

Workshops

“ Apply a noise layer to your painting at the end of the creation process and you’ll achieve more natural colour values ”



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FANTASY ART TIPS

Artist PROFILE

Henning Ludvigsen

COUNTRY: Norway
CLIENTS: Fantasy Flight Games, Midway



Henning is a digital artist with basic traditional art education and

12 years' experience in digital art, design and illustration. He is art director of a computer game development company and works on private commissions and projects in his spare time.

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From skin tones and highlights to misty valleys and glow effects, **Henning Ludvigsen** shares his top 20 pieces of advice for creating great fantasy art every time.

1 FANTASY SKIN

When painting skin for a fantasy piece, monochromatic tones are a good start, but even after experimenting with all the levels of colours and different skin types, you can end up with a monochromatic effect. Skin is always darker than you think, so don't take highlights too far, and use redder colours where skin is warmer.

2 THREE THINGS TO AVOID

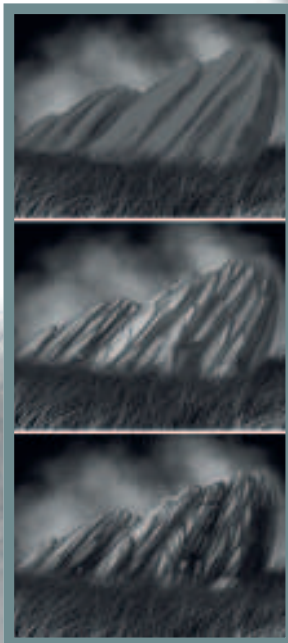
- A)** Unless you can hide it, avoid using filters. There's nothing less painterly than seeing a large surface covered in a custom-made Photoshop filter effect. Why not use the effect as a vague base instead and work it over from there?
- B)** Effects such as lens flares and software-generated fire and cloud won't look natural unless they're done by hand.
- C)** Avoid using the Smudge tool for the major parts of the painting process. Keep brush strokes clear, confident and bold.

3 LEARN TO LIMIT YOUR COLOUR PALETTE

When legendary artists such as Frank Frazetta choose their colours, they try to keep them all related. Even skin colours are mixed with colours from the surroundings. Limit your range of colours, and play more with narrower selections of the palette. That said, make sure to keep your chosen colours varied enough to not look monochromatic. You don't need all the colours in the world to make your palette lush and rich.

4 ROCKS

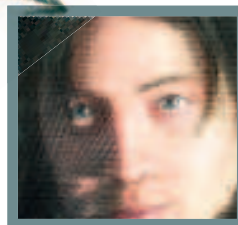
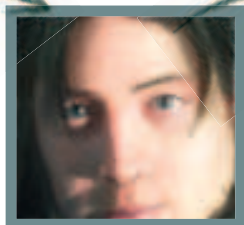
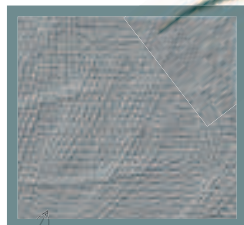
When painting rocks, keep the highlights duller than you think. Contrast is still important, but you can still achieve this effect with colours that are close to each other contrast-wise. Narrow down the range of values but try to keep the lit faces more or less within the same areas of the palette. The same goes for the shadowed areas. A hard-edged brush is the best tool for this. Stay true to your light source, and add veins and textures where it feels natural.





5 MOODY FANTASY SKY

Fantasy art tends to distort everyday elements. This applies to clouds too, but real references will help. Contrast is important, so be sure to have some dramatic shifts of values and colours, along with beautiful and maybe even unnatural shapes and formations.



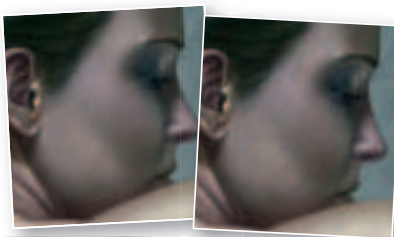
6 VISIBLE BRUSH STROKES

Get a traditionally painted effect by creating a greyscaled overlay texture that includes a vague canvas texture and brush strokes. Play around with some Palette Knife brushes and add dynamic criss-crossed brush strokes. Make sure the basic starting value for the background is close to the middle range: RGB = 128, 128, 128.

If you apply a light Emboss layer style to your brush strokes, you can get a vague 3D embossed look on the textured base. Set the Layer Blending mode to Overlay and adjust the Opacity slider until you're satisfied.

8 APPLY NOISE

Apply a noise layer to your painting at the end of the creation process to achieve more natural colour values. Make a new top layer, RGB= 128, 128, 128. Run Filter>Noise>Add Noise, set the slider at 400 per cent. Run Filter>Brush Strokes> Spatter; run the Blur filter a few times. Set Layer Blending mode to Overlay; Opacity at 3 to 10 per cent.

