production in a time-pressed commercial environment.

KV: Then I started in on some searching and I found concept artists all over the globe who do matte paint using digital tools. First I asked *'how do they even do it?'* When I realised, I wanted to try it too. That was when I got my first painting tablet.

DAL: I see. Did you find any mentors in your early years, people who helped you to learn and to train?

KV: No, I didn't. Sure, I watched some videos on YouTube, and some webinars and other helpful training. But mostly I just stared hard at art I liked and tried to understand them.

DAL: Not a bad strategy. But did you have any specific training in black & white work?

KV: Black and white are two most important aspects of everything. It helps us understand a light and a shadow and how they work together. You don't need to thinking about colours, distance, atmosphere, daytime, etc. If used for a story, you are only focused on the story, and the story and how you tell it is most important aspect of every art.

And the story works only with good composition. You can play with other things later on, but first you need a sketch. The sketch is the seed idea which and why you do art for. If you don't like it, you just scrap it, because it took only little time and you don't care too much. So you can try literally anything until you find "it".

But if you don't like the finished piece, well, that's a big problem.

DAL: Right, so plant lots of seeds and find the strongest, rather than a make a huge unstable tree that falls on top of you. */Laughter/* Your work also links with music. Were you into the 'synthwave' style and electronic music genre before you started making your current work?

Or was it that the picture style led you to listen to the music? Or perhaps you came to the art via videogames?

KV: I actually found synthwave relatively recently. It was somewhere in the middle of 2018 when I was listening music on YouTube. Synthwave just started to 'play' and it was like an awakening. I finished my first synthwave cityscape to imitate the *Cyberpunk 2077* game with skyscrapers, a man, a car and purple colours. And I fell in love with these.

But actually synthwave was always with me. But not a colourful as it is now, but how it really is. I grew up in post-Soviet state which, although it's in heart of Europe, was very different than to how the west was. Many well-know movies of the 1980s were only show here for the first time on TV, and after a while it started to feel like were they just broadcasting them every month, over and over again.

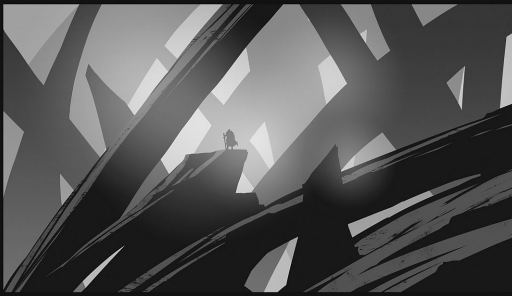
DAL: Right, so that synthwave-ish approach was drummed into you, visually and musically.

KV: Then when I was older, I started to play PC games, always something really new and modern. So both these thing became something like a billboard, something that you saw all day and every day. So you didn't even notice how the times flies. Now, after some real-life thing like graduation, work, well... life, I realised how I miss those things.

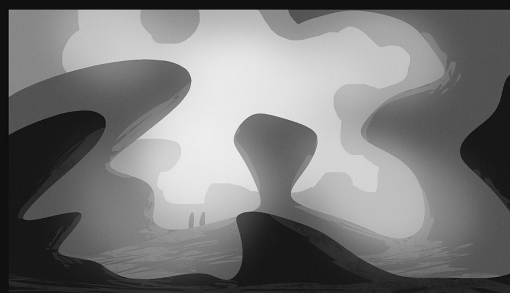
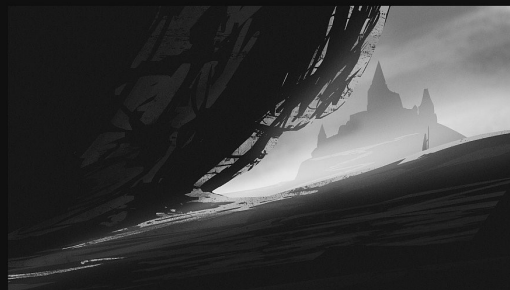
And so synthwave is a modern way to remind myself, and a way not to forget how our digital reality — that we now use every minute — started off. And it also keys me into the colours, that we now use to symbolize how cool and original it was. How happy we were. And I started to watch 80s movies again, and also discovered how the old anime was much better than it is today.

DAL: I see. And then you found your current software, to express these feelings? Did you find it easy to learn?

KV: Photoshop is very easy to work with, but it's pretty tricky. You can do anything, but you need to discovery it first. Many functions are hidden right there in front of you, because you don't need them until you try them.



Pictures: Example of Kvacm's recent regular excercises in making thumbnails and black-&-white sketches.



I enjoy Photoshop and I got it under control very quickly.

DAL: Great. It takes some people a while to learn. But maybe I'm out of date on that aspect of it, thinking of CS6 rather than CC 2018. What are the top features, would you say, that keep you using your current Photoshop version?

KV: Actually, sometimes I think about changing my software, to save some money because of monthly fees for CC. But it's not easy to learn something different, if you need to do work during the transition period. Photoshop has one huge benefit — many users and many years of experience. But in last month I started to use Procreate for sketches, to learn it. I always wanted to try it, so I bought an iPad. And we'll see, maybe one day I will stop use Photoshop! */Laughter/*.

DAL: Interesting. Yes, I finally got around to trying Rebelle, after many years of mistakenly thinking it was just another one of a dozen painting applications. It's very nice bit of software, such a beautiful interface. The main strengths are watercolour colouring of lineart, and the real watercolour effect. It might even drag me away from Krita, for some things.

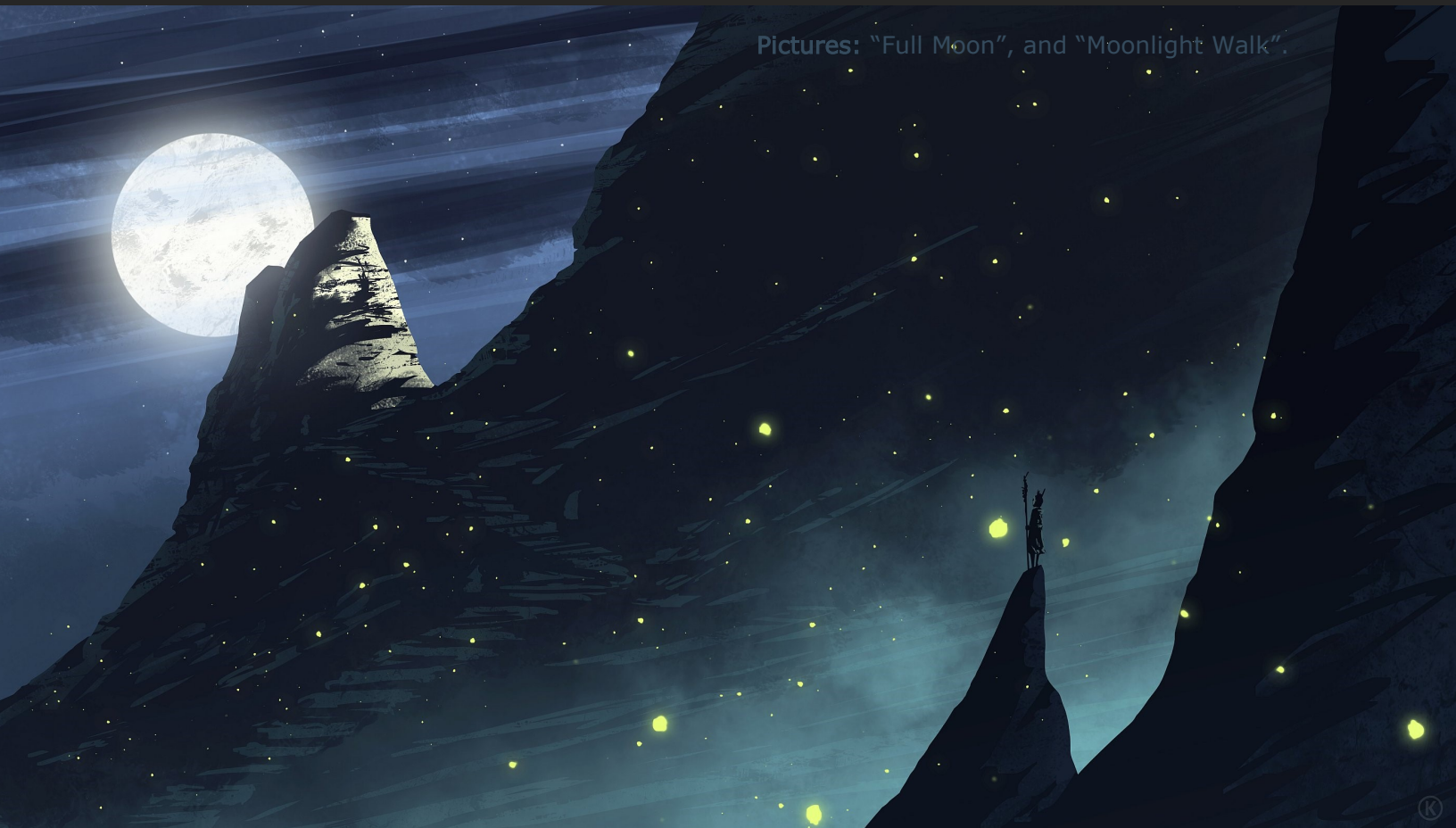
It's little over-priced in the current market, with 20% VAT here in the UK, it probably needs to be more like £49 than £100 given the coming recession, and the need to build a user base in the face of Krita being free. Talking of cost... you mentioned CC and its costs, are you pleased with the current version of Photoshop, do you feel you get your money's worth?

KV: Well..... with every update comes fixes, but also new bugs. Or the old bugs come back! For example my Wacom pen sometimes just don't pick up on my pen-pressure options after almost *every update*. But there is nothing what can't be fixed. So no, I'm relatively happy about it.

DAL: Good. What are your creative working techniques and workflow? I'd imagine the Lasso tool is used? Have you tried the old Alchemy software — which Krita 4 now emulates?

KV: I actually only use the Lasso tool only for the base lines for sketches. After that stage, I do not use it much. The most used tool is Rectangular Marquee for buildings and other stuff. But often I'd rather to use my hand and the pen. It's the most effective and natural way. But yes, I'm always trying to learn something new to be more effective.

Pictures: "Full Moon", and "Moonlight Walk".



Like creating my own brushes. And no, I never tried the old Alchemy Software, and I've not yet tried Krita 4.

DAL: You have a very pleasing blend of approaches in your work. There's the silhouette style, which goes back into cinema and early animation in various forms, but comes ultimately out of the history of theatre and woodcuts and paper-cuts. But this is harnessed to science fiction and a synthwave type approach. It's a very pleasing style and approach. Did you consciously set out to do that, or did your personal style 'just happen'?

KV: Hmm, yes, I choose that style. But actually not because I like it — and I do love it — but because it's easiest. I can't draw characters. I wasn't able to draw even a face in anime style. And when I took painting seriously, silhouettes were the right choice how to learn painting — easy, fast, effective, ready for stylization.

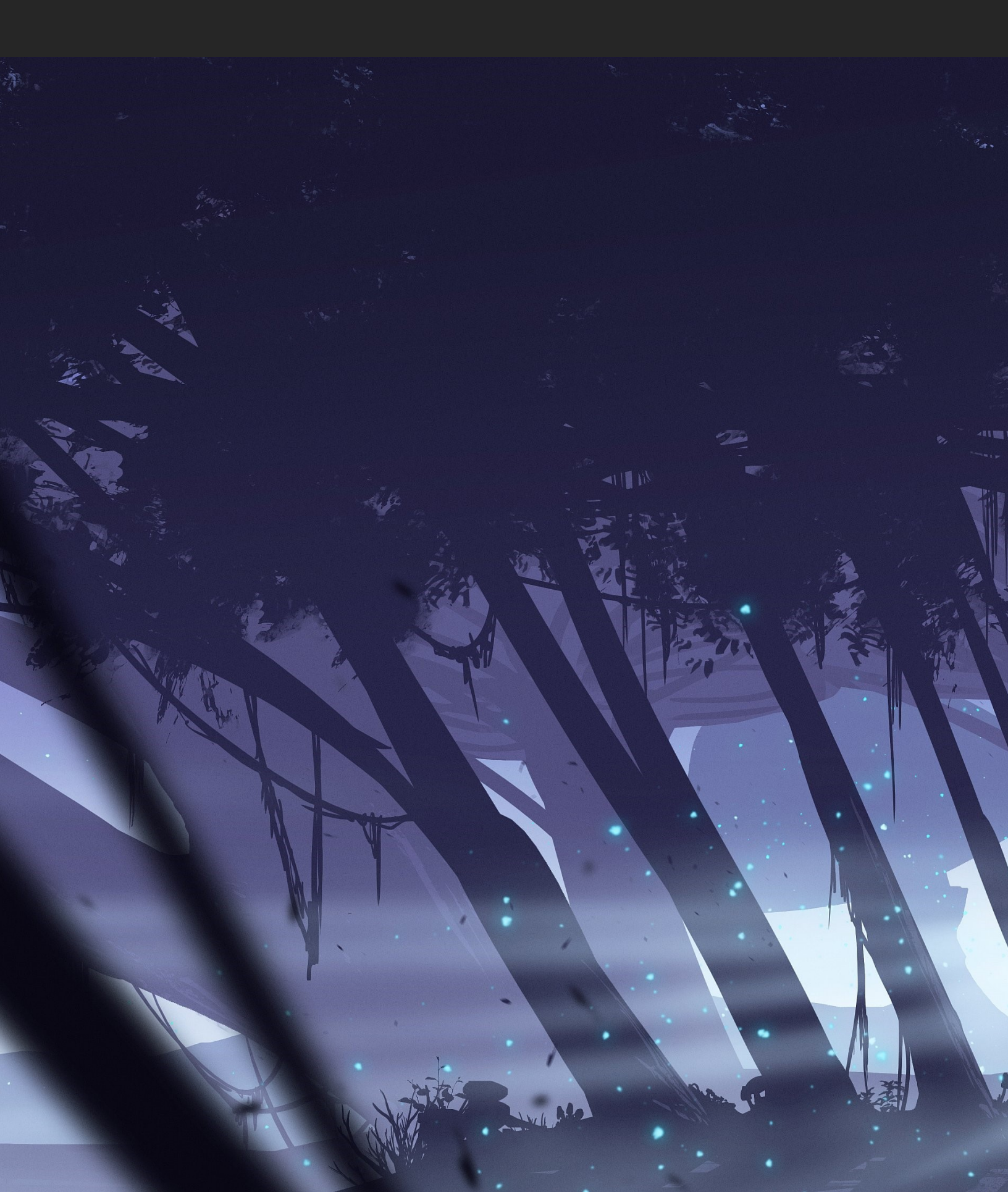
And then I implemented it in my style. It's cool and somehow modern. You can play with it even years later, when you revisit your old works.

