



Photoshop

JOURNEY INTO DARK FANTASY PAINTING

JP Targete shows you how to create a dark fantasy painting by taking you step-by-step through his piece *The Purifier*

Artist PROFILE

JP Targete

COUNTRY: US

CLIENTS: NCSoft, The Gnomon Workshop, Wizards of The Coast



JP is an accomplished digital and traditional illustrator,

concept artist and art director for books and video games with 17 years experience. He's been providing illustration and concept art for book and RPG publishers, video games and production companies, and is presently working on a full-colour graphic novel. He currently resides in southern California with his wife and son.

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DVD Assets

Screenshots and the files you need are on your DVD.

FOLDERS: Workshop

Files, Screenshots

SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2 (demo)

What's the difference between dark fantasy and regular old fantasy, you might ask. Well, it's not the obvious, which is, it doesn't actually have to be a literally dark image or have a muted colour palette. It does, however, require a sense of mystery, obscurity or a threatening mood of pending or present fear visualised in the image. What makes dark fantasy art distinct is that it introduces an element of reality to the viewer's visual experience that is different than the typical fantasy. It should appeal to them or make them feel uneasy. Let's face it, many of us like to be scared or surprised and dark fantasy should do this.

So when I was asked to host a workshop, I chose my favourite genre: dark fantasy. I find it interesting and enjoyable to play with, and it keeps me engrossed from start to finish. I enjoy simplicity in concept and idea, but I love all the technical details and processes needed to give life to those ideas too.

In this workshop, I'll start with a simple idea in thumbnail form and develop it into a drawing that we'll evolve into a fully detailed, coloured illustration using Photoshop CS2. There is more than one technique and tool in Photoshop to get the results we want.

I'll go over the techniques and tools I use, as well as discussing the ideas and concepts behind *The Purifier*. We'll also look at painting, colour, lighting, surface materials and detailing. This workshop is for artists who have a basic to good understanding of Photoshop.



1 Birth of an idea

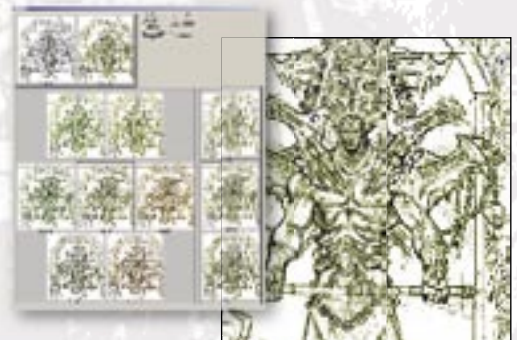
For this first step I use pencil and paper and start sketching to fuel my ideas. When I first start sketching I don't have a clear idea of what I want to draw, all I know is that I want to create a powerful character either in battle or just standing in an 'I'll kick your ass' pose. As I continue to sketch, I find myself straying away from the more action-orientated thumbnails because I've done many battle-type paintings in the past. I choose to do the more iconic posed character in sketch four, above – the character holding the axe. This will enable me to focus on the single character, details and background decor.

2 Develop a line drawing

I take my raw thumbnail and develop it into a line drawing, I then scan it at about 10x13 inches at 200dpi and tweak it in Photoshop. Try to get as much detail in the shapes and anatomy at this stage because it will save you a lot of grief later on. The Purifier is a cursed lord from the underworld who travels between our world and his. He purifies people through pain and eventually death, enabling their souls to be set free and collected. The object on his back is a dark magic soul-collecting mechanism.

3 Colourise your line art

Colourising will merge your line art with your painting, and the coloured line can be easier to deal with than the black and white line when it comes to painting over it. There are several ways to colourise, one is using the Variations function under Image>Adjust. Here you can see variations of your image and change the colour of the overall image quickly by clicking the desired colour. ➔





4 Lay a ground colour
As I mentioned in step two, your line work should be bold and clear because you will now use it as a top layer and lay a colour ground underneath it in another layer. So create another layer under your line drawing. Change the layer setting of your line drawing to Multiply, and go back to the layer underneath. Go to your RGB colour slider and set it to this: R 110, G 102, B 117. Take the Paint Bucket tool in the toolbar and click into the empty layer. This is to create a colour and value ground that we will add highlights and shadows to.

5 Filters are your friends
Many artists don't like using filters in their work, which is fine, but I like to use as many as I can. My favourite filter is the Grain filter, found in the Filters menu under Texture>Grain. By adding texture to your ground layer you will simulate real media, such as paper or a grainy painting surface. Settings in the Grain filter should be set to Grain Type Clumped, with an Intensity of 39 and Contrast of 50. The filter will add small, coloured grainy particles to your image, which will help it to look more natural.



6 The mighty Dodge tool
The Dodge tool gets a bad rap in Photoshop because many users tend to misuse it, making it obvious that the tool was used in the image. If used properly, Dodge is a powerful tool. Here I use the Dodge tool to add highlights to my ground colour. This is similar to adding white chalk on grey paper. The Dodge tool does not erase or paint over the grain texture, so the texture stays intact as I add highlights. This is known as 'backward painting', because in art school we are taught to start with our darks and shadows first and finish up with highlights. I find the backward method easier for me when I put in basic highlights. It's important to know what direction your lighting will be coming from, and from how many light sources.

7 Adding darker values
Now that I have my highlights, I can start to add shadows and some values to my ground colour. I like to use the pre-made Oil brush in Photoshop. It's not as smooth as the regular Round brush, but not as hard as the Pencil or Hard brush. I set the brush setting to Darken and apply dark colours like markers, keeping areas somewhat translucent. I try to work very quickly in this step and really focus on shadows, values and form.