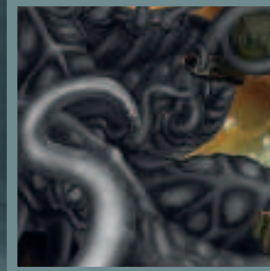
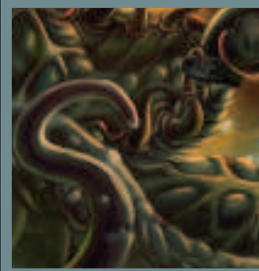


7 LAYOUT

Less is more when it comes to laying out fantasy art. Pick a simple idea and focus on this object in a bold and straightforward way. Heavy focus on symmetry can often be a good solution for a successful fantasy painting, as can making sure it balances well if you go for less symmetry and more elements.

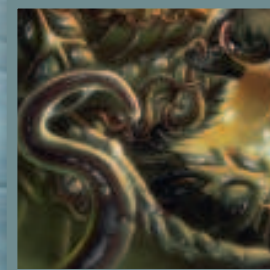
9 SLIMY TENTACLES

Fantasy art requires monsters, and often slimy, shiny, disgusting ones. To add slime, follow these steps:



1 Copy the areas you want to make slimy into a new layer. Then make this layer greyscale.

2 Smooth the layer with a soft brush. Parts pointing at you should be brighter than those pointing away.



3 Run the layer through Filter> Artistic>Plastic Wrap. Keep the details to a minimum.

4 Set Layer Blending mode to Pin Light. Use Dodge to edit highlights in this layer, and paint strings of slime.

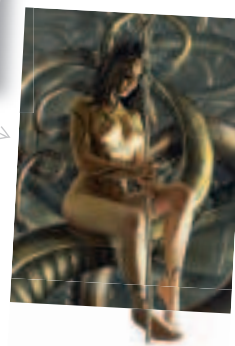
10 TEXTURED BRUSHES

Human imperfection is what gives art character. Custom brushes can help you emulate this imperfection. Download or make some textured brushes to give your pieces a bit of life.



11 MOUNTAINS

Use photos as a reference when painting mountains. A good tip is to limit your range of values. Make one value each for highlighted rock and snow, and the same for shadowed versions of the two. Keeping values limited and adding detailing with a hard-edged brush will make mountains look natural.



Artist insight Fantasy art tips

12 MANUAL GLOW

There are plenty of ways to apply automatic glow to objects in the different painting packages; from soft brushes to layer styles. To make your artwork appear as *painted* as possible, go for hard-edged brushes and paint it by hand instead. A glow doesn't have to be perfectly smooth, but it will still do its purpose and at the same time add more of your own personality to your piece.



13 FANTASY GLOW

The romantic and fantasy genres are where glow effects are used most. Glows can add the extra touch – or leave you in the 80s if over-used. Add a flattened copy of your piece to a new layer on top of the others. Run Filter>Gaussian Blur, and play with the Linear Dodge blending mode and Opacity slider on the Layers palette.

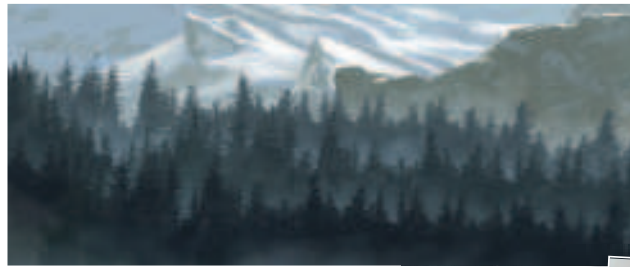
14 CANVAS PRINTS

Is there anything more traditional than a piece of art on canvas mounted in a wooden frame? Make your digital fantasy pieces come to life by printing them on real canvas and hanging them on the wall. The texture of the canvas makes your piece look and feel like a traditional painting, and it even smells similar.



15 REFLECTIVE METAL THE EASY WAY

To create a base for metallic effects, copy the metal area into a new layer and make it greyscale. Smooth the surfaces with a soft brush and apply dark lines for etched details (bright for extruded details). Run the Chrome filter, set Blending mode to Colour Dodge, and play with the Opacity.



16 MIST IN THE VALLEYS

Divide the background into layers depending on distance. Applying a soft mist at the bottom, between each valley, can create an eerie feeling and add a lot of depth.

17 FORM-FIT TEXTURES

With textured layers, it can look like overlay textures are projected onto objects. To avoid this, make the noise layer cover more than you need, and use Photoshop's Liquify tool. Use the Forward Warp tool, tick the Show Backdrop box, select the base object and set Mode to Behind, then adjust the Opacity so you can see through the texture layer. Warp-change the texture layer so it fits the object.



18 CHECK YOUR GREYSCALE VALUES

Fantasy art usually contains dramatic colours and contrast. A good piece of fantasy art should also work in greyscale, so check your greyscale values every now and then to get a handy overview of how your work is coming along.

A quick way of checking this is by keeping a layer on top of your layer-stack with 100 per cent white colour and Blending Mode set to Colour. You can then toggle between colour and greyscale mode.

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19 DISTRIBUTE YOUR DETAILS

Try to distribute detailing throughout the piece onto areas that are important. Remember that even rough brushstrokes can appear complex if accompanied with detailed areas.



20 LIMIT YOUR HIGHLIGHTS

An important overall tip for realistic results is to avoid extreme highlights, especially on fabric and skin folds. Overly strong highlights on skin may cause an artificial appearance and give a comic book style to the character. Keep your greyscale base values under control.