DAL: Great. And you're obviously also consciously honing and refining your skills each

week, as can be seen in your lovely b&w thumbnail sketches. Do those come from the imagination, or from small stories, or do you find that they are inspired by various things you see in real-life?

KV: Yeah, that's true. It started when I wanted to learn more about perspective and how to use it. And to learn how to make better compositions with it. So I started with studies and work around sketches of other artists. I didn't want to do the same as they did, just find the reason how, where and why they did it. How they did it, where they put it there and why they did that. So basically that was how I learned how to do more than just slap down three layers of a landscape, without any reason. After a few weeks I realised how effective some approaches are and that I can use these for future works. So I started to use more and more of my imagination in the sketches. I still use other works, sketches, photos or reality, but only when I do not have any idea right now — or I want learn something specifically. But when I use reference I always try to use what I personally like, or I know. I mean I always want to learn something new, but it can't be done all at once.





Picture: "Mushroom Forest".



So, if I don't know how to do something, like a building, I put a tree there, or something and... wait until the right time comes.

So these black and white sketches are for learning and to gain experience. And when I

don't have the right feeling for doing some painting or don't have the time, I always have the opportunity to do a sketch, so I can be relaxed and think — I did something for my future.



DAL: Great. Do you create the scene character separately, and have a sort of pre-made 'character bank' you can then call on? Or does the character develop uniquely, to fit with the finished landscape?

KV: I have created some characters. Or made PNGs from photos, then basically using renders as brush. But the specific characters in a picture are developed after the landscape, or through the process.



Sometimes I have imagined what character I want to put there, but it's mostly something like 'icing on the cake'. But I always count on having a character, so I plan from the start the place for the character. Because it makes the picture more lively and it represents me, the viewer and it helps the eye to determine the scales involved.

DAL: And talking of characters — do you create little back-stories for your scenes?

KV: No, I don't. It's just me. But it can be anyone. It's the viewer, who is trying to understand what he sees, or what he wants to see. My works are made my dreams and imagination, but I want the viewer to use his brain and his imagination to peruse what he sees. So my works are made by all, not just me.

DAL: Talking of landscapes, what is the view from your studio like, in the Czech Republic? Do you live in somewhere where there's a nice view?

KV: I live in ground floor in a flat, in a panel building [UK: tower block? USA: housing project?], so not really much of a view! So I could say I paint something I don't personally

have out of the my window. But in South Moravia we have beautiful landscapes, also the city of Brno is pretty cool, but it's a small city. We don't have any mountains, no sea, no real big skyscrapers, almost no stars in night, no huge moon or Jupiter on orbit, no space ships, no bullet trains, no... I'm sorry, I just want to *see* these! Well, basically my art isn't drawn from the reality I see. It's from imagination and my dreams.

DAL: I see. Well, the great thing about science fiction is that it keeps coming true. And is there a good 'scene' there in the Czech Republic? By 'scene' I mean a loose network of people making new synthwave music and making the kind of art you make? Have you had your work used in music concert, on album covers and suchlike?

KV: I do not make work for the Czech people. There are many new things, such as synthwave, and my generation *should* like such new things — but this new style isn't extended much of a welcome here. We are still trying to understand the west. The older people are still living back in the socialist era. The younger ones are too fixated on mobile phone culture, or they like the 1990s and 2000s stuff their



parents lived through and brought the kids up on. We in Czech Republic were always more traditional, rather than seeking for the new and for more personal styles.

DAL: I see. That didn't used to be the case. Back in the pre-Soviet era the Czechs were at the cutting edges of art and design, I recall?

KV: The change was due to many years under communism. So... no, a local scene isn't here, or if it is it's very tiny. That's why I have mostly friends in the USA, and I'm glad of it.

DAL: I imagine that music is a consolation, as it was for many under communism? What are your favourite futuristic / sci-fi music albums or compilations? The ones you can listen to again and again on repeat?

KV: I don't really have something specific to mention, but I really love space ambient music. And no... it's not only about *Interstellar*!

DAL: At present you're selling your work. Do you also have any thoughts about how you might expand — perhaps making comics, or silhouette-style animations (*Jasper Morello*, etc)? Or even games, like *Limbo*? Or stage-design for theatre or rock-music?

KV: Oh, my dreams are huge. I'd like to be a

representative of my own style. Be a part of history, like Masamune Shirow or Katsuhiro Otomo. I want to create a 'face' for movies and games, like George Lucas did. Create my own world for other people.

DAL: Awesome. Is there a place or forum you can recommend, for those interested in what we might broadly call 'silhouette art'?

KV: Maybe it sounds funny, but I can't, because I don't know any. And that's the paradox. But just because there's no community... you can still do anything you want, just don't stop trying. It 'comes into itself' over time.

DAL: Yes, 'create it and they will come'. Great, Ok, well... thanks for this in-depth interview. We wish you all the best in the future.

KV: I'm the one who is grateful for this chance. Thank you very much and the best in your journey as well!

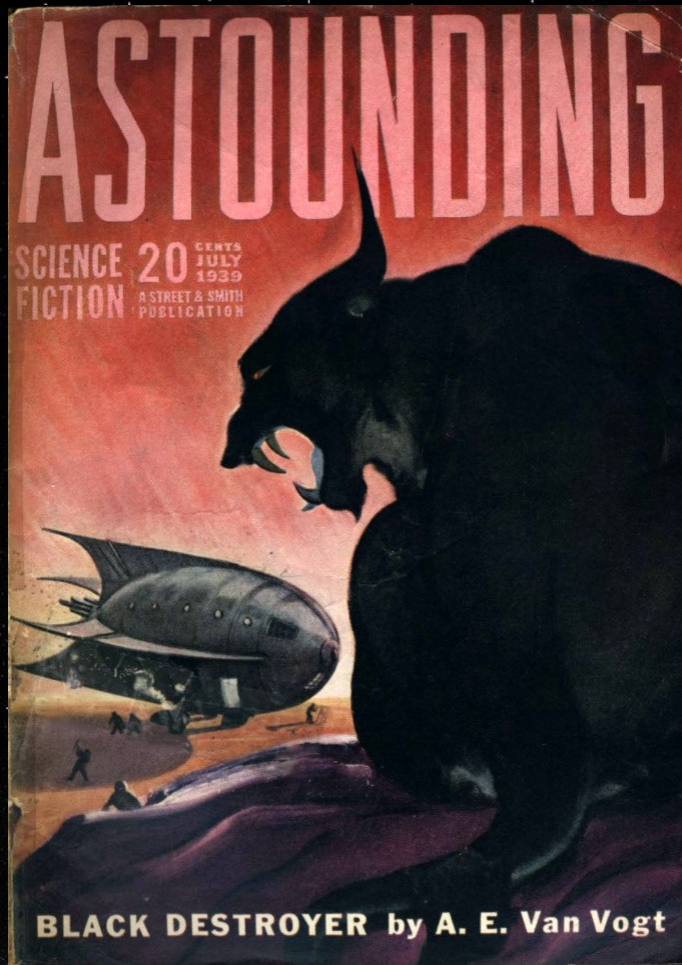
'Kvacm' is online at:

<https://www.deviantart.com/kvacm>

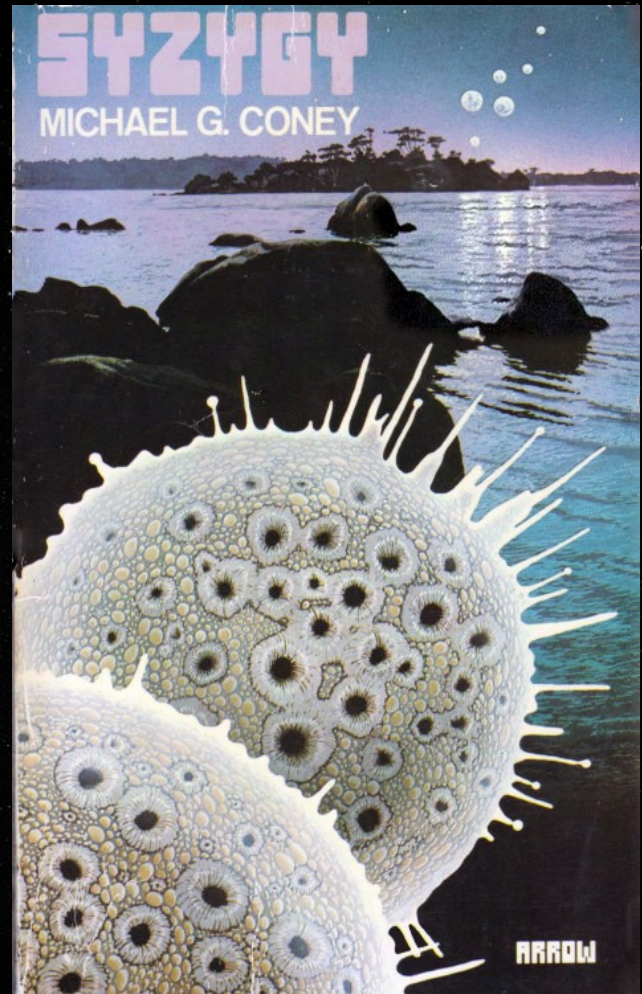
<https://www.patreon.com/kvacm>



CREATIVE IDEA: fierce jaws echo the fins of a spaceship.



CREATIVE IDEA: strange spores on a darkling seashore.



CONTRAST ON VINTAGE COVERS

Astounding magazine

July 1939, USA.

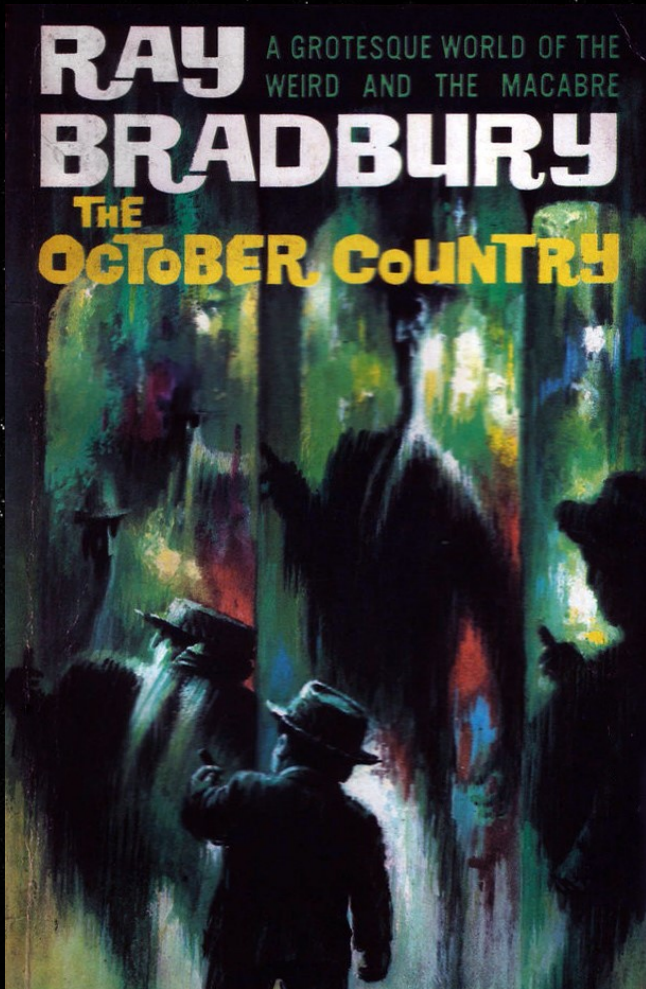
For many American readers, baking in the summer heat of 1939, this cover of *Astounding* must have seemed an omen of imminent war in distant Europe. Yet it also carried the story generally credited with heralding something more positive — the start of the great 'Golden Age' of science-fiction. The story was van Vogt's "The Black Destroyer" and its cover is by **Graves Gladney**. A keen big game hunter in civilian life, he knew what a big cat looked like! Gladney studied in London and moved to New York City in 1935. He found a niche in the pulps and created around 70 covers for *The Shadow* and three for *Astounding*. When war came he served in the 82nd Airborne, and saw action in airborne landings ahead of the Normandy invasion.

