



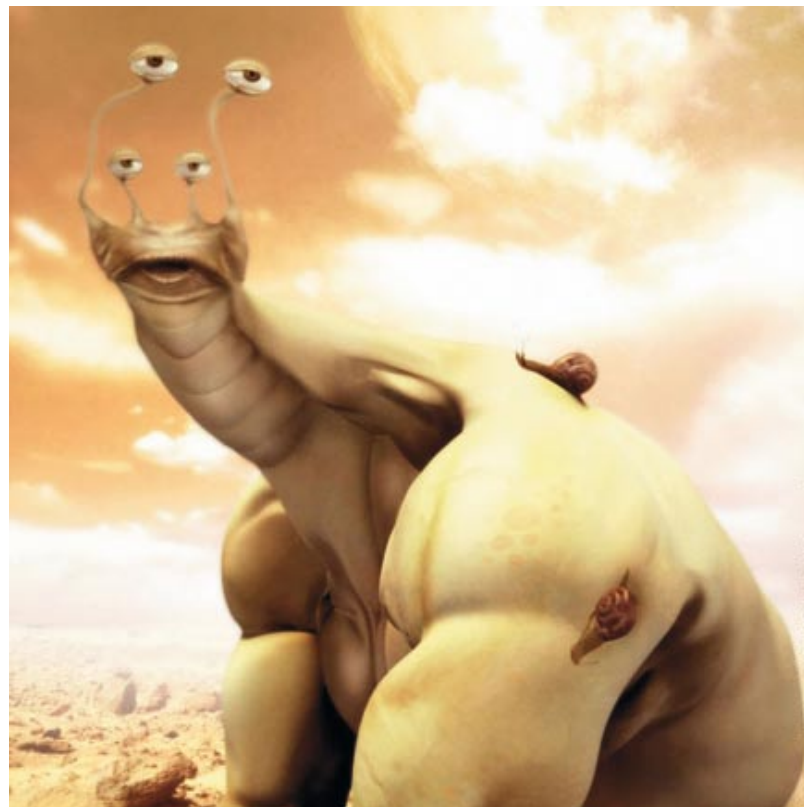
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The Matrix, *Hitch Hiker's Guide* and *Sin City* were all number one at the box office on opening weekend." And if that doesn't convince you, Pascal has a simple solution: "Lots of people find it childish to have an interest in fantasy. I think that it's good to be able to revive our childhood."

Fantasy themes

We still have to establish the constituent elements of fantasy art, its raw materials, its themes. "Fantasy art has no real boundaries." So, says Pascal, "do whatever you want." Arnie doesn't believe this limits the genre to simple escapism: "The best fantasy art can explore any and all aspects of the human condition."

He rounds that off with an example which has almost become an archetype: "One artist could paint a robot rampaging through a city and it would be simple pulpish entertainment." There's nothing wrong with that, but "another could create a canvas that uses the robot as a metaphor for feelings of detachment or alienation."

He then gets postmodern on us: "Likewise, how a work of art is interpreted is beyond the painter's control: once it's offered to the public, they view it however they wish regardless of the artist's original intention." The fantastic is more an attempt to accurately document the gymnastics of

the mind, it's unashamedly popular in its aspirations, that's why it's looked down on by 'high' art. John Mueller provides an illustration. "I think early in my career I had some desire to be 'taken seriously' as an artist." There's no shame in that, but what he came to discover about himself as an artist is that "I'm happiest when I'm painting some big ugly dude smashing the crap out of some other big ugly dude." Round of applause please.

Community influences

Aleksi Briclot gives us some insight into his creative process: "I like trying new things and discovering new paths." This attitude is a vital part of any healthy artform. "What I love beyond everything is feeding the brain and digging through ideas."

The blossoming online community and the success of big budget movies like *LOTR* are a kind of poisoned chalice to fantasy art. On the one hand, helping to gain credibility, on the other threatening a kind of monolithic whitewash. "I think if I had a community like the one on the internet when I was growing up, I would be a vastly different artist." John Mueller is worried about this: "I mean it's cool, but also it's incestuous."

