THE 10 MOST COMMON MISTAKES IN DIGITAL PAINTING AND THEIR SOLUTIONS

EBOOK EDITION

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INTRODUCTION
(AND OTHER STUFF YOU'LL PROBABLY SKIP)

Better your observation, better your art.

The ability to identify problem areas and correct them is critical to an artist's skill and improvement. If you can't see the problems that are holding your work back, your progress will be long and difficult. It is this booklet's aim to aid you in refining your critical eye and save you from wasting hours and effort. Make identifying these common mistakes second nature, and you'll be miles ahead of the masses.

WHERE IT BEGAN

The inspiration for this material came while surfing art sites and forums where I was struck by the commonality of certain mistakes. Despite the subject matter or genre, the same problems arose time and again. Upon observing this, I began compiling a list of the most common mistakes. While the list was initially much longer than ten points, I compared my list to numerous sites, forums, and galleries, recording which issues arose the most. What you have here are the top ten. But what good is identifying a mistake if you don't know what to do about it? That's why every common error is given with both visual examples and solutions. The last section brings it all together by critiquing and correcting examples of all ten points.

PROGRAMS AND REALISM

This book is written to those interested in digital painting using programs such as Adobe Photoshop or Corel Painter. All program options and settings the author mentions refer to Photoshop. The principles, however, are equally applicable to all programs. The problems and recommended solutions are given on the assumption that the artist's work aims to be realistic in nature. Highly stylized or surreal images are held to a different and more abstract code of correctness.

THE EXAMPLES

Following the description of each of the mistakes are examples. While other mistakes may exist in the example images, primarily those concerned with the current issue will be addressed until the book's final section, where images will be evaluated on all 10 points.

It takes a lot of guts to be willing to let your artwork be publicly critiqued in any way, so I offer a big thanks and kudos to all the artists who did by volunteering their images as examples. The "corrected" versions of the examples were edited by me, the author, not the original artist. Credit to the original artists is listed at the bottom of their respective pages.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to all the contributing artists for giving permission to use their work, Karen Sargent whose proofreading skills make it look as though I did well in English, Mom who has always inspired and believed in me, and the countless other artists who paved the way before me.
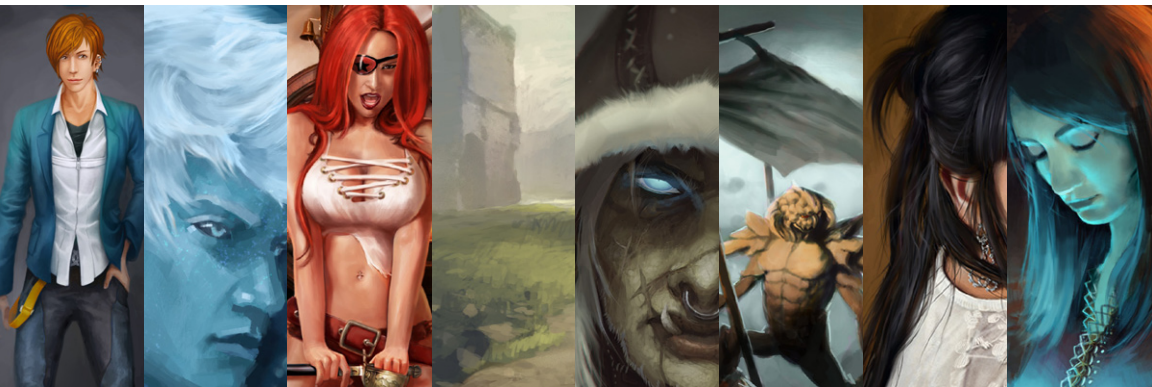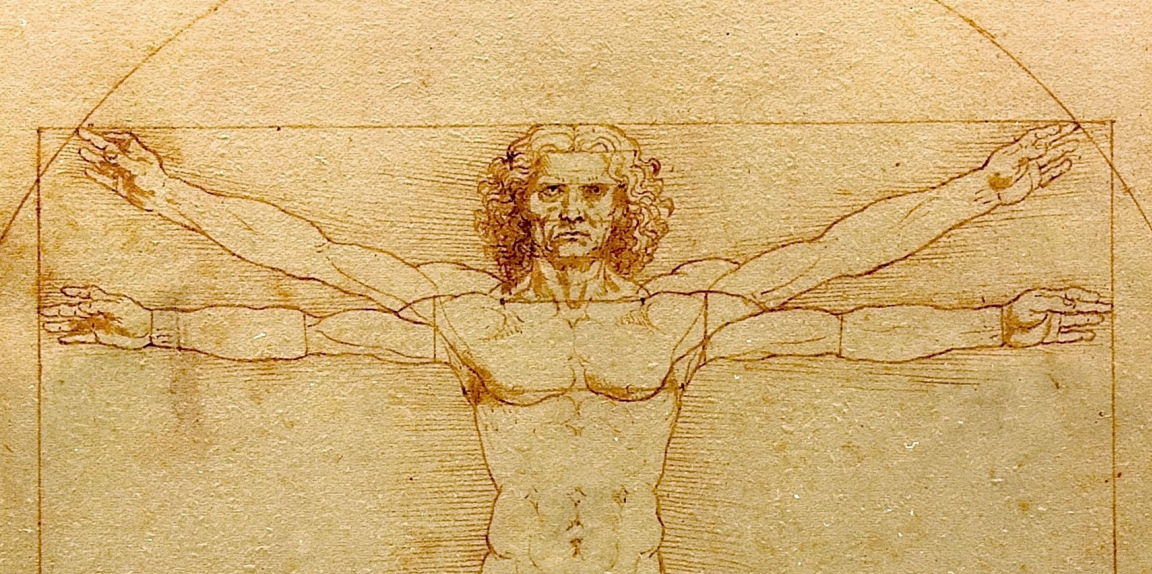
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MISTAKE 1:
INACCURATE DRAWING

The simple fun of drawing—it's what inspires most artists to start. Drawing is the simplest form of creation, a sublime mix of intangible idea and definable result. With a few strokes of the pencil we can create characters and worlds beyond our own or touch hearts with portraits of loved ones. Yet when strokes are misjudged and proportions skewed, the world in the images feels wrong and loses credibility.

Indeed, the most common mistake found is that of simple *inaccuracy* in the drawing. Let the "drawing" be understood as the relational distances between shapes, not just the pencil or line art. *Inaccuracy*, then, would be defined as "a departure from the standard proportions or shape of the depicted form as rendered in a realistic fashion." Human proportions, standard object proportion, foreshort-ening, and perspective would all be included. While there is certainly allowance for style, too often it is used as a crutch to cover up *inaccuracy*.

This mistake is most often seen in the rendering of anatomy in the form of disproportions, which result from a failure to (1) study the human form, (2) seek the aid of reference images, or (3) properly observe deviations from the reference subject matter. The problem is exacerbated by the tendency of the artist to skimp time on the initial block-in and basic posing, choosing to jump instead to final lines, at which point inaccuracy is built upon inaccuracy. While many artists are capable of effectively skipping to the exterior final lines without building from a skeletal pose block-in, such ability requires much practice and is not recommended for those new to art.