Syzygy

Arrow, 1975. UK.

Coney was a thoughtful British SF writer popular in the 1970s and early 80s. His novel *Syzygy* told the tale of a small isolated colony on a hostile alien world, discovering a complex and mysterious ecology. The artist is **David Bergen**, who seems to be using the blended photomechanical collage process seen on many prog rock album covers of the 1970s. A talented painter, little is known about Bergen. But he began his career with covers for Sphere and Arrow in the 1970s, along with occasional work for Hutchinson and the pioneering artbook publisher Paper Tiger. After some DAW SF paperback covers in the USA he drops out of sight — only to reappear in the 1990s doing covers for the Puffin editions of the children's *Earthsea* series of books, after which he had another long career in book covers.

CREATIVE IDEA: a Hall of Mirrors in a shadowy light.

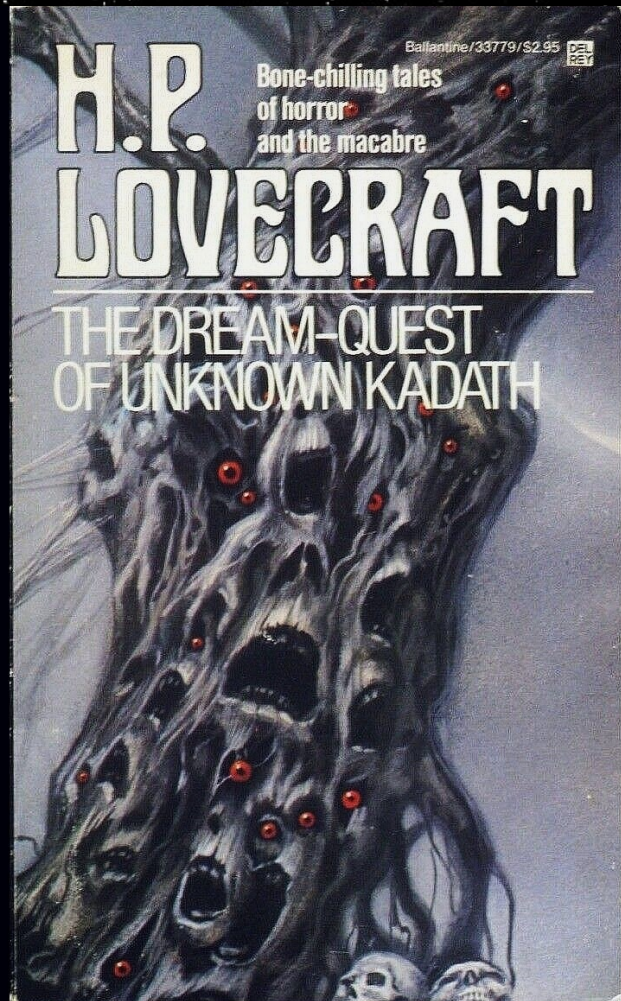


The October Country

Four Square paperback. 1965. UK.

Bradbury's story collection *The October Country* sits alongside his classics such as *Dandelion Wine* and *Something Wicked...* It collected the best of his early eerie and macabre tales from the famous *Weird Tales* magazine. Bradbury added new additions, and revised many stories for the new book. The artist is **unknown**, but we can say that he is illustrating the story of a carnival 'small man' named Mr. Bigelow — who learns to find joy each night in the fantastic visions he is able to see in The Hall of Mirrors, while other visitors are more disturbed to see themselves as they really are. The stylised typeface now has an unfortunate *Scooby Doo* feeling to modern eyes, but it has at least a partial fit with the world of the small-town carnival sideshows of mid-century America.

CREATIVE IDEA: tree with startled / fearful faces in it.



Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath

Del Rey paperback, 1983. USA.

Del Rey celebrated with 28th re-printing of Lovecraft's long fantasy adventure *Dream-Quest* with a new cover by **Michael Whelan**, better known for his elegant science-fiction work than for eye-popping horror. Unfortunately for the unwary reader, the cover is far from being any kind of illustration of Lovecraft's *Dream-Quest*, which on other covers has been illustrated with golden sunset cities, dream-cats and a zebra. Nor does it reflect the Dreamlands tales also included: "Celephais", "The Silver Key" and "Gates of the Silver Key", "The White Ship" and "Strange High House in the Mist". It is almost as if the cover was made for another book entirely — one containing Lovecraft's most over-the-top work such as the serial shocker "The Lurking Fear" and the hilarious self-parody "The Hound".

KOOKI99

A woman's face is shown in profile on the right side of the image. She has a futuristic, metallic eye with a red lens. Several translucent, iridescent bubbles are floating in the air around her face and hand. The background is a soft, light blue gradient.

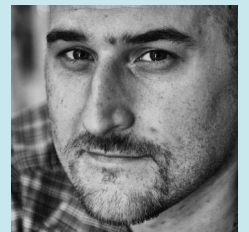
We talk with 'Kooki99' in France, about his enjoyment of the power of 3D to create hyperrealistic portraits with relative ease. Kooki has also just become a brand new character-maker for the DAZ Store.

DAL: Kooki, welcome to the *Digital Art Live* in-depth interview.

K99: Hi, thank you so much for having me here!

DAL: Have you always been interested in realist portraits, or is that an approach to picture-making that you came to via first trying your hand with other types of pictures?

K99: I've always been very fond of all that is



'KOOKI99'

FRANCE

DAZ STUDIO

[WEB](#)

related to computers and technology, and especially what can be created with the tools involved. 'Back in the day', I had friends who were pixel artists for the Demo scene — working with Deluxe Paint on the Amiga.

Yeah, I'm that old! And there were others who made very accurate stuff with 3DS Max 1.0. I was only good at playing videogames, but then one day along came Poser. Poser made it very easy to create digital clones of real people.

In Poser you could set about posing them the way you wanted and make pretty renders. So, to answer your question, my main goal has always been to reproduce reality in renders, especially reality in skin texture and expressions.

DAL: Have you studied real-world lighting in some way, perhaps in the theatre or a photographer's studio, or did you go 'straight to digital'?

K99: Not at all, I'm not even a good photographer. I wish I had their 'keen eye'. But the truth is, I just see a point when the lighting in a scene 'seems good' and I'm lucky that lighting also proves good for many others.

DAL: I see. And so, as you say, you started out with Poser. What version was that, and how did you then progress with it?

K99: Wow, it's been so long, that I can't remember correctly. I think it was Poser 6 or 7.

DAL: Ah, right, not a bad starting point. Could have been Poser 3. */Laughter/* It's come a long way with the latest version 11. How did you set about learning it, back then?

K99: In order to get better, I just practiced, spending a lot of time on it, trying to get the most from my renders.

DAL: I see. What was your breakthrough picture, would you say, the one that started to get you a lot more attention?

K99: At first I didn't want to post any renders on the Internet, as I was not a professional, I thought that the renders weren't good enough.

I was looking at others renders on DeviantArt and then V4 — Victoria 4, the flagship Poser figure and successor to V3 — went up on DAZ Store. Along with that base figure, came a lot of fantastic characters with great textures and what I think was my first "success" was this render, "Redhead". Just a redhead girl that looked a bit like Leeloo from the science fiction movie *The Fifth Element*. I think this render helped me gather more followers and also increase the pressure on my shoulder for the next renders!

DAL: Yes, a good Leeloo-a-like would do that.

So, in 2020 is your main software is DAZ Studio or Poser?

K99: I'm now completely into using DAZ Studio, for many years. The new G8 figures models are so much more flexible, and there are many items of store content to play with!

DAL: Yes, the inventiveness of the content makers can be tremendous. Such attention to detail too. And we should praise the plug-in-makers too, who make it easier the make scenes, to light them, and to render faster. What are the three main things you consider when trying to make a highly believable 3D character render. Eyes, skins, pose?

K99: First of all, the one you didn't mention... the lighting. You can have the best character with fantastic high-res textures, but it will not render good if not lit correctly. Good textures with many details are also a key to getting realism. Of course, the eyes have to be believable too, and especially the reflections.

DAL: Right. But expressions and poses are obviously also quite important for you. Do you craft your own from a blank face, or start from a store-pack base and tweak it? Or perhaps facial motion-capture helps? I know, for instance, that I was impressed by some real-life facial motion-capture files recently launched on the DAZ Store – they could do remarkable things with a G8 face in terms of bringing it 'life'. More so than presets, which was surprising. I guess there's just 'something about' good facial mo-cap.

K99: To be honest, I'm a bit lazy, I prefer using the work of talented artists instead of creating those of my own. So I'm starting with a pose from a pack and, as you said, I then tweak it to meet what I have in mind. Of course motion capture can be very helpful as it is, indeed, real life expressions and poses, but I'm sure they will also need some tweak to perfectly match what you have in mind.

DAL: What advances in future 3D portrait technologies do you anticipate in the near future? For instance, 'mingled fuzz' seems to be something the iRay devs have recently perfected for the latest version of iRay, and that should be plugged into DAZ Studio soon.



I wonder if you've noticed things like that, and are anticipating using them soon?

K99: I'm not aware of such 'fuzz' rendering, but I'll look into it, I'll follow the flow. Many improvements have been made in DAZ Studio to enhance the detail of the morphs, using the subdivision of the models, and I have no doubt they'll be more good stuff to play with!

DAL: Super, Now, are you using Octane for rendering? How long has that been in use for you? And are you happy with where Octane is now, in terms of speed and other things?

K99: I was blown away by the power of Octane 1.0 when I saw the first renders. I saved up some money and went for a licence with the Poser Octane plugin at first, and then the DAZ Studio plugin. That was before iRay came into DAZ Studio. Using Octane was one of the things that made me want to post my renders on the Internet, just to show others how fantastic it is!

It was a great investment, both for the fun and for improving the PBR. Then came iRay and it was cheaper to use than purchasing more licences from Octane.

DAL: What are your thoughts on the ease-of-use there, specifically with DAZ figures? Is much tweaking needed? I'm not an Octane user, but understand that it's now very well integrated into DAZ Studio?

K99: I'm actually no longer using Octane, but 'back in the day', it was the best choice for great renders when Poser only had Firefly which is the internal renderer. I'm not sure of the progress of Firefly renderer in 2020 but I know Octane is fantastic and always will be.

DAL: The latest Poser 11 still has good old Firefly, but version 11 introduced the newer SuperFly engine. That's a slightly tweaked version of Blender's Cycles render engine, but seamlessly plugged into Poser. One can also use Reality as a plugin, which just went open source back in 2019. Octane can run as a Poser plugin. Vue can also load a Poser scene and knows all about Poser materials, due to years of work on seamless conversion. One can even take a Poser scene to Cinema 4D, if

one kept hold of the PoserFusion plugin from Smith Micro and one doesn't need to use the very latest C4D — I think C4D 18 was the last compatible one. What Poser 12 will bring, who knows? My own hope is that they enable a new real-time engine, perhaps as a paid plugin — though if so then it's more likely to be advanced OpenGL like in U-Render, than Blender's Eevee — Eevee being very much a moving-target. But DAZ Studio is also doing very interesting things, keeping up with the latest developer versions of iRay, and pairing nicely with the powerful new NVIDIA graphics cards. You're happy with iRay renders?

K99: Well, I have no real artist background, and the ease-of-use of DAZ Studio was what made me switch to it in the first place. You just have to click, move some dials and BAM!

DAL: Right, and iRay enables that.

K99: In Octane we originally had to make several modifications in order to get it rendered right. But then I remember using the Octane DAZ plugin that made the conversion of the iRay materials into Octane materials, it was very efficient!

DAL: You also re-sculpt details on figures and faces I believe? What are your sculpting tools, and how do they fit into the workflow?

K99: Actually, for all the renders you can see on my gallery, I used the original meshes, it's just a matter of the bump/normal that I created or modified to meet the level of detail.

DAL: I see.

K99: But occasionally, when I have sculpting or morphing to do, I use Blender by saving the DAZ Studio model out to .FBX (Base level, SubDiv0) importing to Blender and then taking it back to DAZ.

DAL: Right. Have you also considered Marvellous Designer, re: custom clothes? Or are you happy to sculpt from a base?

K99: I have! I made some scarves with a trial version of Marvelous Designer, it's a fantastic tool to make clothes, sort of WYSIWYG of 3D clothing! I love it, but I'm not keen enough on the clothing part of scenes to fully use it.

