

Workshop



powered by **ImagineFX** August 2007

Photoshop & Poser

MIX TECHNIQUES IN A CG ILLUSTRATION

Silvia Fusetti uses a combination of 2D and 3D software to quickly create high quality images

I'm going to explain to you my usual way of working on digital images such as this, Barbarian Warrior. In ten years of working with CG I've used many different software programs, and have had the chance to work out the advantages and disadvantages of each application. Like many of you, I often have to create illustrations in pretty tight timescales, so I've had to learn to employ a multitude of techniques in order to achieve the optimum result in the quickest time possible.

When planning an image, I try to think analytically of its separate parts and then determine which would be the best and quickest techniques to use. Once all the various elements have been thoroughly planned, I can then begin work on integrating them.

This method can be hazardous if we don't stick to a constant guideline that has to be set up from the beginning. This basis is really important because it provides an ever-present reminder of the fundamental characteristics of the image we're working on: direction of lighting, volumes, perspective and the position of

every single element. If we didn't follow this important reference during the implementation process we would be at risk of creating bad harmony between the various components of the design. We may well end up with high-quality

individual elements, but if the overall image looks ugly then we would've failed in our task.

A positive outcome depends very much on the balance of a design, so try not to get bogged down with attention to detail.

1 Seek out references

I envisage my Barbarian Warrior as a historical novel book cover. The design has to be expressive and eye-catching to attract the attention of potential readers. The client wants a strong, intense image; a close-up of a warrior with a penetrating expression – handsome but threatening, with eyes like ice.

When the idea has been clearly defined, but before beginning production, it's important to do some research. Browse the internet or peruse photographic books to boost your knowledge of the period your character lived in. It's also useful to look for references to help us with elements of the design that we may not have a clear mental image of – perhaps the detail of a scar or the length of a beard.



Artist PROFILE

Silvia Fusetti

COUNTRY: Italy

CLIENTS: Animo srl, Insert Coin

A freelance illustrator, Silvia Fusetti has spent three years

working for animation studio Animo. www.aivlis-home.com

DVD Files

The files you need are on your DVD in the folder Silvia Fusetti in the Workshop section **SOFTWARE:** Photoshop CS3 (demo). You can download a demo version of Poser 6 from <http://downloads.e-frontier.com>



2 Head modelling with Poser

We now have a clear idea of how our warrior is going to look. Judging from several reference examples, his face will be covered in part by the helm, hair and beard. This is where research can come in handy in the planning process of a design. By digging a little deeper, we discover what will have most relevance in the design and therefore we'll avoid wasting time on elements that won't be visible in the finished drawing.

With Poser it's quick and easy to obtain pretty good human figure renders. I wanted 3D to be just a trace for head proportions, expressions and volumes. By selecting the face we find a great number of additive shapes, manageable via sliders, that enable us to generate a wide variety of expressions.

In less than an hour we can obtain the render we need to create a layout.

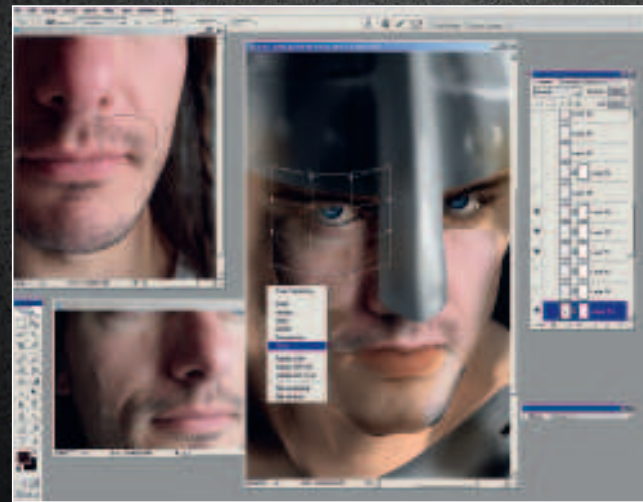
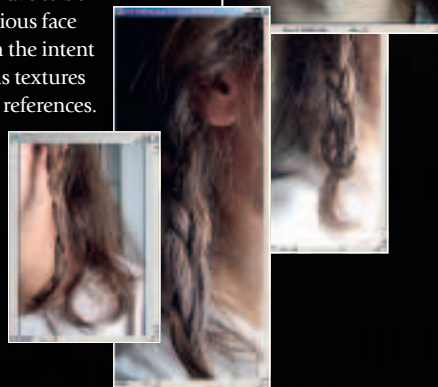
At this stage, as we take a rough look at lighting, using Poser is ideal. The layout we're going to create will be used as a vital lighting reference.