The temptation to copy instead of breaking new ground can be overwhelming. "I think a lot of artists are cheating" >





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The fine art of matte painting

Max Dennison has an impressive list of credits as a digital matte painter: *The Lord of the Rings*, *Revenge of the Sith* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide* among them. But don't expect him to steal any scenes intentionally: "My work is most successful if people don't notice it!"

The object of the game is to shoot the impossible: "The castle on the hill, the mountains of Mars or the hangar on a spaceship." For this reason, matte painting often overlaps with fantasy art but it's a wider discipline.

"Fantasy art tells a distinctive story in a very 'literal' way," says Max. "It serves an idea on a plate to you and tells you clearly that this is what 'my' world looks like." This means clients want photo reality, they've already done the imagining, thank you very much.

If it's unalloyed fantasy you're after then the precursor of the matte painting is what you want, concept art: "It allows for all the expression that the artist can muster, and is the only time where the artist has licence to fully explore the theme."



To see Max's matte paintings see showcase on page 8 XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

themselves out of their own voice," says John. "I try not to peruse the professionals' sites too much. While I love the art and it being so accessible, you can't 'unsee it.'" When you next sit down to work, guess what pops out? Smeagol.

Digital developments

Oddly for a world inhabited by elves and goblins, fantasy has a huge appetite for digital technology. The new generation of fantasists currently swapping notes on sites such as conceptart.org would look at you gone-out if you suggested an oil on canvas solution to that bionic werewolf problem.

John Mueller recalls a time when this wasn't so: "I remember showing someone one of my digital pieces and they were like 'Wow that's amazing' and they asked 'Can I see the original?'" At this point, John was forced to explain that there was no 'original' as such, just some ones and zeros. "There was sort of this sad disappointed look in their eyes like I had just pissed on the great mystery of life."

The influence of Hollywood's industrial exploitation of fantasy art is undeniable. Driving forward technique and putting this in the hands of youths with role-playing habits to feed has generated a global mutual support group for anyone itching to

express their fantastical yearnings. This is an unprecedented upswing but there is a flip side.

"An original painting can take on a life of its own when hung in a gallery," explains Arnie Fenner. "There's something magic that happens when you're standing in front of an original." This simply can't ever happen with a digital piece. "The computer and the software create an artificial barrier between the artist and their audience." Overcoming this will make digital truly all-conquering.

The benchmark

To a certain extent, any field is best described by its leading proponents. For fantasy, one name stands out: Frank Frazetta. "Frank is sort of a force unto himself," says Arnie. "He was the perfect artist for the perfect subject at the perfect time." But for all this he is not alone. "Frazetta is certainly a quintessential fantasy artist, but there are a lot of quintessential fantasy artists."

Aleksi has the right idea: "The rules are always the same. You have something to express through an image so find the best way to do it." Take this as your starting point, not someone else's solution to the same problem "Then it's all about style, composition and colour." In this, fantasy is no different from reality. **ca-p**

Full Spectrum anthology

"Art Annuals aren't uncommon," confesses Arnie Fenner, one half of the editing duo responsible for *Spectrum*, the fantasy art yearbook. "But it always seemed that fantastic art was under-represented." Not any more.

In 1984, Arnie and his wife Cathy attended an exhibition of science fiction artwork held by the Society of Illustrators in New York. As Arnie recalls, "It was a virtual who's-who of contemporary genre artists," but the Society didn't even do a book or catalogue to chronicle the event.

Frustrated at this oversight, Arnie and Cathy set about developing the idea for a fantasy art anthology which would document the best and latest developments in this incredibly vibrant field.

Now on *Spectrum* 11, the annual competition selects from works variously described as fantasy, science fiction, horror or just 'skewed versions of reality'. Preferring this wider remit gives the title broader appeal but also makes it true that: "The *Spectrum* books are celebrations of the artists' imaginations."



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