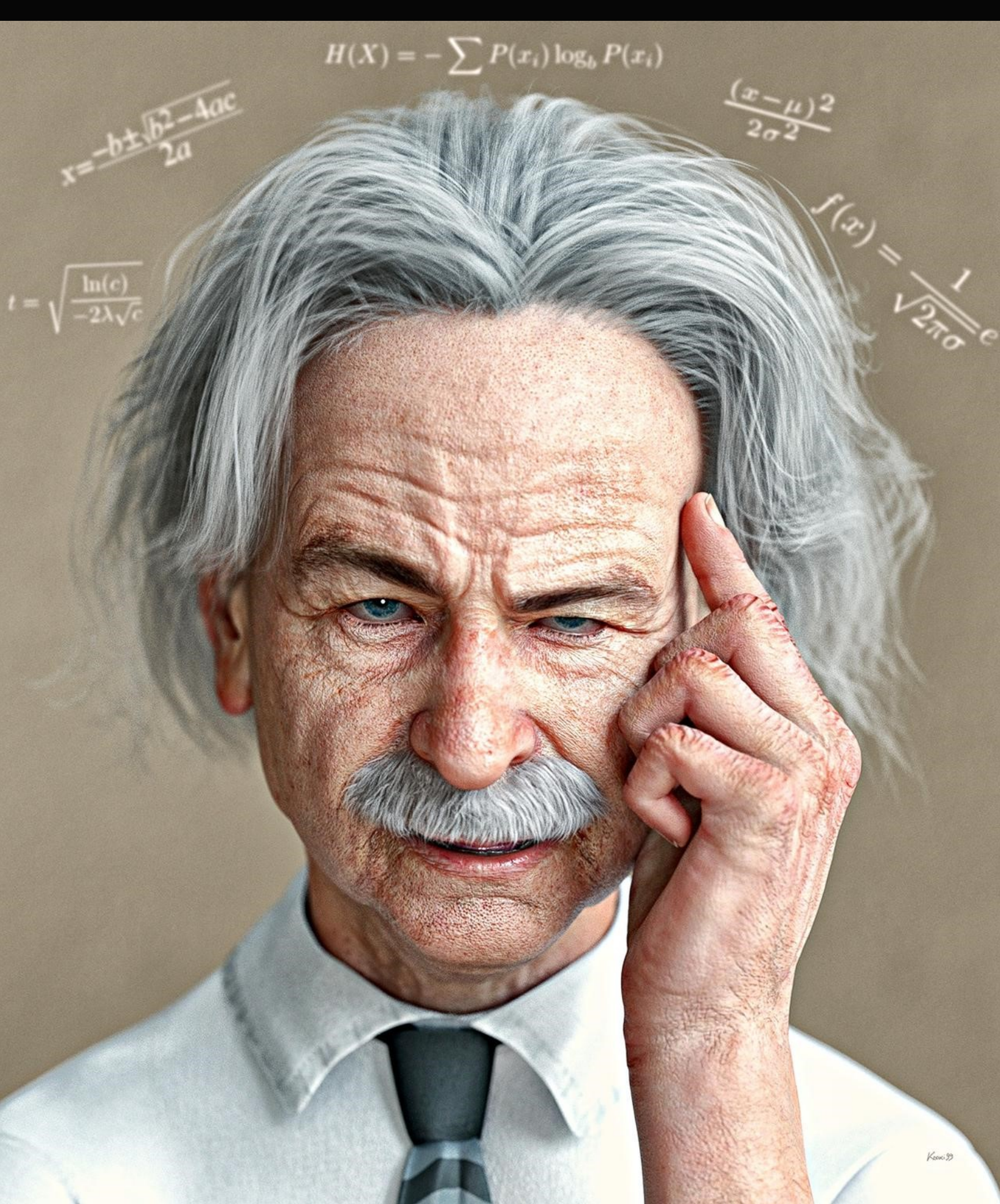




Picture: "Lurking in the attic".







Pictures: "Mama Wu" and "Use your brain".

DAL: What are your hopes for the forthcoming DAZ Studio 5?

K99: Hmm... not sure there will be a DAZ 5 as they only seem to release on two digits — 4.11... 4.12... But I do hope that we'll be able to sculpt directly in the software. Bridging to Blender or Zbrush is OK, but I would prefer not be changing software in my workflow. Also, maybe a 3D painting plugin inside DAZ Studio?

DAL: Talking of painting, how much postwork do you do on a portrait, and what tools are

your favourite 'go-to' tools there?

K99: I try to 'make the best' of the iRay render, but it's true that I rarely post a pic without applying some postwork. In addition to applying my signature, it can be just a brightness/hue modification, or erasing a misplaced hair or spot that I missed. I mainly use Niktools's Viveza and Color Efex, they have all that I need.

DAL: You also like both rendering in black and white, and converting your portraits to b&w.



Do you use photographer's software for the conversions, or do you try to do it with lighting in the 3D space?

K99: I do render directly in black and white in DAZ Studio because I think lighting may be a bit different on B&W portraits. But the main tweaks — grain, contrast, levels, etc... — are all done in postwork.

DAL: What is the attraction of the black and white or stylised limited-tones picture, for you?

K99: I'm not sure... At first I was reluctant to

do black & white. I was like: "I have great shaders, great SSS, why should I lose all that detail!?" But when I accidentally dialled a wrong button when postworking a render, I ended up with a highly contrasted black and white picture... that has so many details! For "XenoGirl", the coloured version was poorer on the detail than the limited tone version. B&W and limited tone can support contrast better than colour in my opinion.

DAL: Who are you favourite b&w portrait artists, and why?

Pictures: "Sina" and "Just a cowboy".



K99: I don't have one favourite, I just like all the photo or pictures with high contrast that reveal all the details of the skin, wrinkles, etc..

DAL: And who are you favourite Genesis character makers at the stores? The makers who you always watch and buy from?

K99: I love Bluejante Characters. They have a uniqueness, a realism that you can encounter in everyday women. Lyonesse creates fantastic morphs and textures. Daveyabbo makes some incredible cyborgs for Genesis 8. There are so many talented creators out there!

DAL: Indeed. Have you also found any plugins / addons / scripts / store eye-packs especially helpful in your work?

K99: Not particularly. As I mentioned earlier, I find that everything is easy enough in DAZ Studio itself.

DAL: Super. What is your home studio working space like? Do you have a nice studio with a view?

K99: Ahem... I work on a small room full of technology and cables, with one window with curtains half-closed — because it's too sunny where I live and I can't see my screens otherwise. I have a 27-inch 4k screen on a desk, a mouse, a keyboard a pen tablet and *lots* of diet-cola drink!

DAL: I suspect that some of your portraits may be commissioned 3D portraits of people you know? I wonder if I'm right on that guess? Or perhaps you find that people send in their photography portrait and ask for a 3D version?

K99: I am asked to do it, yes... but not that much. Of course, some renders and morphs are people I know and others, people we all should know!

DAL: I see. I guess I may be missing a few celebs and movie stars in your DeviantArt Gallery, then. The perils of not owning a TV... Have you considered a personal project of portraits, such as perhaps a Tarot Card set? Or some sort of themed sci-fi set?

K99: No, but that's kind of a great idea ! Thank you!

DAL: What would be your big 'dream project', if

you could make a themed series of portraits? Perhaps a uniform set of 'electronic music idols' portraits? I see you did Daft Punk, for instance, a while back. Kraftwerk?

“... in the last few weeks I worked on my first character to be sold on the DAZ Store: Elora. Elora has been on the store since end of April 2020 and she's a pretty great success! I now have two more characters underway.”

K99: Without hesitation, a family portrait or rather... a portrait of every member of my family, the most realistic possible. In fact it's an ongoing project for some several years but I'm kinda absorbed on other things in real life job, family, etc.

DAL: I see. What are you working on at present?

K99: Well, in the last few weeks I worked on my first character to be sold in DAZ Store: Elora. Elora has been on the store since end of April 2020 and she's a pretty great success! I now have two more characters underway. It's great to be on “the other side”, making characters people will use and make renders for fun like I did — and still do of course!

DAL: Great, congratulations. Well, many thanks for this interview. We wish you well in the future, and a bevy of best-selling characters on the DAZ Store.

K99: I'm the one who thanks you for your interest! Wishing you all the best, and your tens of thousands of readers!

Kooki99 is online at:

<https://www.deviantart.com/kooki99/>



WATCH EVERY SHADOW

Our short and visual survey of some 'silhouette style' videogames.

On a certain immaculately-swept backstreet in the Japanese city of Kyoto, one can sometimes detect a slight trail of white cherry-tree petals. Following this trail, the visitor discovers the door to a museum that almost no-one knows about. Roughly translated, it is 'The Shadow-House of The Silhouette'. A wizened old lady, who might be Hayao Miyazaki's sister, silently and quickly tears your paper ticket into a flat origami profile of your head. Then she slips back the bamboo screen and admits the rare visitor. You browse through the first galleries, devoted to medieval woodcuts and eastern shadow-puppets. There is an exquisite gallery of papercut silhouette portraits from Victorian England and New England, followed by backlit post-1900 shadow puppets from all regions.

Then we enter modernity and the woodcuts of Frans Masereel whirl the visitor down a long corridor, each cut printed six-foot high. To the dance music of Weimar Berlin the visitor then enters the large Lotte Reiniger room, flanked by small viewing booths in which to enjoy her restored animated silhouette films. At the far end of the Reiniger Room, a brief survey of German expressionist cinema draws parallels with early *film noir*. A soft babble of local young voices announce the next sections, where the *cognoscenti* browse from a huge wall of comics and graphic novels or enjoy an arcade of playable videogames. This museum is, of course, quite imaginary. Yet we'd like to think that the following games could, one day, be found in working-order in the real museum.





INSANELY TWISTED SHADOW PLANET(2012)

Set on and around and under an alien planet, *Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet* won a spaceship full of awards, but the critics niggled and carped about how short it was. The PC port of the game was released in spring 2012, and included the *Shadow Hunters* expansion.



PATAPON (2007-08)

Patapon and *Patapon 2* were flagship music/rhythm games for the Sony Playstation, made in Japan.

The player is a local god who beats 'talking drums' in patterns. The drums command a raggle-taggle army of small creatures, as they battle against a variety of large 'monsters'.



FEIST(2009, 2015)

In 2009 *Feist* was rather lost in all the hype for *Machinarium*. Which was a pity because it rather spawned the genre in games, and led to classics

such as *Ori and the Blind Forest*. Driven by Unity's physics engine but harnessed to a unique style, the full game was eventually released in 2015-16.

BADLAND (2015-16)



The *Badland* player helps a small black shadow-creature called Clone through the various phases of a mysterious forest, during Dawn, Noon, Dusk, and Night.

Initially released in 2013, the game was very successful and has been released for a range of platforms including the Kindle Fire and the iPad, and has spawned a sequel, *Badland 2*.

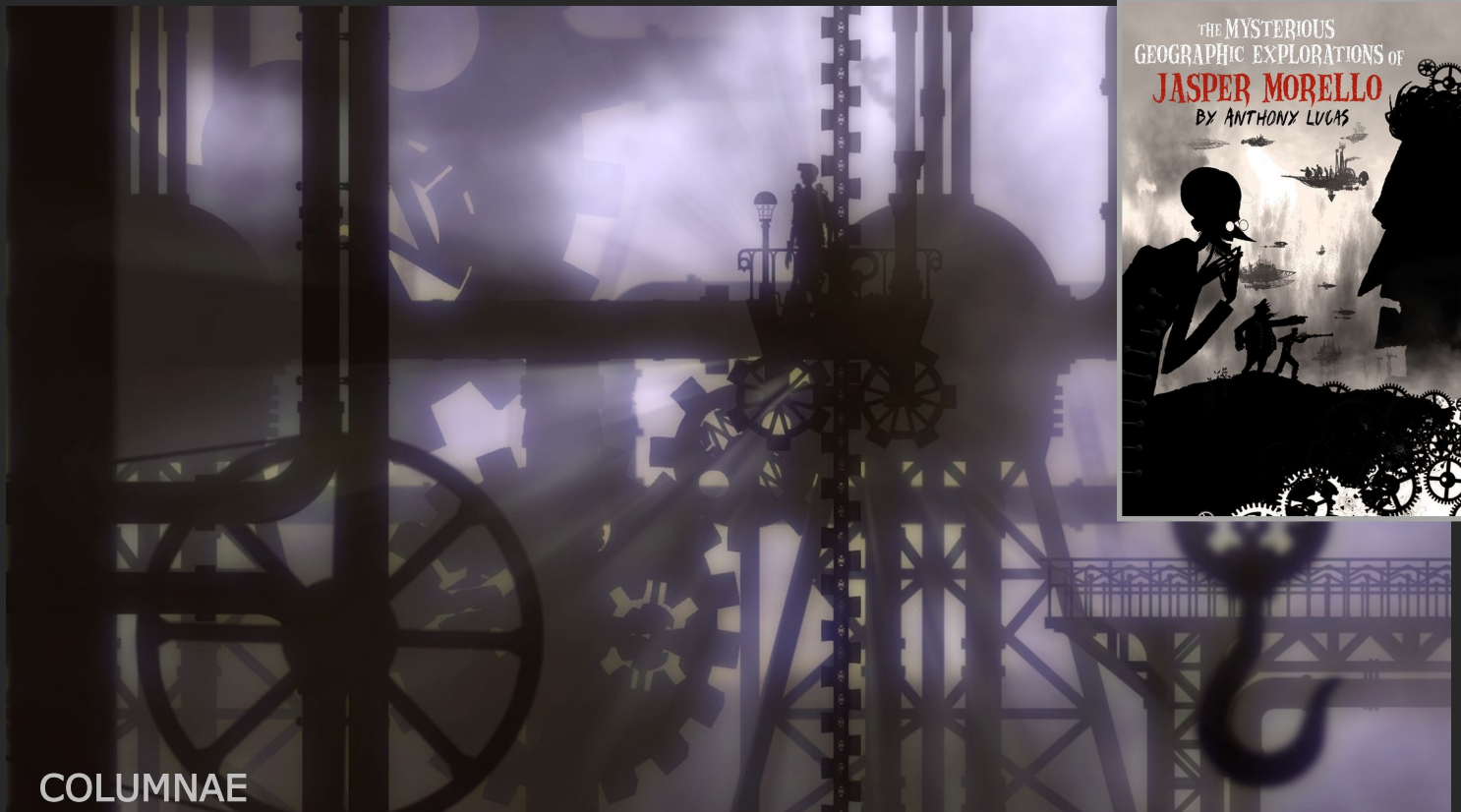
The game won numerous awards and saw great critical acclaim.