IDENTIFYING

While *inaccuracy* is the most common mistake, it can also be one of the most difficult to spot in your own work, which gives rise to the problem's commonality. Fortunately, there is a simple technique that helps you spot this problem that exists in your blind spot. By flipping the image horizontally (mirror-imaging) you can effectively cause the brain to reanalyze the image and make hidden discrepancies obvious. This is due to the mind's tendency to stop questioning what it sees after it's already been analyzed. As you sketch, you base every stroke on the previous stroke for positioning, but if your eye failed to notice a mistake on one stroke, then every stroke thereafter will also be "off" since it's being used as a point of reference. Flipping the image cleans the mind's slate and helps you observe the image anew.

Posing and proportions can shift in the course of adding and redrawing elements, in which case overlaying a sketch of the original skeletal pose can show where the figure may have become "off." Disproportions also occur when the artist fails to consider the three-dimensional nature of the subject, which calls for foreshortening and proper contours. While *inaccurate drawing* is most prevalent in anatomy, it does occur in every subject when proper three-dimensionality has not been considered.

MIRRORING

I noticed nothing blatantly wrong with the sketch at this stage.
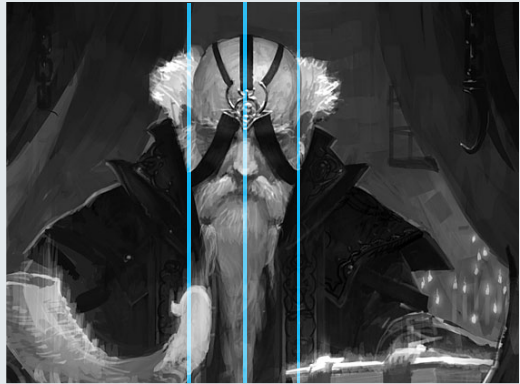
Flipping the scene horizontally, however, I immediately became aware of the right-angled lean to his head and beard (left on image above). This was due to right-handed drawing in which the wrist naturally pulls right as it strokes downward. The issue was easily corrected for the final below.

CORRECTING

As they say, if all else fails, read the instructions. Or in this case, find reference. *Inaccuracy* often occurs when the artist is unfamiliar with the proper dimensions of the subject; therefore, good reference is indispensable to helping get the image back on track. I am not proposing that one should be literal to the reference, copying it verbatim, but use it as a starting point or mirror to aid in identifying flaws.

There are many fantastic art books pertaining to anatomy to aid you, from George Bridgman's Complete Guide to Drawing from Life to Sarah Simblet's Anatomy for the Artist. The Internet, of course, can also be a valuable tool in locating useful material, though quality and copyright issues are often questionable.

Self-referencing your image is a great way to find and correct problems. This involves selecting an easily measurable element in the image (such as the length of the head) and comparing it to the size of the other elements. The head in this case becomes your unit of measurement to which everything else is compared. This is useful when you know what the standard measurements of the body are; for example, the figure should be seven head lengths tall and the narrow of the waist a horizontal head length.

Don't be too afraid or too proud to start over if that's what is required. Sometimes only by building up from a good framework can problems be truly corrected. If you drew it once, you should be able to draw it again. If it was just a fluke, you really should do it over anyway. You've heard it all your life: practice makes perfect. Perfection sounds a bit lofty, but practice certainly will make you better. The more you draw, the better your intuition will become, and the more you'll notice pitfalls along the way.

Approach your work honestly. Sure, it's easy to be emotionally invested in your work; we all do that, but it can make it harder if you have to change something. If you don't come to it openly and honestly, you'll willingly fool yourself as to what the real problems are. Everyone makes mistakes—everyone. You see that you've gone off somewhere; good. That's one problem you probably wouldn't have been keen enough to notice last year.

AESTHETIC INACCURACIES

Sometimes the topic of inaccuracies in the drawing bleeds over to the issue of aesthetic inaccuracies, and it is at this point that the definition of mistake gets blurry. While the picture's subject may be rendered correctly and the proportions may be accurate, the scene depicted may be so implausible or illogical that it looks wrong.

If much of digital art deals with fantasy subjects, how can I define something as being implausible? Imagine this situation: a ten-foot Minotaur hammers down his door-sized battle-axe, which is blocked by the lean heroine, holding her sword over her head. Okay, I'll buy the idea that Minotaurs exist in this fantasy world, but the sheer idea that a woman (or man) could stop that much weight and force over her head is ridiculous. Even if she

had super-human strength, a sword would break under such stress. But it's a magic, unbreakable sword, you say. Yeah, maybe. Nonetheless, it brings us back to what I said about aesthetic inaccuracies blurring the issue of mistakes. In the end, such a situation offends one's sense of reason and dis-credits the overall believability of the image. It is up to the artist to decide whether or not the visual awesome-ness of the mistake outweighs the fact that its unbelievability undermines the subject. (See example on the topic on page 12.)

IDENTIFYING

To help pinpoint the issues, photographic reference was consulted, as well as anatomy drawings by Andrew Loomis. The leg's thickness, arm length, crotch placement, and head size were identified as the main trouble spots.

The crotch being high made the thigh and knee need to be placed high as well to fill the extra vertical. The arm length, being based on the crotch and leg, was short since they were both high. This is a great example of what I mentioned earlier about each stroke being based on the previous ones for accuracy.

CORRECTING

The legs, which were too bowed and thin, were brought in slightly and thickened according to musculature. Remember that the convex curves of the muscle on the outside of the leg do not align with those on the inside. The crotch was lowered, allowing the knees to lower to their proper place and the arm to extend. The head, which was slightly small, was enlarged. As a side note, the pants were conveyed as being quite tight, and yet large folds were shown, which is contradictory. Therefore, the folds have been diminished in the final.
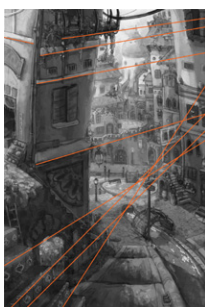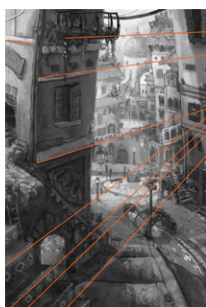
IDENTIFYING

Perspective mistakes are often subtle, as seen above. It is beyond the scope of this book to explain perspective except to remind artists to


INITIAL PERSPECTIVE ALIGNMENTS

EDITED PERSPECTIVE ALIGNMENTS

CORRECTING

The angles were adjusted towards the top of the building so that eye level is defined as being just above the porch. The steps

always double-check that all parallels align to the same vanishing point. In this case, the angles show that we are still looking down at the highest point of the closest building when it should be at least even with eye level. While the steps don't share the same vanishing point, they do need to align with each other.