3 Proposal layouts

Usually during the planning stage I'd consider various proposal layouts to determine which one is able to better express the initial vision in respect to its more important aspects: the composition, expressivity and title paging, and so on. Details are not important yet because this is just like a pre-visualisation step.

4 Take photos of skin and hair

For this piece I really want a photorealistic result. Face textures have to be detailed so I take various face and hair photos with the intent of using them both as textures and as photographic references. While taking the photos I have to be careful to maintain a similar lighting to my 3D layout in order to avoid light-matching problems in the image retouching stage.

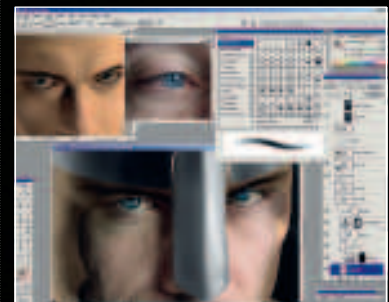


5 Start the skin base

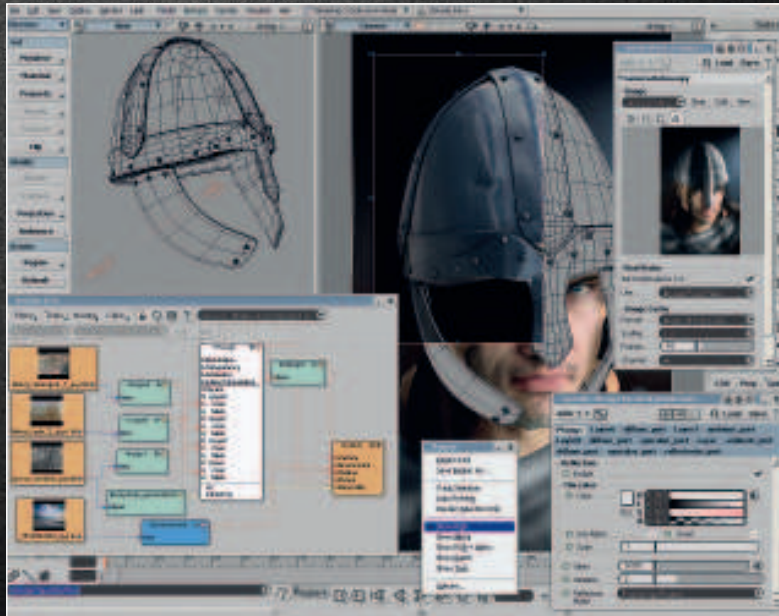
Let's identify the most useful image parts, trying them out by side by side. When they're chosen, begin to integrate the pieces between them by employing a technique similar to matte painting. At the end of this process we have a face with photorealistic skin. Usually, to adapt photo pieces to the 3D Poser base perspective, I use a handy tool named Warp. You can find it in Photoshop in Edit>Transform (CS2 and above). It's a deforming grid manageable by handles or, more directly, by modifying the shape of segments compounding the grid by selecting and dragging.

6 Painting eyes and skin

With the photographic base done, we can kick off the painting stage. I start with the eyes because this is the part I'm most worried about. They have to be a lot more realistic and expressive than those of the 3D Poser model. With much patience and care, I add reflections, shadows and blurriness until I'm satisfied. For this kind of work I mainly use the Brush, Eyedropper, Smudge, Blur, Burn and Dodge tools.



In depth Combine 2D and 3D



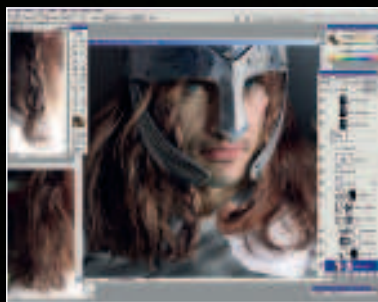
7 The helm with XSI

The helm is crucial, being the only real clue as to the historical era. I decide to construct it with Softimage|XSI because I'm confident I can get the correct perspective and integrate it better than with a 2D technique (but you can use any 3D app). After creating the polygon mesh model I must fix camera matching, using, as perspective reference, our wip illustration in Rotoscope mode. I then fix scene lights, environment reflections, textures, ambient occlusion (dirtmap) and Bumpmap generator.