EXTINCTION PROTOCOL

Not yet realised, but an interesting 2019 Kickstarter — involving humble Construction Drones that battle invading alien war-machines.





COLUMNNAE



Belgrade-based Moonburnt Studio began an attempt, circa 2014, to translate the aesthetic of the Oscar-winning *Jasper Morello* animation (inset) into a point & click adventure videogame in the classic manner. *Columnnae* was to be set in a decaying steampunk world, but the game seems to have been 'on hold' for about six years now. However, a playable demo is still available on Itch.io and the page there even has '2020' as a date for the full game.



LUMINESCA

Matt Glanville's *Lumesca* was another game that was being developed in 2013-14 but — despite glowing coverage in *PC Gamer* magazine — it never managed to surface. The game offered an eerie underwater exploration by a mer-child, with languid puzzles and exploration.

GALLERY

This month our Gallery takes a short tour through some of the many varieties of "mono" — from rice-paper silhouettes to stark 3D portraits, from delicate conceptual lineart to gleaming *2001*-like spaceship interiors.





Pictures: Concept still from the open movie *Wires for Empathy*. With thanks to the Blender Foundation.

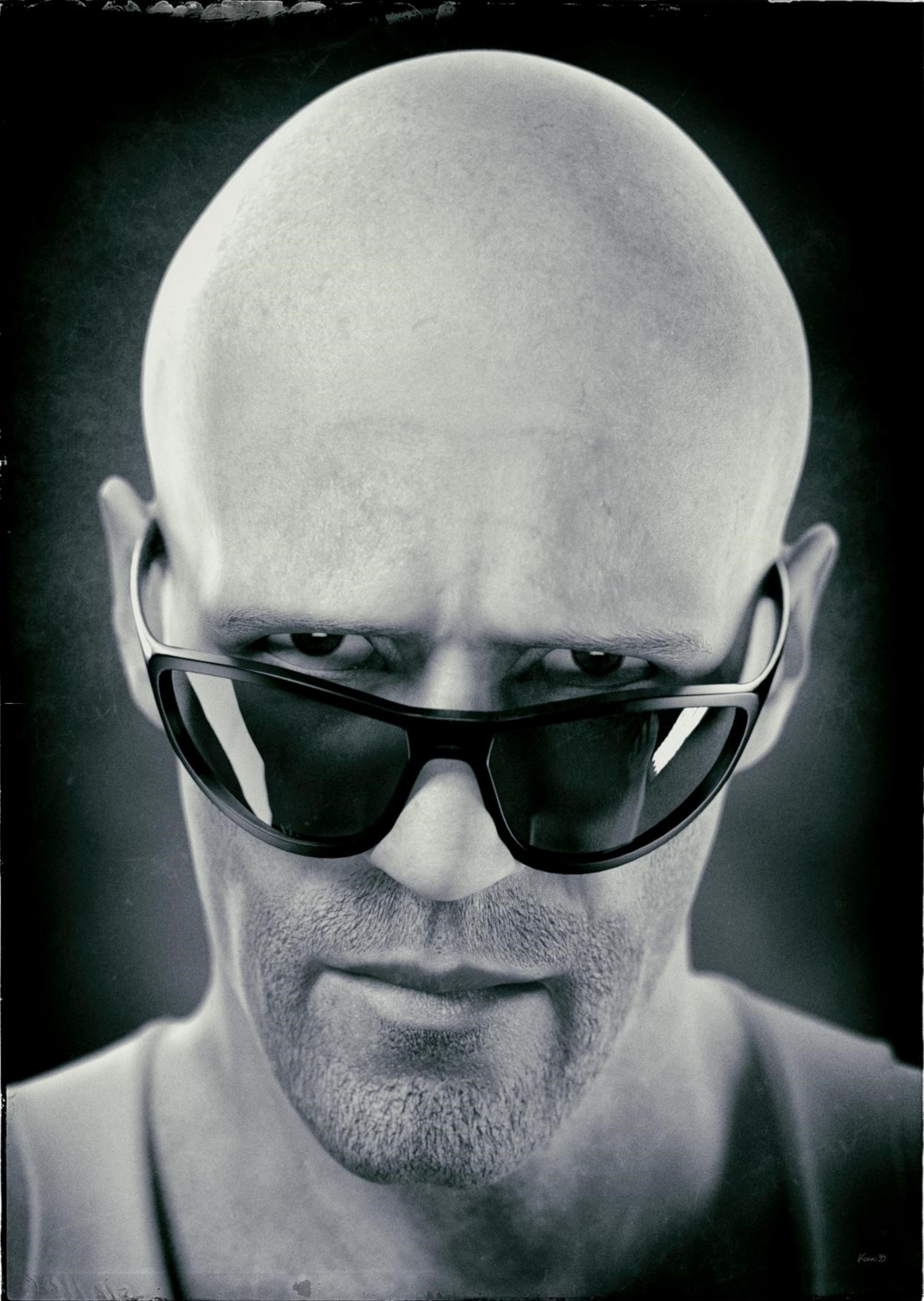
Inset: 'Silhouette art' 3D experiment by Mutinate, made in Poser 11 and seeking to emulate the style of the *Limbo* game.





Pictures: "Golem" (speedpaint) by [Zerahoc](#) of Canada. "Jason M4" by [Kooki99](#) of France. M4 in DAZ Studio and iRay.

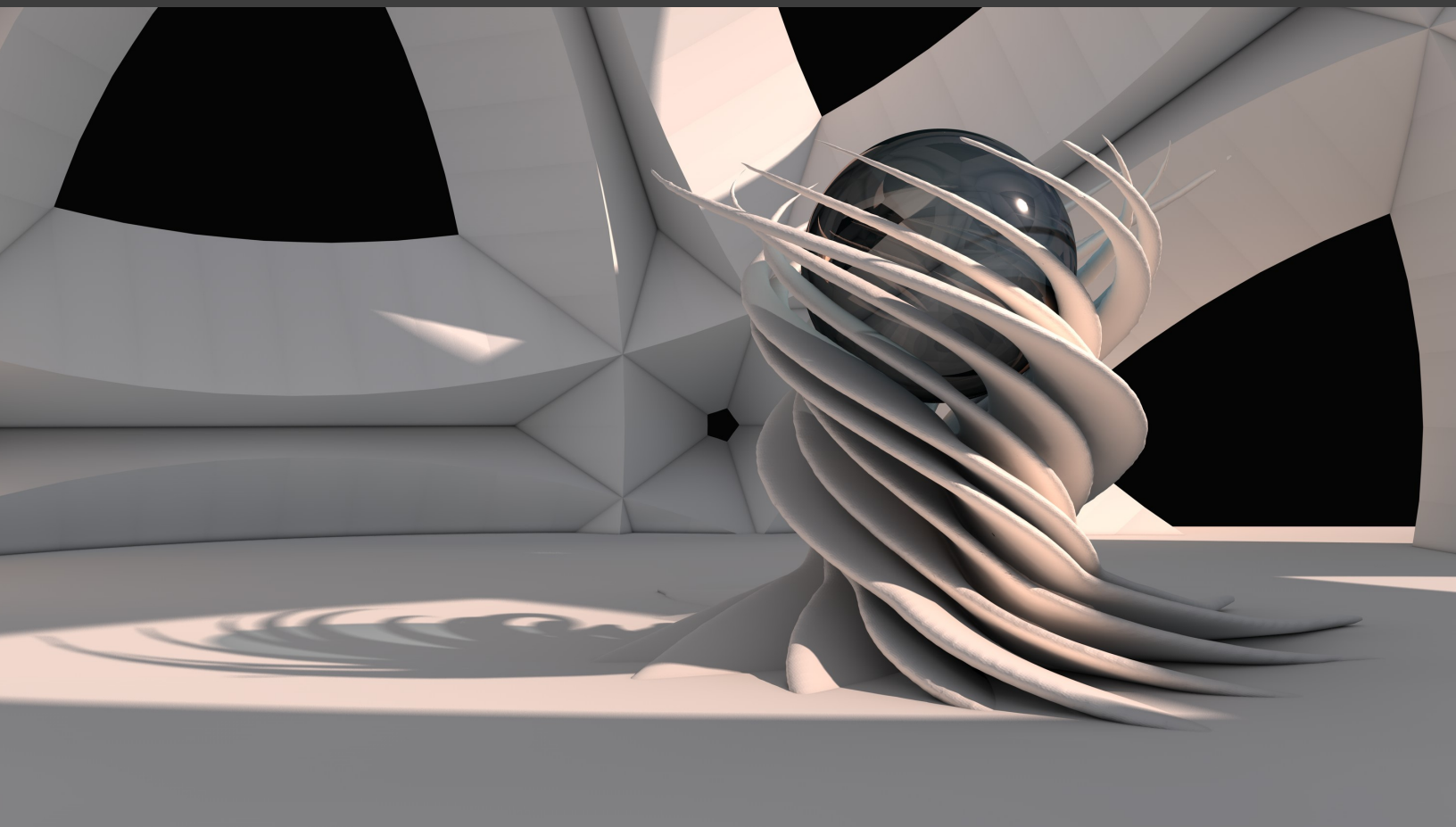
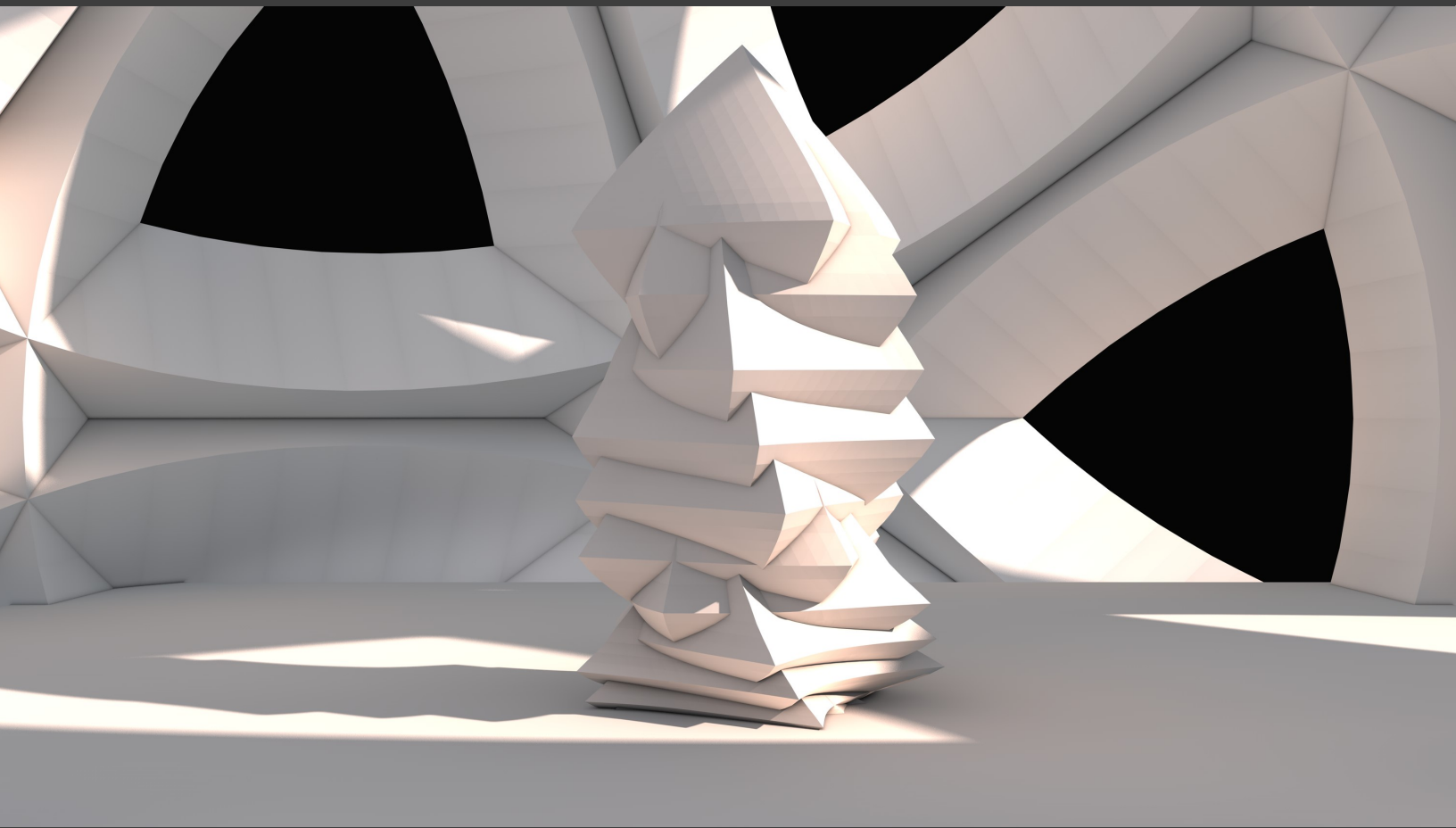