were skewed until they matched properly with each other and the defined eye level. The changes overall are minor, but if you take the time to make those changes, it will add up in the long run.
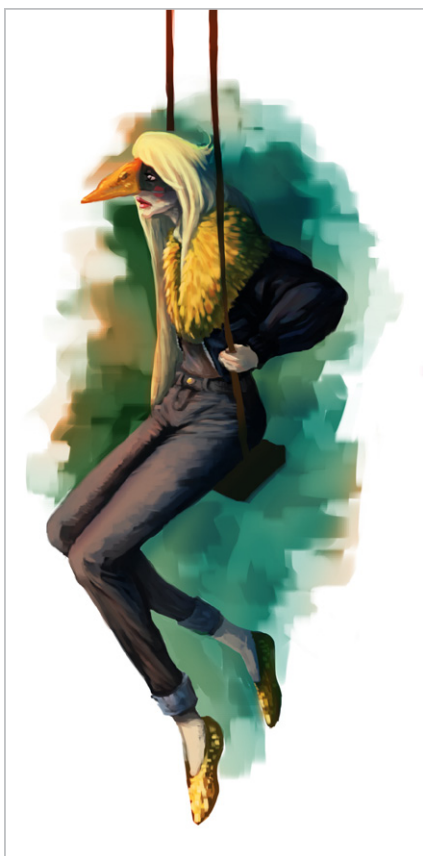
IDENTIFYING

While the character is wearing a bird-themed mask, nothing else indicates that she is inhuman. Thus she would be held to standard human proportions, lest the drawing be perceived as inaccurate. The length of the thigh should be approximately 1.5 head lengths from crotch to top of knee; it currently falls near 2.5. This is in part due to the head itself being too small, which skews the measurement.
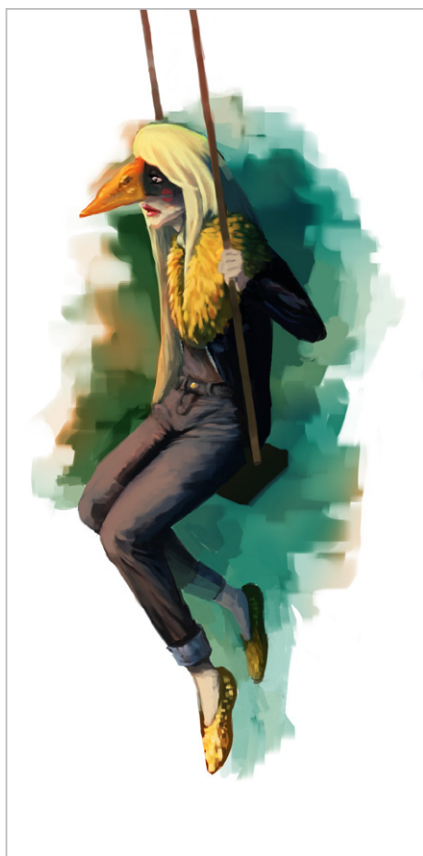
CORRECTING

The legs have been shortened, both from the hip to the knee and from knee to heel. The back leg was shortened even more since its knee starts further visually higher. The head size was increased to match the rest of the body. As an aesthetic change, the hand was moved to grip the rope farther up, which is a more natural position.

"BEAK" BY ANNA CORRALES, 0-BANANA-0.DEVIANTART.COM

IDENTIFYING

While the piece shows solid character design and execution, *aesthetic inaccuracy* troubles the scene in the form of the scythe. It may look cool to hold a knife or sword backwards, but in this case the scythe's blade is so large that it is implausible that he would or could hold it backwards and upwards.

CORRECTING

All that need be done is reverse the ends and put the blade in front. Now it is believable—his hand rests near enough the scythe's center of gravity to comfortably carry the weapon. Was the piece "wrong" to begin with? No. Aesthetic corrections are often the difference between good and better, not wrong and right. Additional small changes include reducing the contrast on the sky background so the character stands out better, and thickening the legs and wrists.

MISTAKE 2:
INCONSISTENT LIGHTING

Proper use of lighting can be a powerful asset to an artist. While the drawing tells you what you see, lighting directs how you feel about it. It makes a scene wondrous, suspenseful, hopeful, powerful, or any of a thousand other feelings. Lighting needs little support, and it requires no color and minimal details to be equally as effective. It is no surprise, then, that when it is mishandled, the image can suffer greatly, a problem equally as common as *inaccurate drawing*.

Inconsistent lighting is defined as "an inconsistency between the relationship of the depicted or suggested light source(s) and the object(s) lit by it." Small amounts of inconsistency in this area are easily tolerated under artistic license and style. However, gross discrepancies fragment an image and signal the conscious mind that some-

thing is wrong. This problem primarily arises because the artist fails to take time to consider the nature of the light in the image or because he simply does not understand the nature of light behavior.

IDENTIFYING

Lighting mistakes may manifest themselves in three ways: the direction, the color, or the intensity of light.

Directional mistakes show objects as being lit where no direct light could reach or without light in an area that should be receiving direct light. It is common to see a beginning artist shade each element (or even parts of an element) independently from the others. This occurs when the artist doesn't take time initially to define a light-source direction or becomes so focused on the details that he doesn't

consider how they relate to the larger lighting scheme. When examining this issue in your own work, first define the location of the light source(s). Each element should then be evaluated with the light direction in mind as to whether it should or shouldn't be lit. This is not always simple. Issues of foreshortening, odd-shaped forms, and cast shadows can cause problems, but a solid understanding of how the three basic forms (sphere, cylinder, and cube) are shaded can resolve most of them. Even imperfect reference can be extremely helpful in defining light behavior.

Color mistakes show objects being lit without regard to the hue of the light source influencing their color. For example, a white ball being lit by a red light would be tinted reddish and could no longer remain neutral gray. All light is made of specific wavelengths of color, and it is when those wavelengths bounce off an object that we identify the color of the object. An object's color, therefore, is completely determined by the wavelengths available in the source light. It would be impossible to identify a blue ball as blue if it were lit solely by a strong red light because the source contains no blue wavelengths to reflect. The ball would appear grayish. Take a moment to determine the color of your light source. This color should be tinting all the elements it shines on. If not, there is an inconsistency.

Intensity mistakes occur when a weak light source is shown to give off a bright light or vice versa. For example, the cast shadow of a man lit by candlelight should be soft rather than harsh; a candle could not light a scene like a spotlight. Likewise, a campfire is not capable of lighting everything with bright highlights. Determine the power/intensity of your light sources. Are the weak sources lighting too brightly and too far? Are the powerful ones not lighting enough?

CORRECTING

The surest way to correct a problem with *inconsistent lighting* direction is to determine your light source and direction when beginning the piece. However, if you have identified the problem afterwards, you have several choices. Once you determine where the inconsistencies exist, you can choose to either shift the shadows to match the light source, move the light source to match the shadows, or create a new light source, which may help match the current shadows and explain the inconsistencies. Choosing to shift the shadows allows everything to remain in the same place in the layout but can be a time-intensive process. If the majority of the shadows are consistent with each other but not the light source, then moving the light may be the best option. This choice may save you time, but it requires you to change the initial layout and may cause compositional problems greater than those of the lighting problems. While adding a new light source to explain the problems can be an option, it usually is a poor one since it entails applying its effects to all objects, which then causes yet more shadows to be analyzed.