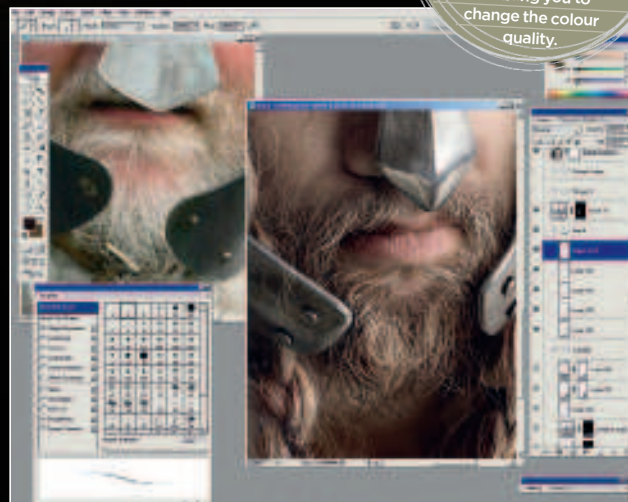
8 Working on the hair

With the hair we don't have a 3D base so let's select photo pieces to build a composition. When they're in position, proceed with colour balance to make the various parts look like a single image.

Now we can paint, using the Eye Picker tool to get colours from our composition, and using small-sized brushes. I use dark colours first and then lay lighter colours



on top in order to add volume to the hair. When the hair is painted, we'll end this stage by fixing general shadows and by lightening up certain darker zones.



9 Painting the beard

Unlike with the hair, I hadn't taken any photos to use as a base for the beard. Instead I just had a few low-resolution images found on the internet so I must make the best of those. I choose the photo I think offers the best reference and start to paint, literally hair-by-hair, copying hair direction from the reference photos and picking colours from the long head hair painted in the previous stage. Again, I use dark colours first before graduating on to lighter tones.

PRO SECRETS

Use a graphics tablet

During the painting stage it's important to use a good graphics tablet. With this you'll be able to work more quickly and comfortably. Using this tool you'll modulate hair thickness in a better way, making them seem more natural. I usually work with an A5 graphics tablet. It's not so big but I think the quality of this instrument is more important than its dimensions.

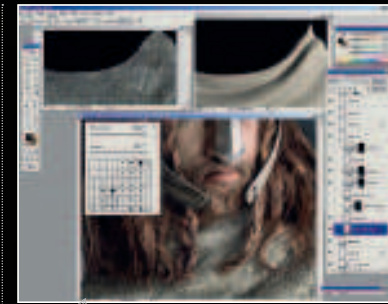
Shortcuts

Colour editing

(Photoshop)

Ctrl+B

Gives quick access to the Colour Balance tool panel, enabling you to change the colour quality.



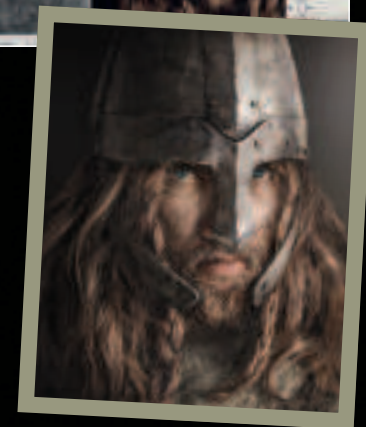
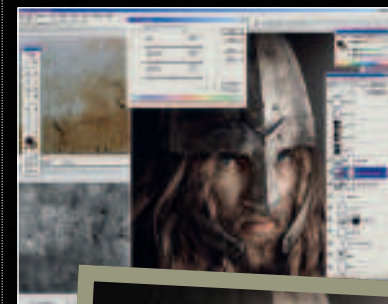
10 Get dressed

To create the fabric I build a NURBS surface mesh model in order to have textures realistically following the cloth's creases. Then I import the 3D render in Photoshop and add dirt, imperfections and shadows. The dirt effect is made by a photographic dirty-surface image positioned in an upper layer in Overlay mode.

11 Final touches

It's time to look at the whole picture to fix any slips, adjust the colour balance and also to add any last details and apply some filters. I add face and helm dirt in the same way I did for the cloth, accentuate the cheekbones, paint small imperfections on the metal and paint hairs covering parts of the helm.

Finally I apply a tan colour correction, the Grain filter and Unsharp Mask.



PRO SECRETS

Reuse

When you nail down a satisfying material, save it for use in future work. You can reapply it to new models, adjust the scene illumination and, in no time, you'll have a render of an object that'll need just a little bit of retouching in Photoshop to achieve a great look.