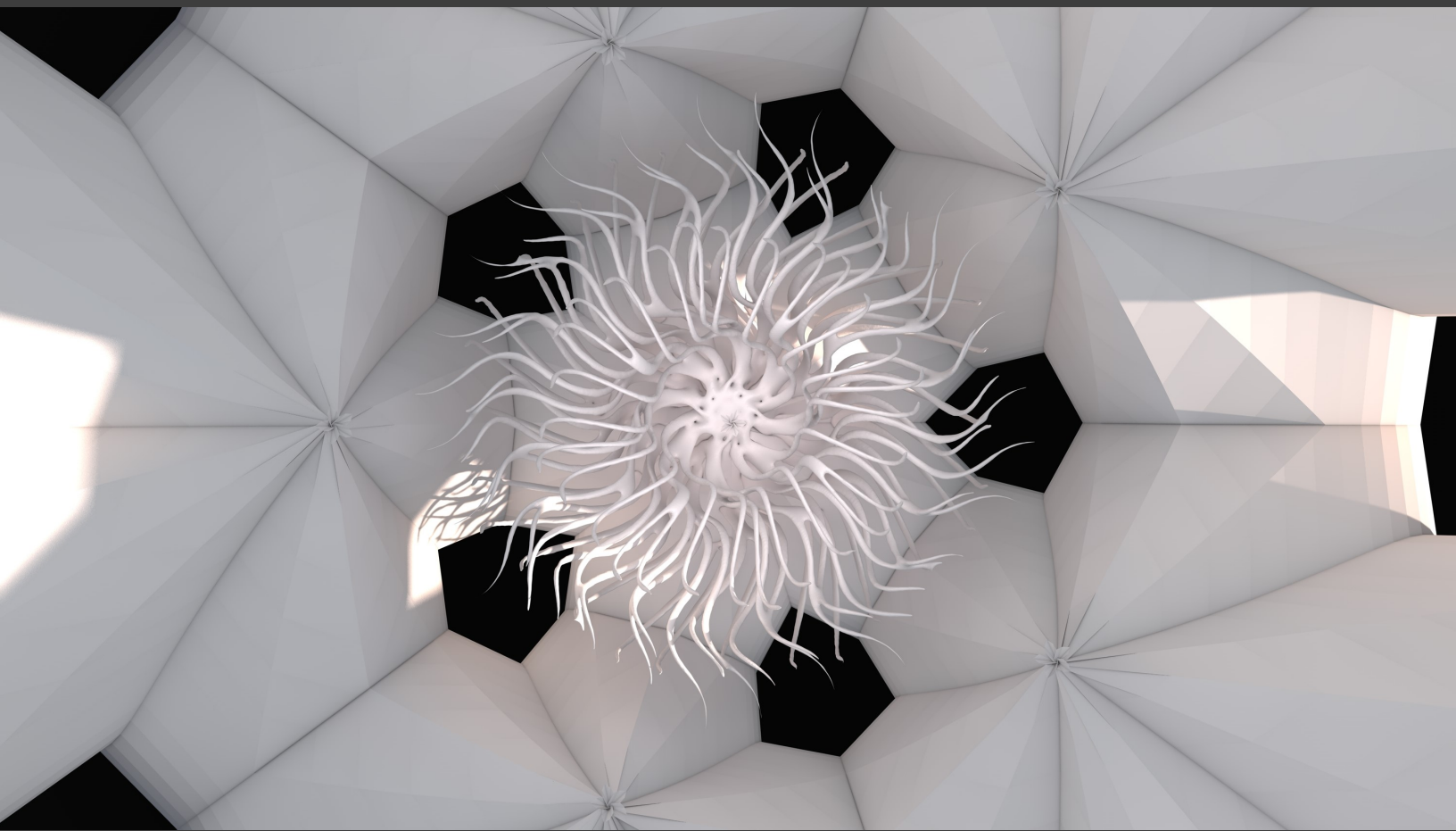
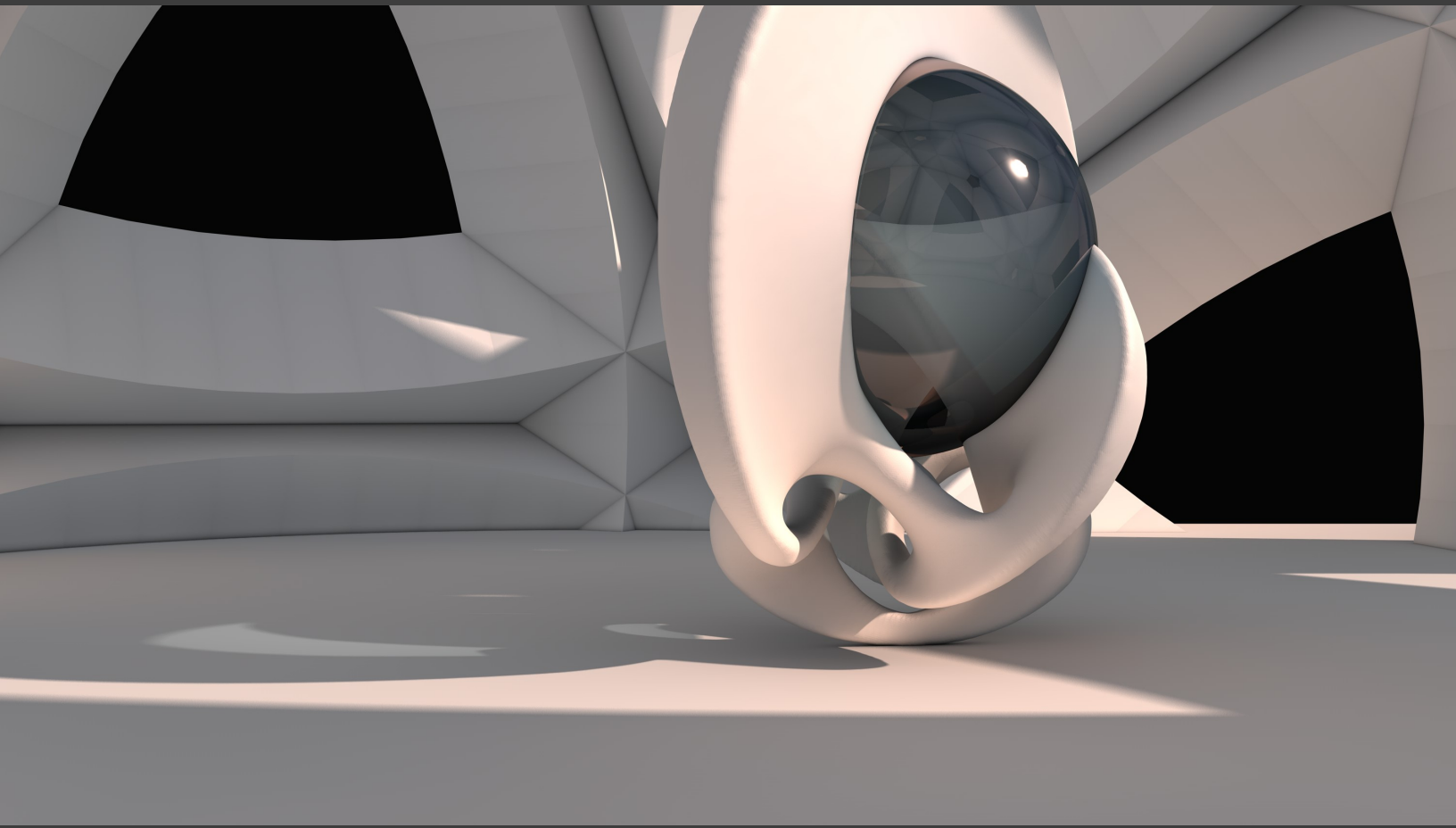


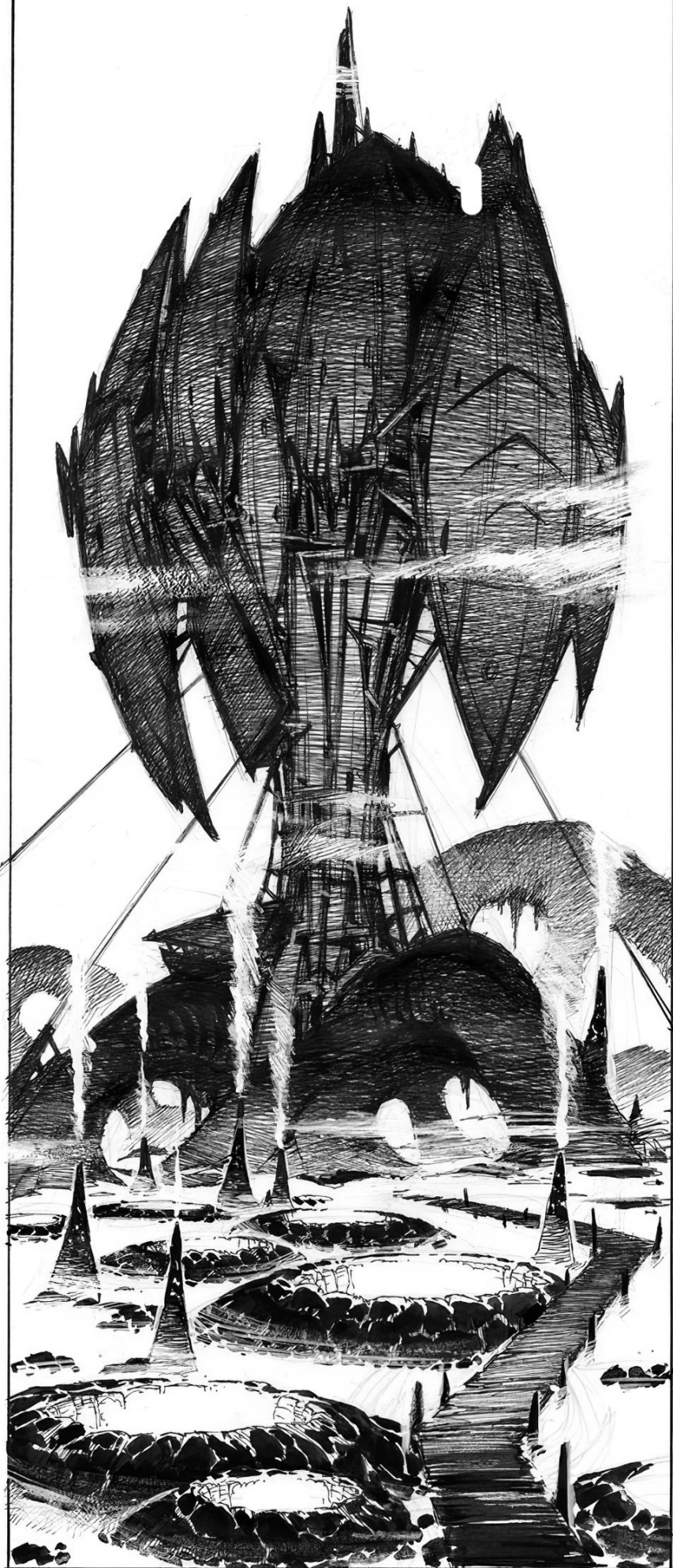


Comics pages by Matt Timson, interviewed in this issue.



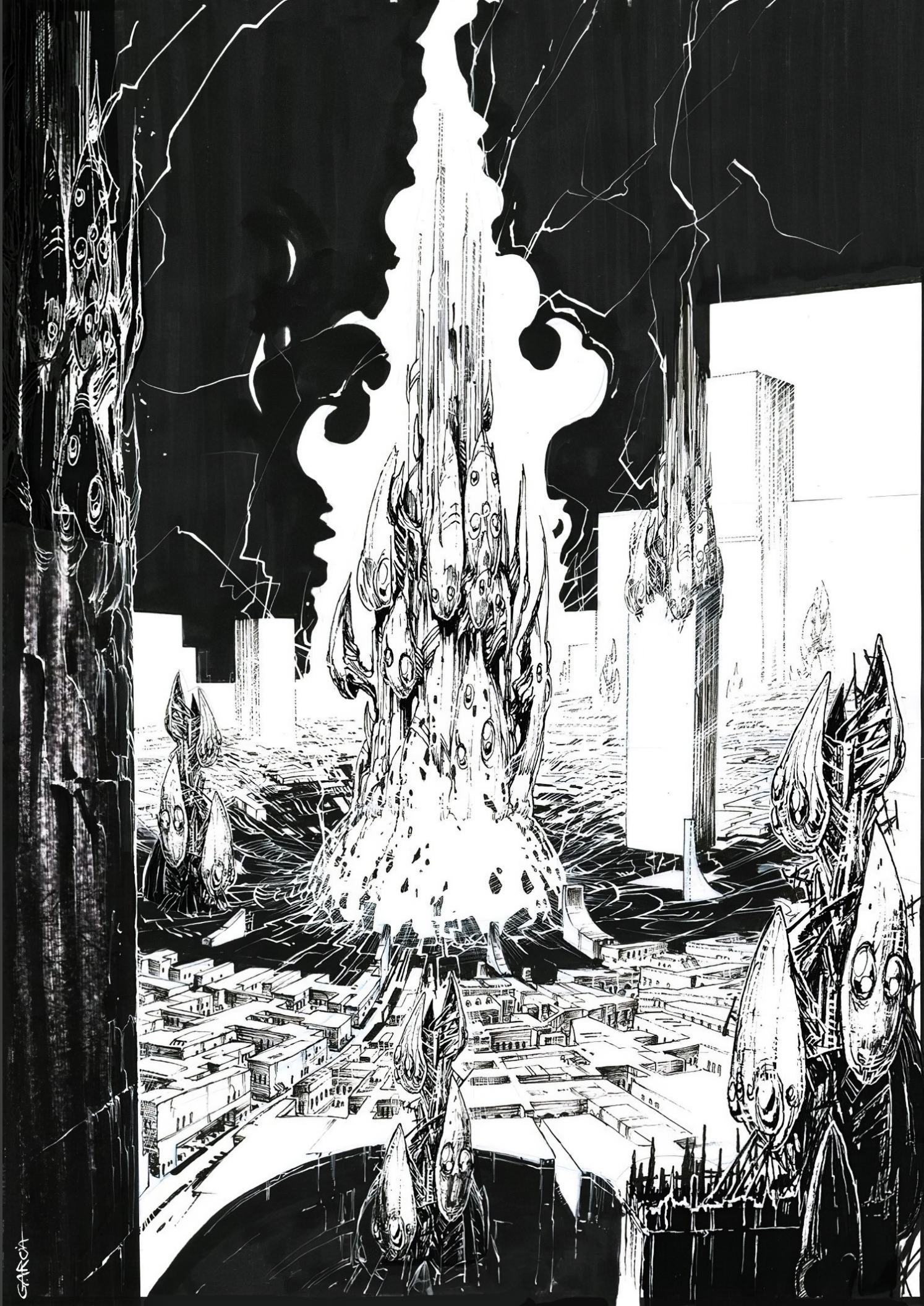
Pictures: Clockwise across spread, "Space 3", "Space 8", "Space 12" and "Space 9". All by [Nic022](#).