The quickest (but rather crude) way to correct mistakes in lighting colors is

to use a Photo Filter of a close color to that of the source light. This will tint everything to the light source hue and tone down any complementary colors that shouldn't exist. The Photo Filter will need to be used at 25–40% to really start to see change in the color scheme. While Photo Filter can be run by going to Image>Adjustments>Photo Filter, it is recommended you use an Adjustment Layer on the Layers menu because it will give you the ability to turn the effect on and off while adjusting the parameters.

Mistakes in lighting intensity are often much simpler to correct than directional mistakes. You may choose to alter the light's strength to match the subject's or match the subject's to the light. The context will usually determine which is best. Remember when correcting problems with lighting intensity that changes need to affect the value, contrast, and edges of the shadows. Weak light sources are incapable of creating many highlights, while strong sources will push even mid-tones into lights. Weak lights produce low-contrast shadows and soft edges, and strong lights produce a high contrast between lights and hard-edged shadows.

IDENTIFYING

The artist has done a good job of establishing a definitive under-lit lighting situation but discrepancies hold the image back from being cohesive. To identify directional lighting flaws, forget the details and imagine the subject as a simplified statue made entirely of planes (see right). Remember that the easiest forms to shade are the simplest ones, so simplifying a complex subject in your mind can aid in resolving lighting issues.

CORRECTING

The primary areas addressed were the top of the nose, brow, mouth region, hair, and left forearm. One can see the dramatic difference consistent lighting can have on an image since no changes were made to the anatomy, proportions, or composition.

"RACHEL YATES" BY ELIN DALSTÅL, W176.DEVIANTART.COM

IDENTIFYING

Where the first example showed inconsistencies in light direction, this image has no defined light source or direction. Shadows have become haphazard, and they struggle to depict form while following no real logic. The resulting image in turn lacks depth, believability, and mood.


CORRECTING

The first issue tackled was to define a lighting direction, which I chose to be from the upper left. This allowed for minimal required change to the overall image while creating a shadow pattern that easily conveyed the forms of the face. The hair and eyes were keyed to the bluish light and minor anatomy changes were made to the left eye, eyebrow, and mouth. Again, reference was consulted to define an authentic shadow pattern for the light direction.
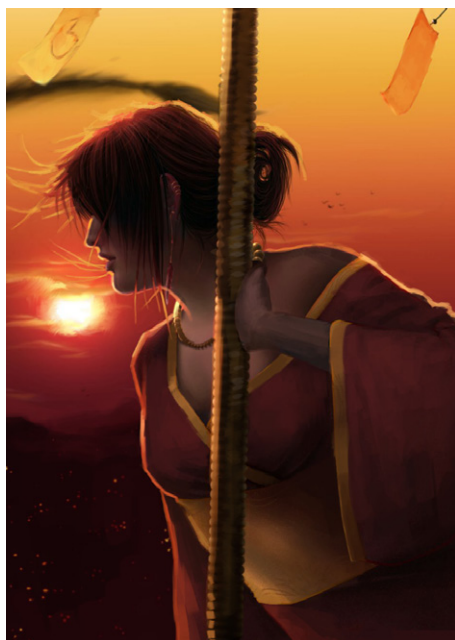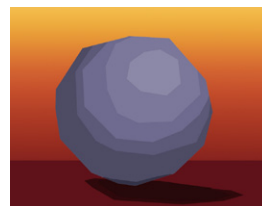
IDENTIFYING

The problem in the above original is a subtle one. The color of the skin tone is too cool given the warmth of the direct and indirect light. The skin is in shadow and therefore would be "cooler," but "cooler" is often simply less saturated and doesn't always require the use of blue tones. This is a comparative difference, not a palette one.

An exaggerated example of inconsistency between the subject color tone and that of the light source.

CORRECTING

The skin was warmed using Photo Filter > Warming Filter (85) with a mask to only affect the skin and pole areas. To add authenticity and visual interest, rim light was added along the arms, shoulders, and head. Remember, thin strands of backlit hair (and backlit leaves) behave like stained glass by glowing brilliantly, so some of the wisps were brightened. To better see the character, a small amount of fill light was added to the top of the chest area and arm.

"RED DUSK" BY NIKKI WYNNE, NIXITY.DEVIANTART.COM

MISTAKE 3:
FRAGMENTED VALUES

Values allow us to create shadows and realistically depict a scene. They help tell distance, mood, and light. While colors are tasty desserts, values are the meat and potatoes of a picture. They ground the image and direct the eye. However, when values become fragmented with lights in the darks and darks in the lights, it leads to a disjointed and weaker overall piece.

The problem arises whenever blacks are overused in high-key areas or whites are overused in low-key areas. Those areas are defined by the piece's overall value scheme, which divides the image into simple, large masses of values. Each area has a certain tolerance range for values: mid-tones should be the deepest dark in high-key areas while they should be the brightest light in low-key areas. Just as certain colors should not be possible under certain lighting conditions, some values shouldn't be allowed in certain lighting conditions. *Fragmented values* come about when values exceed the tolerance range, thereby breaking up the value scheme and causing visual clutter.

The term "values" when used in reference to art denotes how light or dark a tone is. The hue or chroma of the color has no bearing. A pencil drawing, therefore, is made of nothing but values.

This problem is often accompanied by inaccurate lighting and stems from a lack of consideration for the overall presentation, while the drawing and details receive the majority of the attention. The eye is naturally drawn to points of high contrast, so a few such out-of-place lights can aid in leading the eye around the image. However, when they are overused, the effectiveness is lost.

IDENTIFYING

Fragmented values can be divided into two similar yet separate categories: *fragmented value scheme* and *fragmented lighting values*. *Fragmented value scheme* is when an image has no clear overall value scheme, but instead, dark and light areas mesh haphazardly together. A piece with a clear scheme makes the image visually "read" better and does a good job of conveying depth and subject matter. Pieces with a fragmented value scheme feel flat, busy, and don't hold up well when viewed in smaller sizes.

Fragmented lighting values, on the other hand, affect things on a smaller, per-object basis, with the most common occurrence being seen in reflected lights, where they do the most damage. When a rounded form is allowed to graduate from light to shadow, and the reflected light equals the brightness of the light

VALUE SCHEME

A value scheme is a large, simple light and dark pattern in an image. Details and colors are not a factor. Let's use a simple Photoshop procedure to look at an example.
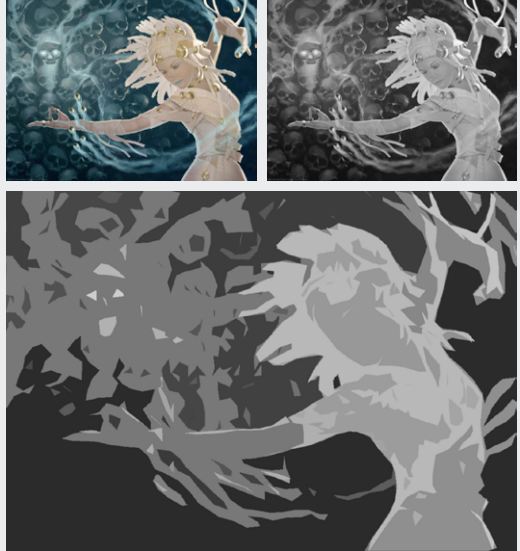
First we have the original colored image, followed by a monochrome version. If an image continues to visually "read" well in black and white, it is a good sign that the value scheme is strong. Then we have a simplified version where we can now see the large simple masses of the image. Note how the values were carefully controlled to keep the value scheme simple and recognizable.