PRO SECRETS
Thumbs up
One of the key points in the thumbnail step is to do as many as you can and keep them loose, focusing really on composition and poses. Lighting, rendering and so on should be minimal at this stage. Thumbs and sketches are the raw essentials to creating a finished illustration.

8 Apply the Lighting Effects filter
The Lighting Effects filter under Filter>Render is extremely useful for painting in Photoshop. It should be used to help establish quick, broad lighting and colour set-up in your image. I've set up a cream-coloured spotlight for my main light source and two omni red/orange lights for my edge and background light source, which represent flames. By previewing your image you can move the lighting around and see how it affects your image.

9 Establishing your surface materials
Before we continue it is important to establish the surface materials of the elements in the painting. If a viewer cannot distinguish flesh from stone or metal in your work, your image is getting further away from realism. Just like a 3D modeller who will create for their 3D renderings, a 2D artist needs to establish a materials library. For The Purifier, there are four main surface materials: chipped, painted stone of the arch decor, the character's flesh tone, the carved stone of his back piece and the worn metal of the headpiece and weapon.



In depth Journey into dark fantasy painting



10 Merge layers, start painting

Once you know what materials go where you can merge your drawing and ground layers and start painting on top of that layer or on a new layer. I roughly start to paint with my oils and Soft brush with warm colours. Notice how some of the ground colour is showing through.

11 Blocking in the background

Painting more transparently, I roughly block in the background, leaving bits of the ground colour to show through. I paint in the flames very quickly; they'll be refined later on. I've also started rendering the character's back piece, keeping in mind the materials it's made out of and how light will affect it.



PRO SECRETS

Material world

Mastering surface materials in painting is a key component that will help you develop a believable world. The greatest mistake that many aspiring painters make is that they do not have a wide range of established materials in their paintings. Many objects in the image, from flesh to leather to metal, seem to have the same specular properties. Once an artist has control of surface materials, the possibilities of application are endless.



12 Love your skulls

As I continue painting I get carried away with painting the skulls. There's nothing so raw and primordial as a skull of an animal or human. It's this basic, visual chunk of reality that seeps into dark fantasy that makes it so appealing to me.

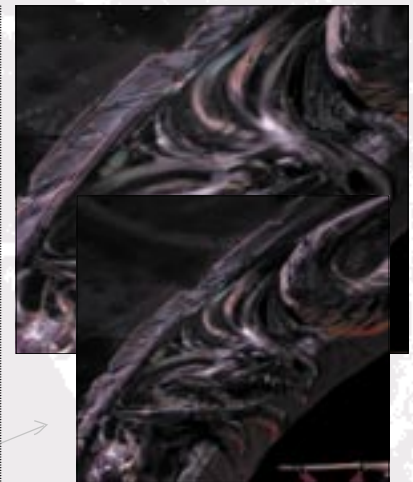


13 Back to the background

I go back and forth from background to foreground and middle ground many times. In this step, I work up the right arch decor and the flames a little more, keeping in mind the material they're made of. I also flesh out the character's lower body. Notice the difference in materials from the cloth below his waist and the metal piece on his abdomen.

14 Arch headpiece

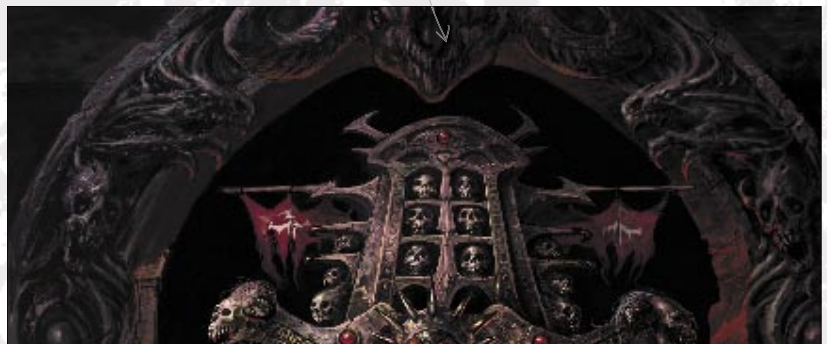
For the arch centre headpiece I want three degrees of light: ambient lighting that shows the form, a dominant



main light source and secondary under-lighting emitting from the bottom flame. For the left side of the arch decor I copy and flip the right side and repaint it with the proper lighting.

15 Texturing the arch

Using a custom-made Texture brush I add small speckles to the arch's surface, which adds a realistic, stone-like texture to it.





- ➔ **16 Add smoke**
On a separate layer I paint smoke in the background with a custom Cloud brush I created. This brush serves many purposes, from clouds to smoke and fog.



- 17 Erasing areas of smoke**
With the Eraser tool I carefully erase the smoke areas where I want to show the foreground elements in the layer beneath.

- 18 Unsharp Mask**
After applying final touches, I use the Unsharp Mask filter (under Filters > Sharpen > Unsharp) to bring out some of the details of the painting. Always create a duplicate layer of the layer you want to apply the filter to, because you can always erase parts you don't want.



- 19 The promised land**
After looking at the image I realise I painted it literally too dark, and I need to pump up the highlights in certain areas. I use the level sliders under Image > Adjustments > Levels and my friend the Dodge tool to bring out the highlights. And so The Purifier is finished. But his reign of terror lives on... ●