Pictures: *Ryzom* concept art, seen here for the first time at a large size. Our thanks to NevraX and Winch Gate.

The city is by Patrice Garcia and, although unsigned, the tower concept was probably also his.





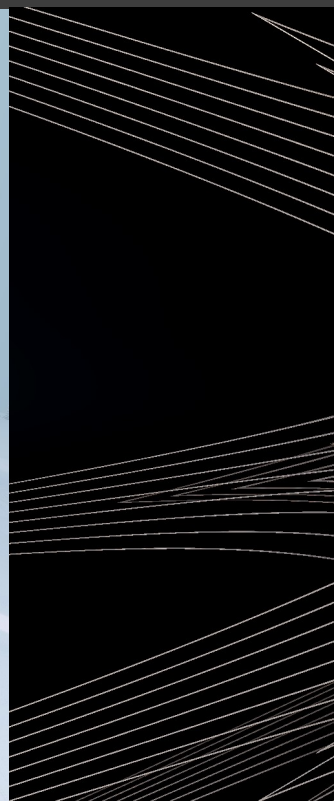
Monsters by Matt Timson, interviewed in this issue.





Pictures: clockwise across spread, "Legatus Albina of Triton" by [Zando Zennek](#) of the USA, who also has a

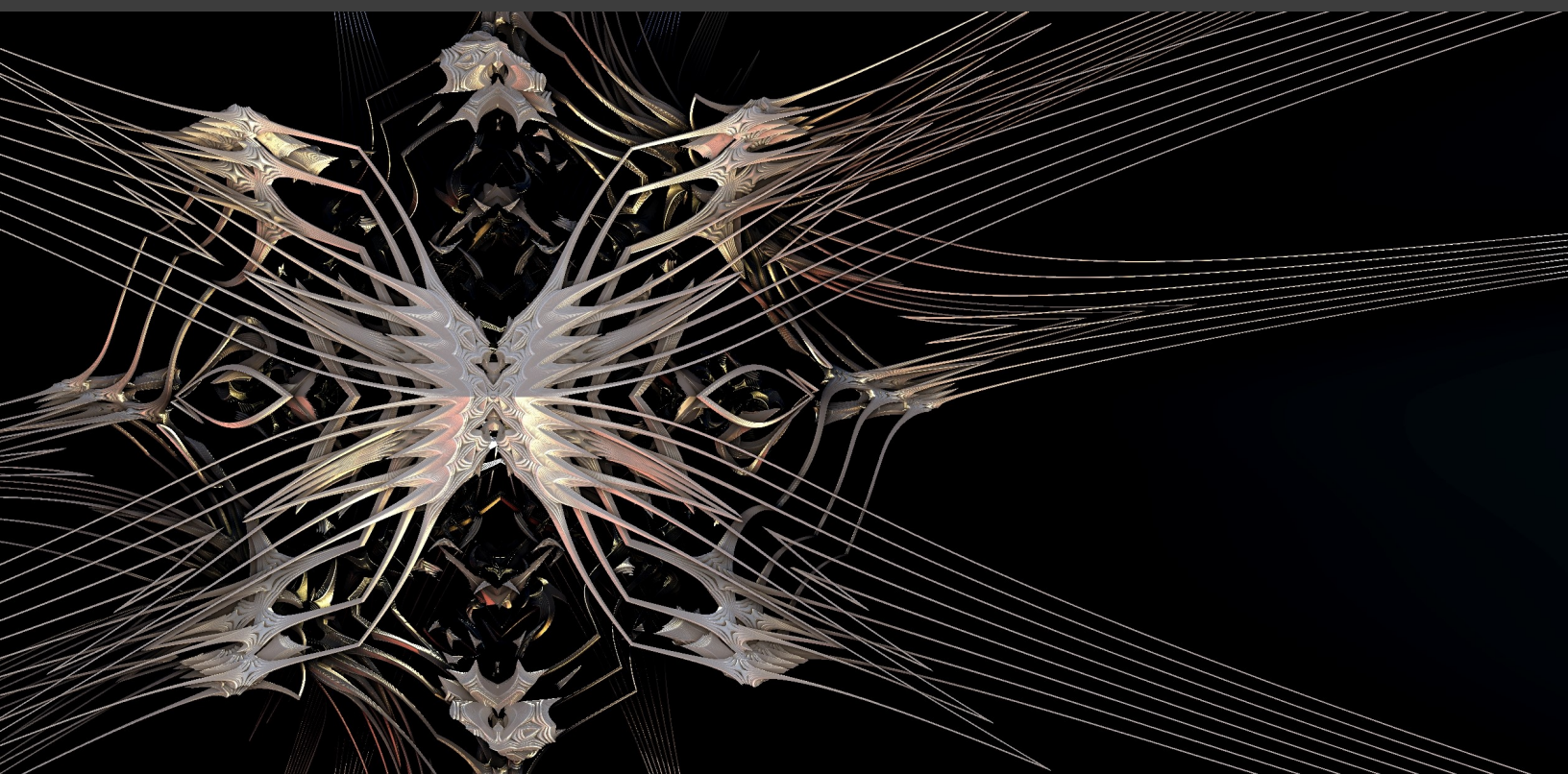
story for the picture; "Nyarlahotep 3" (made with Krita) by [Katharsisdrill](#) of Denmark; "Mb3d" (made





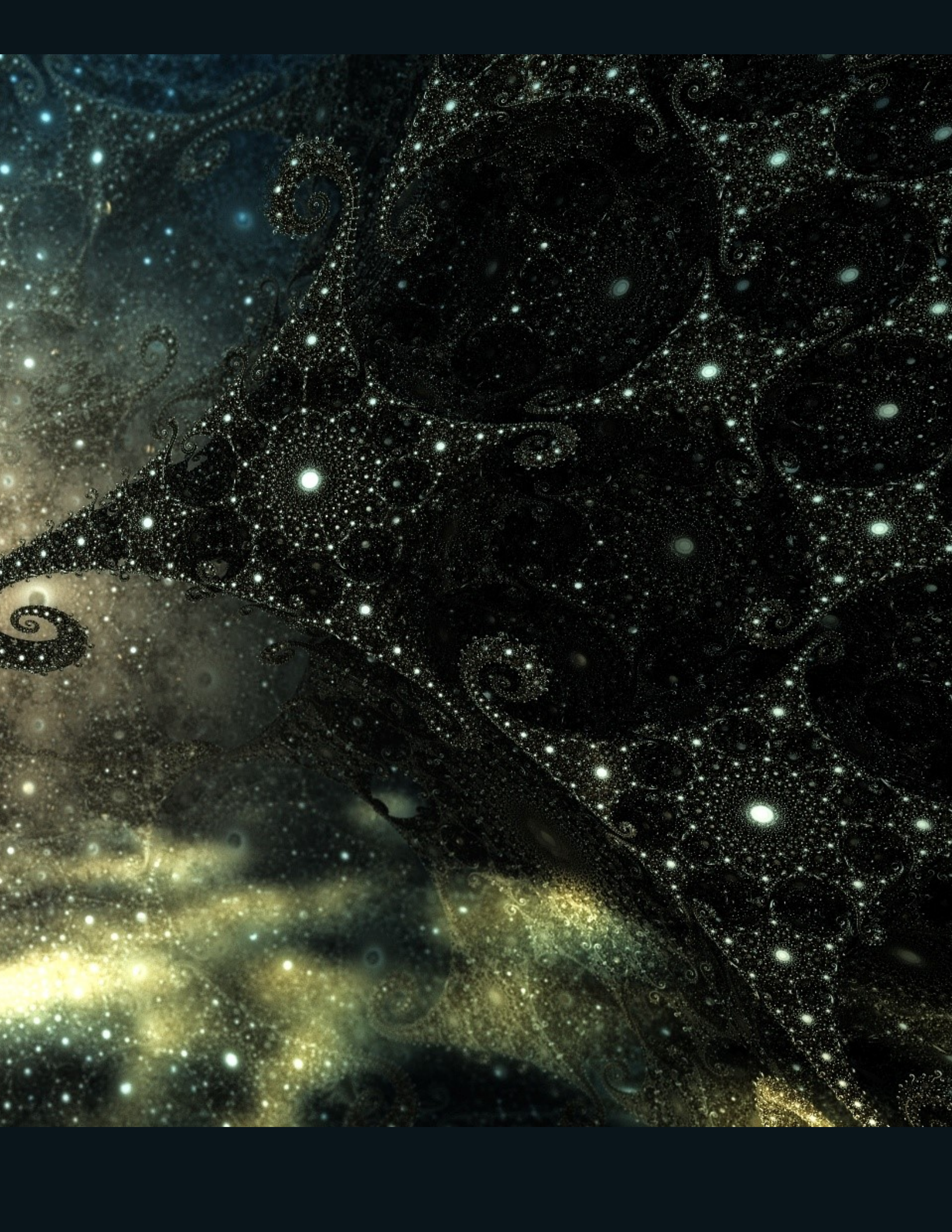
with Mandelbulb 3D) by [Nic022](#) of Switzerland;
"Good Morning" (made with Mandelbulb 3D) by

[Sabine62](#) of the Netherlands. Sabine also gives the
Mandelbulb 3D formula for this fine scene.





Picture: "Stelline scintillante" by [Sabine62](#) of the Netherlands.



Digital Art LIVE

DOCUMENTARY / KICKSTARTER

In Search of Tomorrow will be an extensive, and probably rather wistful, journey through beloved sci-fi movies of the 1980s. The project leads, CreatorVC Studios of London, have so far raised a cool £250,000 from over 3,000 backers. The result should be a four-hour chronological documentary, packed with new and rare interviews with the creative talent who made the magic possible. The release date is tentatively set for July 2021. We rarely feature any kind of Kickstarter here, but this one feels like it needs to be done now and done well. Mostly because the movie-making talent of the 1980s is increasingly elderly — and may be vulnerable to what are likely be several waves of the virus in 2020-21.

<https://www.kickstarter.com/>

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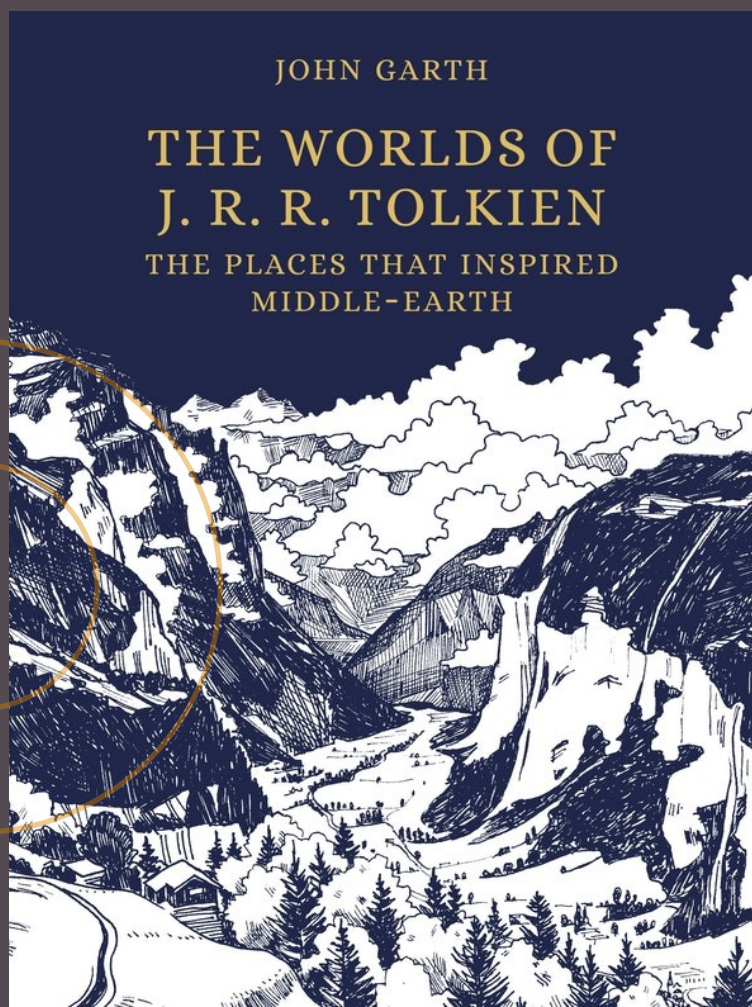
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Novel: *Anathem*

Anathem (2008) is one of the finest and most acclaimed science fiction novels of the last two decades. It is now to have a sumptuous new hardcover edition from Subterranean Press. The book will be beautifully produced, with fine typography and interior ornaments, illustrated sections, and will be presented in a traycase. There will also be a fine new wraparound cover by Patrick Arrasmith, of which the front cover is seen above. This release is set for spring 2020, at a hefty \$125. But well worth it, in our opinion, and it's great to see this superb book finally getting the hardback edition and cover art it deserves. Though, for a first-time experience of the novel, we would recommend a hearing of the unabridged audiobook version via a pair of good wireless headphones.