To copy the procedure used to create the value scheme version: Image > Adjust > Desaturate; Filter > Artistic > Cutout: Number of Levels set at 4–5, Edge Simplicity set at 6–8, Edge Fidelity set at 1.

side, it breaks down the lighting scheme and creates a sliver of high contrast that will be an unintended eye magnet. Bright reflected lights, not to be confused with a bright rim light, are easy to spot and are a hallmark mistake of critique boards and new painters.

Another place you often see this problem

is with metal. Metal, especially that with a shiny finish, can be downright tricky. With its mirror-like quality, it is easy to over-play the intensity of the reflected lights in the shadow side, forget-ting that despite its surface qual-ity, it, too, is a three-dimensional form with its own innate shadow.

Clothing folds are another common subject plagued with *fragmented values*. Yet unlike re-flected lights where light occurs in a shadow area, we see deep, sharp shadows in bright areas. This mistake is seen with each fold receiving a white highlight edge and a black shadow.

Related to over-bright reflect-ed lights, also look for bright (or white) highlights that reach too far around an object into the shadow side. Lights need to pro-gressively diminish in brightness as they round away from the light source side. Look at each value region to find any value that is there without good reason.

CORRECTING

Since *fragmented value scheme* affects things on a large scale, we must forget temporarily about details and look at the overall image. Consider how you would paint the image if you had only three values: darks, mid-tones, and lights. Defining each ma-jor object/area as one of these groups will simplify the image and direct you to what changes need to be made. For instance,


REFLECTED LIGHT
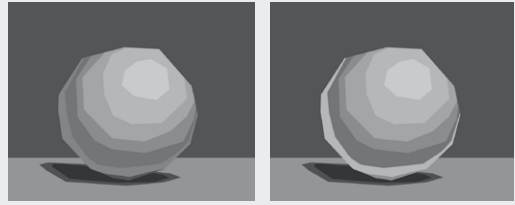
The left image shows a proper reflected light from the surface upon the ball. *Fragmented lighting value* occurs in the right image where the reflected light (or secondary light) is shown nearly the same value as the primary light. While the left image is more cohesive, the right image is fragmented with the eye immediately being drawn to the sharp light area.

all lights should be played down in any area defined as a dark, while all darks should be played down in lights, and both subdued in mid-tones. It is amazing what that alone can do for a piece suffering from *fragmented values*. You will, of course, want to go back over and adjust any specific instances where things need to be different, but as a rule, simpler is better.

The concept of *fragmented lighting values* is best approached by understanding that not all materials easily reflect white highlights or produce black shadows. Skin, chrome, wool, and stone all have very different sur-face qualities and reflect light differently. To give everything a white highlight devalues its impact the same way a vibrant yellow loses its individual punch in a Hawaiian shirt that places it next to many other equally vibrant colors. Less is more.
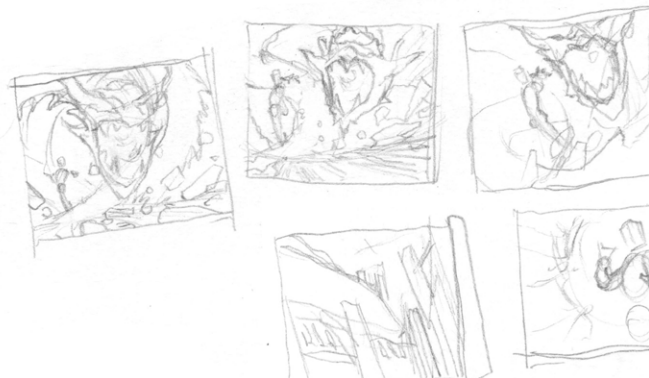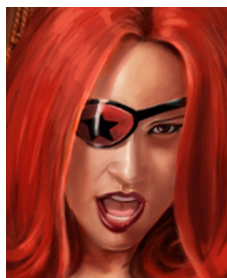
IDENTIFYING

The value scheme is strong with clear light and dark areas, but white highlights abound from the secondary lights (along the outside of the arm on the right), which goes against those defined value ranges. The white highlights also serve to detrimentally distract the eyes and lead to a flatter overall feel.

CORRECTING

All secondary lights were made less intense than the front primary light, and this correction strengthens the value scheme. Shadow patterns were also adjusted to better convey the forms, such as adding cast shadows from the hair onto the face and from the teeth onto the tongue. For visual simplicity, the highlights were toned down on the leathers and the top of the boots curved downwards, since they are below our eye line.

"RED PIRATE" BY PIERLUIGI ABBONDANZA, ABBOART.COM

IDENTIFYING   Nearly every object in every part of the image has white high-lights and black shadows. This fragments the image and gives the eye no path to follow or soft place to rest.

CORRECTING   The high contrasts have been played down on a per-area basis, allowing more mid-tones, and therefore more color, to enter the picture. Now there are clear light, medium, and dark areas for the eye to travel through or rest at.

"ISOLATED CAVE" BY MARK SANFORD, MULTIIMAGE.DEVIANTART.COM

MISTAKE 4:
AIRBRUSHED

Painting programs such as Photoshop and Painter are amazing toolboxes of art. Full to the brim with tools, menus, filters, and settings, they offer more than most people will ever need. Even those new to digital painting will immediately have fun with the soft-edged brushes, aka airbrush. Here is a tool unlike the hard-edged pencil, pen, and charcoal we're used to. What was once limited only to those wielding a spray can is now available at our fingertips. Some people, however, never choose anything else.

What results are pictures that make us refocus our eyes and check that our glasses are on. They are blurry and hazy with every edge as sponge-cake soft as the others. They're reminiscent of a photographer on a soft-focus binge. Our eyes become lost in the sea of softness with no hard edges to rest on or direct us to the focal points. Accuracy is fudged as all edges become undefined suggestions rather than distinct forms.

Master Diameter | 25 px
Hardness: | 0%

45
100
200
300
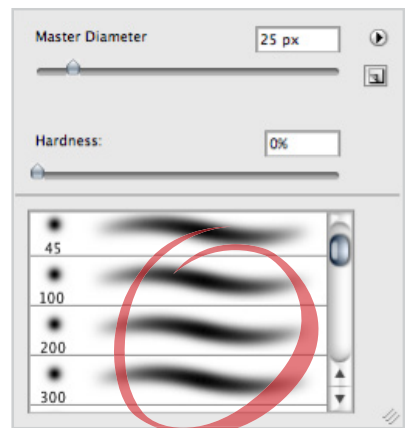
IDENTIFYING

The problem ranges from entire images being painted with the airbrush to a slight over-dependence on it. Due to a reason unknown to me, those who are likely to stick with the airbrush are also likely not to change the size of the brush very often throughout the painting. So while soft edges are the key visual identifier, uniform stroke size commonly accompanies them.

Another mark of this issue is the tendency to transparently airbrush whole areas that the artist feels should be lighter—haziness. The layering of a high value over low-value areas (and complementary colors) causes tones to be "muddied." Dull or "muddy" colors occur when very light values are painted directly over very dark values, especially if they are of complementary color.

It would be better to raise the ambient value of an area by adjusting it with an adjustment option such as Levels, Curves, or Hue/Saturation, or manually repainting all elements in slightly brighter tones. If you are attempting to haze an area, use a much more saturated version of the light tone than you normally would, or use a Layer Blending Mode such as Hard Light, which will amplify the chroma.

CORRECTING

Unlike some of the other problems, which are fairly quickly corrected, this one will likely be time consuming.

The first step is to switch to a brush with a harder edge. The second group of default Photoshop brushes that are round, hard-edged, and opacity sensitive are fine for the job, though I personally am fond of a rectangle brush, which gives great sharp edges. With the exception of subjects with naturally soft edges (clouds, smoke, etc.) all edges will need to be repainted more crisply. It is better to err on the side of sharpness than haziness.

For areas that have received a transparent layering of lightening, more chroma/vibrancy will need to be added back in to compensate for the loss. It may be possible to do this with Image>Adjustments>Vibrancy or Image>Adjustments>Hue/Saturation. Otherwise, repaint the area with appropriate tones, which will likely yield better results anyway. If you learn how to achieve soft and lost edges using the pressure sensitivity of harder-edged brushes, then you will find that even though the airbrush is available, you will feel the need to use it less often. To be clear, the airbrush can be an extremely useful tool, and it is exactly what you want in some cases, but it is not one-tool-does-all. The same way a hammer is perfect for nailing, you'd never want to paint your house with it. Use it where it's appropriate and leave it alone otherwise. You can paint fog, smoke, and haze without it being "fuzzy" or "hazy." Consider creating breaks in the haze so there are sharper areas for the eyes to rest on.
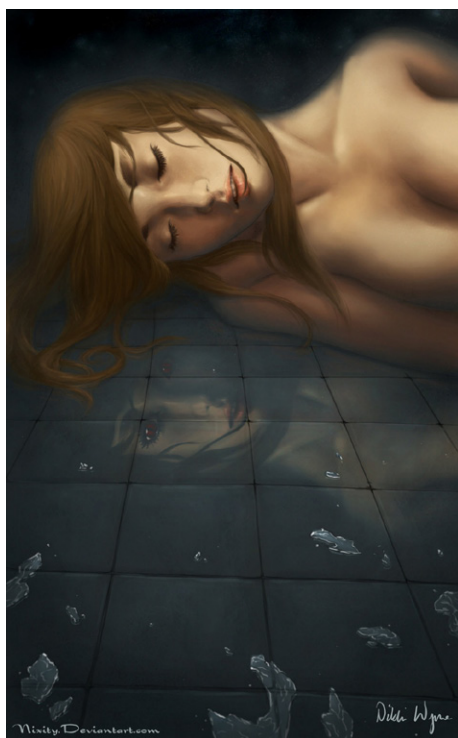
IDENTIFYING

The image above suffers from a minor version of *airbrushed* which could be called haloing. This usually occurs when the artist is unsure of how to handle a specific edge and decides to simply fuzz the edges together without regard to staying consistent to the style or lighting. This is seen on the top edge of the figure and head against the background. It looks as if the dark bluish background has bled into the warm skin tones and hair. A better solution should be possible.
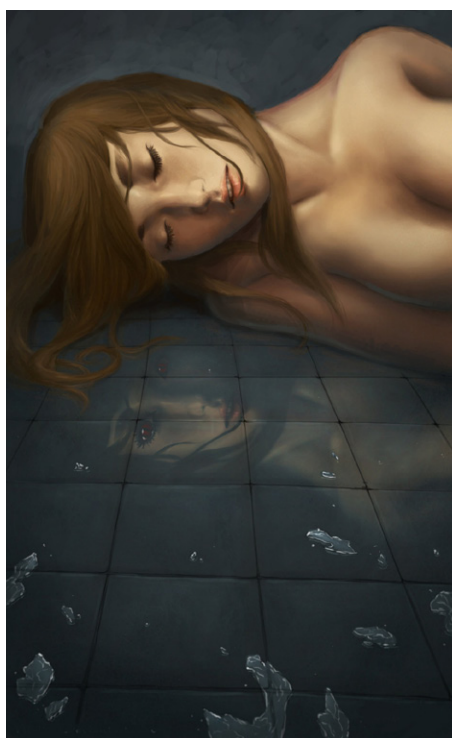
CORRECTING

The image above shows one possible solution to the problem. Since part of the issue was that the hair and the background were almost the same value, the solution needed to be a wider value difference. This was done by letting the hair get darker along the edge and lightening the background behind the head. Previously, the background color merging with the skin made the skin "dirty" and gray, but repainting the edge in warm tones helps keep the skin more fleshy and convey a cleaner edge.

IDENTIFYING

This is a much more extreme case of air-brushing, but don't let a situation like this scare you. In fact, a hazy start to a piece can be great to get the creative juices flowing. The mind loves try-ing to find forms and shapes in chaos, so use it as a chance to let your subject reveal itself through the haziness. The only other major concern is that of the split color scheme with the bluish top half and orangish lower half.

CORRECTING

If you're working into a hazy scene to define a subject, do it right by using hard-edged brushes. If you're go-ing to say something, say it. In this case I used the Lasso Tool to pick out the shapes of rocks I saw, starting in the background and moving forward. The Lasso gave me very crisp edges to work with. A decision had to be made about whether the scene would follow the bluish color scheme shown on the top half or the warmer tones at the bottom. While either was viable, I chose the warmer but decided to keep as much cool in the shadows as I could. Reworking a hazy scene such as this can take a while because almost every edge has to be re-painted, but it can also be a fun exploration and, in the end, rewarding.

MISTAKE 5:
OVEREMPHASIZED EDGES

Edges are funny things since they are, literally speaking, nothing. They are the perceptual tangent of two objects or planes that tells the mind, "This is this and that is that." They have no form, color, or value in themselves but exist only as a delineated marker in the mind. It is when they are not treated as such and they are given color and value that things can begin to go wrong. This is often seen in rendering *overemphasized edges* that border on outlining. That would be fine if you were drawing cartoons because they are representational that way, but in realism art and the real world, there are no black lines outlining objects.