Your free *Digital Art Live* magazine ran a long interview with the author of *Anathem*, Neal Stephenson, in #32 (Sept 2018).



Book: *The Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien*

The Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien: The Places that Inspired Middle-earth will be a sumptuous new 200-page hardcover book. Tolkien scholar John Garth will aim to take readers to the places that Tolkien may have drawn on — to create his famous locations in *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit* and other classic tales. Garth has the scholarly ability and authority to do this, being the author of the highly acclaimed *Tolkien and the Great War*. His new book will include some of Tolkien's own illustrations, archive images, maps and present-day photographs. Garth will also debunk a couple of the wilder claims made by some slipshod fans — who claim their favourite place 'must' have inspired Tolkien.

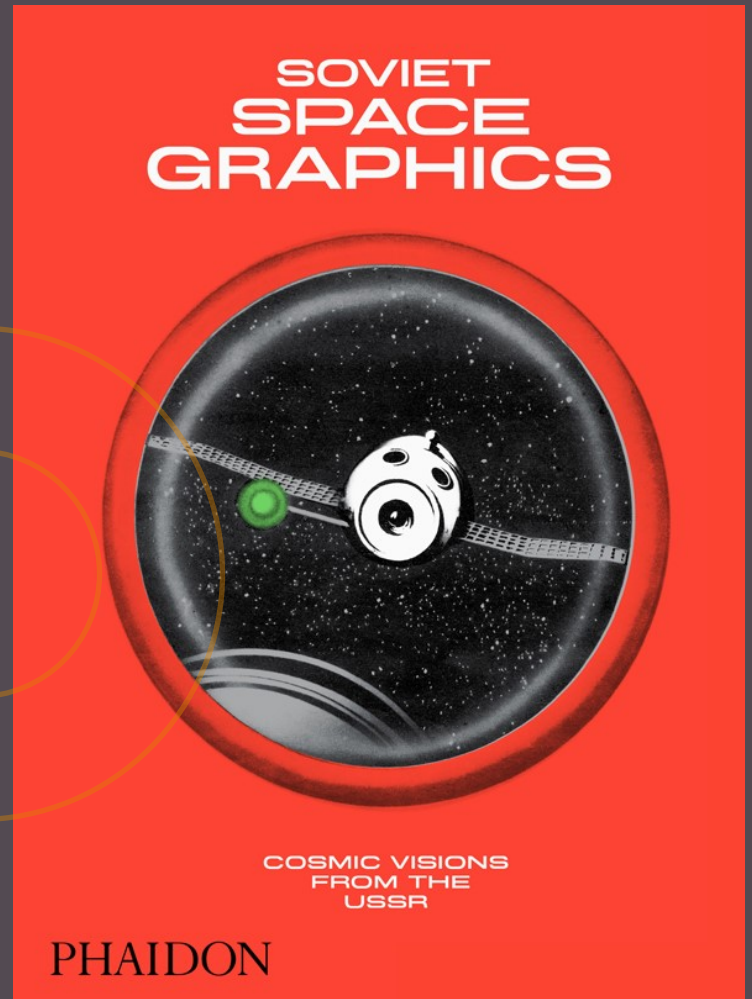
Formerly billed as *Tolkien's Worlds* and due in early 2020 from Princeton University Press, this book has had several delays and changes — and may well have another due to the virus. Amazon currently says 'June 2020', as it did before the virus — but sometime in summer 2020 still seems fairly likely.



Graphic Novels: Sonata vols 1 & 2

We're very pleased to see that a comic made with the Poser software has recently landed a major TV series deal. But our readers can experience the world of *Sonata* before it reaches the screen, via the graphic novels. The first of these is already released, as *Sonata Vol. 1: Valley of the God* (Xmas 2019). The second is *Sonata Vol. 2: The Citadel* (due July 2020). Together they will present over 350 pages of Sonata's sci-fi/steampunk adventures on the planet Perdita, superbly visualised by Brian Haberlin (*Anomaly* and *Anomaly: The Rubicon*).

Also look out for Haberlin's new comic *The Marked*, an excellent magic-fantasy series that has just completed its first five-issue 130-page run. This is another fine demo of what the Poser software can do when used as a key comics production software, in a sophisticated creative workflow. Like *Sonata*, *The Marked* is also signed up to become a TV series!



Artbook: Soviet Space Graphics

Soviet Space Graphics: Cosmic Visions from the USSR is from the experienced artbook publisher Phaidon. They present 250 of the best graphics from the Russian space programme and its attendant publicists in the press, in the form of an oversized artbook. The expert author worked closely with the Moscow Design Museum to source the best and most representative originals from the era. As such this new book offers a rare pictorial view of the optimistic future that Russian scientists and explorers once saw awaiting them in outer space — so different from the grim grey world they actually lived in under communism. It should be noted here that the book is printed on a type of paper which somewhat emulates the low-grade papers and inks that the Russian press were forced to use, due to the shortages and penuries of a command economy. This approach gives the graphics in the book a rather muted look — which may not appeal to those used to the high-gloss vivid printing of today's lavish artbooks.



Frankenstein museum

Possibly 2021, Bath, UK

The British city of Bath is pressing ahead with plans to open a new "House of Frankenstein" museum. While Shelley famously wrote a short version of the tale in the wilds of Switzerland, the bulk of the novel (1818) was actually written later during a stay in the pleasant English spa city of Bath. The city now plans a museum of costume, comics, models, props and more.

Might open in spring or summer 2021.

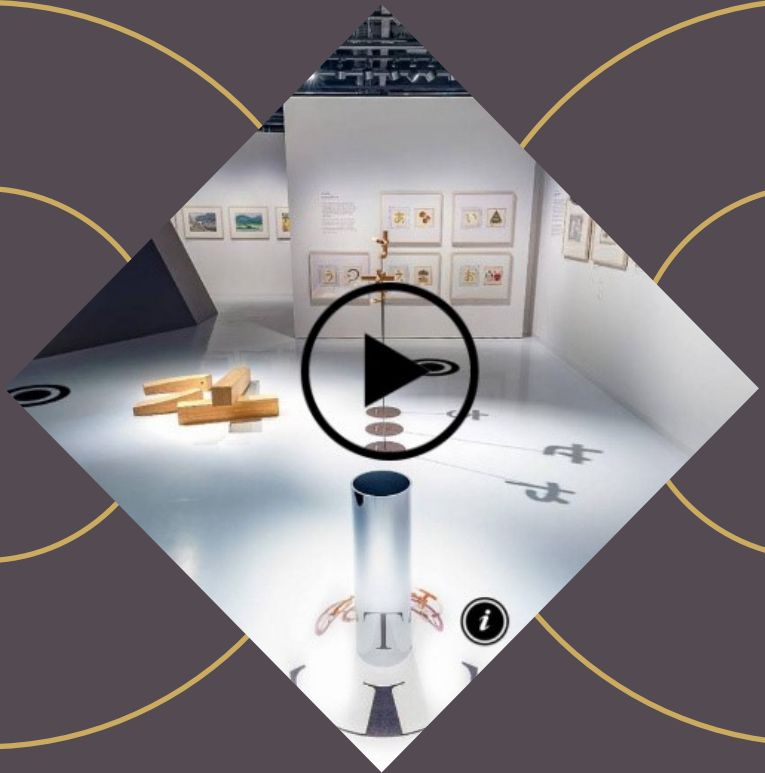
Pictures, from left, across double-page:

Promotional press picture of Boris Karloff in makeup as the monster, in the Universal movie version of *Frankenstein*.

Promo preview for the VR version of the exhibition 'Anno's Journey' (2019, Japan House, London).

A 1920s 'isolation kettle' cartoon by Heath Robinson, depicting a wheeled device to enable the busy gent to take a cleansing hot bath anywhere, even in a London street.

Detail of John Audubon's original painting of a pair of Snowy Owls.



Anno's Journey

Online VR tour / London, UK

Anno Mitsumasa is one of Japan's most beloved and prolific book artists. For over 50 years he has mostly worked in children's wordless picture-books, and has created around 300 of these.

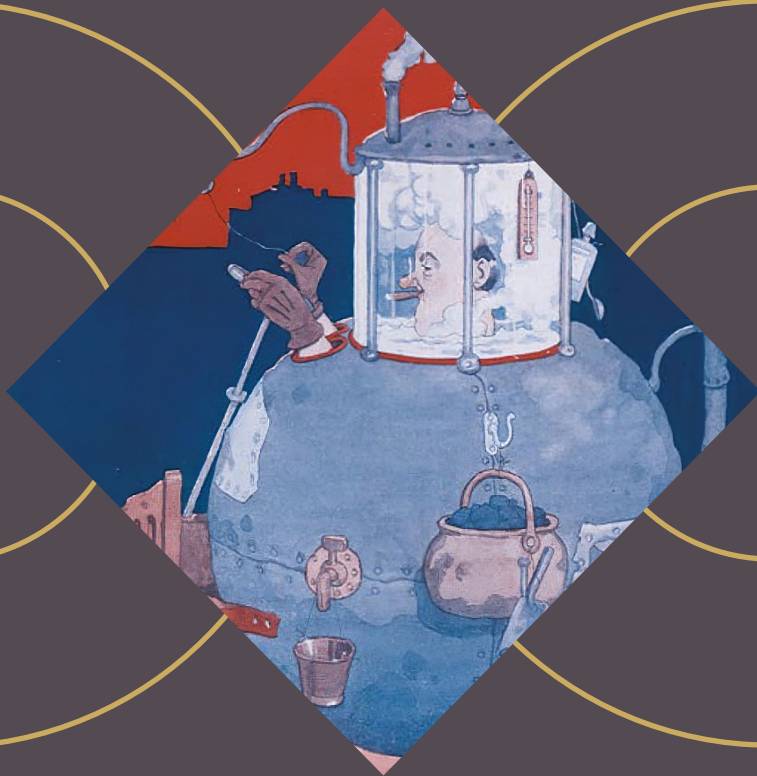
London's Japan House now offers a free online VR tour of their major Anno Mitsumasa retrospective exhibition which was staged in co-operation with the artist in 2019.

The show vividly illustrates the story of Anno Mitsumasa's life and creative journey, from his early picture books of his childhood in rural Japan, to his early 'kirigami' papercuts on science, maths and folkloric themes, through to stories from the post-war capitalist economic miracle in the 1960s. We also see a full set of drawings from *Anno's Britain*, and many depictions of contemporary life in the Japanese city of Kyoto.

There are eight exhibition areas in total, and these can all be seen in the VR version.

There is also a useful Help video for the tour.

<https://www.japanhouselondon.uk/discover/exhibition/annos-journey-3d-exhibition-tour/>



Heath Robinson Museum

Pinner, north-west London, UK

Post-lockdown, there's a curious little museum on the outskirts of London that seems likely to be a relatively safe haven from the vast city-centre museum crowds. The Heath Robinson Museum at Pinner is in a fine restored Regency villa formerly owned by Lord Nelson, and is devoted to the well-loved cartoon work of Heath Robinson. His name has entered everyday English language, used to refer to any outlandish and rather ramshackle contraption. His American equivalent would be Rube Goldberg — both cartoonists depicting whimsical 'labour saving' mechanical devices and their intrepid users.

<https://www.heathrobinsonmuseum.org/>

For those unable or unwilling to visit in 2020, the 2017 book *Very Heath Robinson* (Sheldrake Press) is a highly recommended alternative. The lavishly illustrated and beautifully produced 240-page book has many choice examples of his cartoon art, and text is by the popular historian Adam Hart-Davis.

<https://www.sheldrakepress.co.uk/product/very-heath-robinson/>

Harry Potter: a History of Magic

Online tour / London, UK

The British Library recently staged a major exhibition devoted to Harry Potter and the history of magic, although this closed in February 2020. As you might expect, the Museum was rammed with visitors, but a version is now online and free of crowds and viruses — thanks to a new Virtual Tour courtesy of Google Arts & Culture.

The show has preliminary sketches, maps and original art from the Potter series of books, and some props from the movies. Along with such Potter-ania the show also has a bus-load of real items once used for magical purposes, such as scrying balls, witch-brooms, arcane books, astronomical charts and rabbit's feet. These vie with strange pseudo-relics such as Merlin's Beard, and the Philosopher's Stone. Of course there is also a large menagerie of strange and curious creatures, from snowy owls to man-like mandrake roots and much more. Many online items are highly zoom-able. Visit soon, as the online version may not be online forever.

<https://artsandculture.google.com/project/harry-potter-a-history-of-magic>

NEXT ISSUE: JULY 2020

BIG 50th ISSUE

Are you interested in being interviewed in a future issue of the magazine? Or presenting a webinar for our series? Please send the Web address of your gallery or store, and we'll visit! paul@digitalartlive.com



Picture: Detail from "Escape II" by [Alex Wild](#) of Russia. Alex also modelled the ships.