This mistake is common, and it is not surprising when one considers the progressive understanding of artists and their ability. The tendency to slightly outline edges is a mental holdover from our childhood understanding. The young brain learns at a phenomenal rate, which it does by categorizing things, not as things actually look, but the idea of them. Ask a child to draw a face and he'll draw a circle-ish shape with two dots for eyes and a

Waterhouse's rendering of the edges above is masterful. The hairline could have been a harsh edge between the dark hair and fair skin, but it is kept indistinct so as not to draw the eye or make the hair appear hard. Nothing nearing an outline is used to define any of the features. Even the eyelashes are rendered much warmer and slightly lighter than the pupil to soften the overall eye shape.

curve for the mouth. That is a representation of how the mind defines the face—map-like. This understanding or mental paradigm is reinforced by giving children pencils and markers to draw with. Those tools naturally create lines, not shades, which gives rise to the habit of rendering everything through outlines. It is only when the individual is older that it begins to dawn on him that such lines don't really exist in nature, that they are a figment of the mind. But that old habit and mental paradigm can be hard to shake.

IDENTIFYING

As with *inaccurate drawing*, *overemphasized edges* are most often seen in figures, the face in particular. Look for harsh, emphasized, or dark lines being used to define the edge of the facial features. Such outlining is a mark of thinking of each feature as a separate object attached to the face instead of seeing the face as one object of a varied form. While *overemphasized edges* can come in any color, they are usually made with black.

The objects around you do not have dark borders; all their edges are created by two color notes sitting adjacent. The natural color and shade of the objects define their edges. Thus this problem often arises in pieces where little thought was given to light and shading; an honest examination of them would reveal the inconsistency of the edge. One can then see that the habit of using heavy-handed edges is a crutch to support weak shadows and lighting, because if they had been rendered faithfully, the edges would sufficiently define themselves.

The problem, of course, is not limited to figure subjects alone. Any time the lighting or shading do not adequately explain what you're seeing, there is the desire to outline it to make it more understandable.

CORRECTING

In order to effectively correct the issue of *overemphasized edges*, one must mentally shift from relying on lines to shades to create edges. When shading is accurately used, there remains no reason to use outlines. Start by determining the light source and the accuracy of the shadow patterns. Begin to paint out all outlines and create the edges with shades (two dissimilar, adjacent color notes).

Remember that the eye is naturally drawn to sharp edges of high contrast, so play down the intensity of any edge that isn't part of your focal areas (especially the nose!). Don't be afraid of lost edges. Human eyes don't perceive everything in equal crispness, so you don't need to paint them that way. Be careful about that though, or you might run into another one of the problems, *airbrushed*.

WITH LIGHTING DIRECTION CORRECTIONS

WITH LIGHTING AND CONTOUR CORRECTIONS

IDENTIFYING

Let's revisit Rachel Yates from section 2. In editing the lighting direction, many (but not all) of the object outlines were painted out. Now its time to address the remainder, which are primarily along the arms and hair strands.

Outlines are common in images where the lighting and values are faulty. Outlines are needed to clearly define edges not adequately defined by the values. When the values are corrected, the need for outlines is gone.

ORIGINAL

CORRECTING

The heavy edges on the arms and hair strands were painted out using the neighboring color. The detail of the background darks was also toned down.

IDENTIFYING

Beginning as a line drawing many of the harsh edges still remain leaving the image between being a shaded line drawing and a painting. The line-based edges on the features, scars, and shoulder of the coat conflict with the painterliness of the background and fur. Let's look at how one might develop the image into a full painting with special attention given to the edges. (Continued next page.)


"OUTCAST" BY DESPERISH, DESPERISH.DEVIANTART.COM
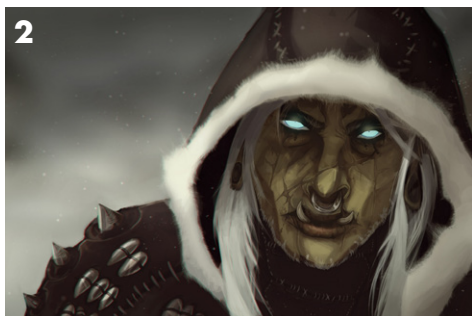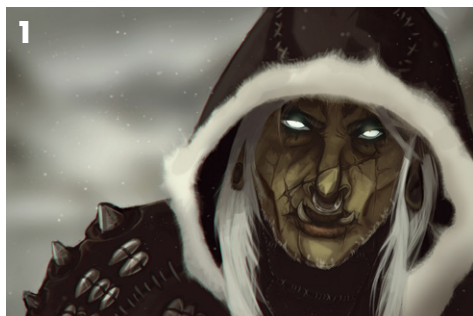
CORRECTING

1) The process began by painting a semi-transparent layer of medium-value skin tone over most of the face to key down the lights and soften the darks. On a Darken layer, a cast shadow from the hood was also added over the top portion of the face and hair, as well as at the bottom areas of the fur. **2)** The scars and other harsh edges were repainted with a lighter tone on a new Lighten layer, which kept me from having to worry about messing up the other lighter colors. The Lighten layer was also used to remove the outline of the shoulder spikes. The eyes were adjusted to be deeper cyan, and the top of the sky was darkened to convey a more grim atmosphere.
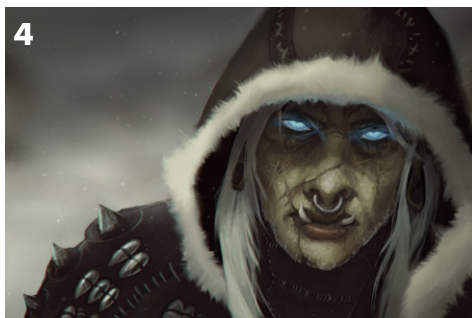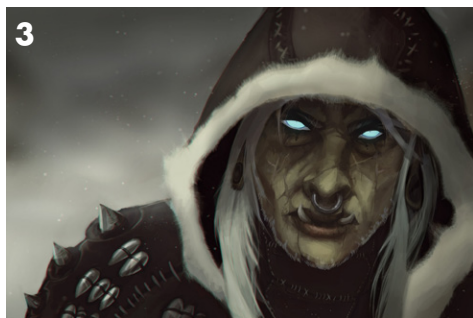
3) Color balance was adjusted so the lights shift towards a cooler cyan range instead of warmer yellow. The scars in the shadow areas were repainted to be lighter than the surrounding skin tone instead of darker. **4)** Using the Smudge Tool with a bristly tip, the edges of the fur were reworked. Skin lights were again shifted cooler and subtle texturing added for a rougher appearance. Shadows on sides of nose were greatly lightened and teeth were lightened for visual clarity. Pupils and edges of the irises were deepened, with faint glow from the eyes added to nearby skin, hair, and underside of hood fur.

Recapping, use a Lighten layer to tone down the initial line edges, establish form with shading on a Darken layer, and hand paint on a Normal layer to end.

MISTAKE 6:
CHALK AND CHARCOAL

Imagine I were painting a flame and, starting at the top, I laid in some red. I know the flame gets brighter as it gets nearer to the source and, since white is the brightest color available, I begin to add white into the red. But it doesn't look right. While the flame's red is getting lighter, it's not brighter. In fact, the red is dulling into a pink and conveys no sense of heat. I just encountered the *chalk and charcoal* problem.

What I failed to account for was the fact that white—and black—possess not only an innate value, but color temperature and chroma as well. By adding the white, I lightened the value but did not appropriately adjust the color temperature and chroma. Dividing the color wheel, white would be placed as a cool color, which, when added to the warm color red, neutralizes its heat and chroma.

It can be easy to think that white as the brightest color can be used to brighten anything or black as the darkest value is perfect to darken anything, but such is not the case. Every color carries a certain amount of chroma, or pigment. Red, for instance, is chock-full of pigment and is a naturally vibrant

The picture above is an excellent example of correctly avoiding the *chalk and charcoal* problem. Instead of adding white to lighten and black to darken which would dull the skin tones, they are instead rich with color while keeping the highlights several values from white. Also notice how the artist was careful not to let the deep shadows go cold but chose instead to render them extra warm.

color. Pink contains far less pigment, and white, black, and grey carry none at all. Adding white straight into red dilutes the amount of available pigment and dulls the overall appearance. However, stair-stepping through colors, you can reach from red to white without such a problem. Starting at red it can be blended into orange, then yellow, and finally white. The results effectively bridge the elements of color temperature, chroma, and value simultaneously.

IDENTIFYING

Chalk and charcoal gives rise to a "muddy" appearance in midtones, because the inclusion of the low-pigmented white or black shifts the brighter colors towards gray. *Chalk and charcoal* is most noticeable on warm-colored subjects since the cooling effect of white and black have less impact on subjects already in the cool spectrum. Look for it to steal the vibrancy from depictions of a sunset, flames, and other warm light sources, as well as prematurely grey red hair and create ashen skin tones.

As previously mentioned, *chalk and charcoal* is often accompanied by *airbrushed*. The artist, realizing an entire area is too dark, softly airbrushes over the whole area with white to "brighten" it. Of course, the straight white muddies the warm colors under it and gives it a flat,

FLAME EXAMPLE
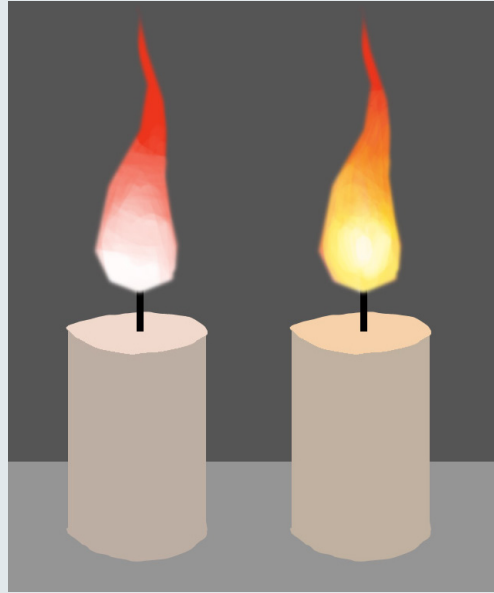
It is important to stair-step through the colors to reach white and not go straight from a mid-tone such as red, or the white will dull the vibrancy and chill the color temperature.

fake look. Conversely, the artist may use black to shadow skin tones, unwittingly pushing them towards a corpse appearance or giving the impression that there is a black film on the skin.

CORRECTING

If the offending white or black exist on their own layer, the simplest solution is to remove the layer and repaint using the appropriate color. If not, create a new Color layer over the problem layer(s), in which you can adjust the color but not the value of the colors under it. You can then be adding back in the pigment/chroma that was lost while correcting the color temperature.

While results are often less than satisfactory, you may be able to just use an adjust-

ment setting such as Hue/Saturation, Vibrancy, or Photo Filter to add back the color needed. With either this or the first option, you will probably need to paint over the changes with a Nor-mal layer to tidy up the details and blend the changes into the existing image. Going forward, remember that light and shadow don't just change in value, but in color as well.

IDENTIFYING

While *chalk and charcoal* can include both white and black, white is the primary offender above. Look for the strongest evidence in the lights of the hand and forearm as well as the hair and nose highlights. In these areas the tones shift dramatically to a duller gray range. The skin shadows stay well saturated but graduate suddenly from light to dark, as seen with the shadow side of the nose where it becomes almost black.

CORRECTING

Using a Darken layer, the hair was repainted to tone down the maximum light value. Consulting reference for skin tone and face shadow patterns, much of the face was repainted with extra attention on establishing saturated lights and consistent skin tone, and lightening the shadows on the side of the nose and cheek.

Remember, the lighter the highlight, the less saturated it can be. For that reason, slightly darker but more saturated lights may be preferable.
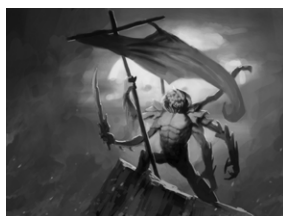
IDENTIFYING

The evidence of C&C is not blatant in any one place but moderate throughout, giving the piece an overall lackluster appearance. This comes by the use of high value colors (not pure white) used directly over low values without properly saturated mid-tones. Black is also overused to darken the sky and shadow the character. The color scheme of green/yellow/purple is also a lighting issue as it is inconsistent with the scene and results in weakening the piece. The small black and white version of the original shows us that adjustments need to be made to make the image more easily readable.

"KEEBO WAR BANNER" BY MICHAEL SYRIGOS, MICHAELSYRIGOS.DEVIANTART.COM

CORRECTING

1) The original image. **2)** A Color layer is used to shift the moon to green to simplify the color scheme. Using a Normal layer, the darks of the sky are repainted lighter and the banner darkened to a silhouette at the top in an effort to create a more dramatic value scheme. **3)** A Multiply layer of bright orange is used transparently over the character to better bridge from light to dark and add more chroma. To explain the warm lighting, reddish light from non-visible fires lights the front of the rocks. **4)** Fire light and smoke are added into the sky. The moon shape is also slightly more defined. **5)** Color layer is used to tint the banner greener. Sharp moonlight is added on top of rocks and contour of character. Detail and edges are refined throughout and fire embers added.

MISTAKE 7:
WIRY HAIR

While the previous common mistakes dealt with fundamental issues in the piece, this point deals with a specific problem on a single subject. In many ways this problem is a cumulation of *over-emphasized edges*, *fragmented values*, and *chalk and charcoal*. Medusa suffered from having snakes for hair, but characters suffering from this appear to have wires for hair. Stiff and streaky, the hair doesn't flow with its natural softness.

IDENTIFYING

Look for a striated appearance where individual hairs are over-defined. The hair looks rigid and unnatural. Those new to digital painting are more likely to get caught by this problem since they have a tendency to use a small, pencil-like brush and never adjust its size or properties. This is understandable because they are used to working with pencils, where such an option is not available.

Existing as a solid yet with the visual flow of liquid, hair has vexed artists for centuries. Take a moment to study the master's work above. He expertly captured the flow, layering, and sheen of the model's hair with a minimum of detail. Only a few individual strands are distinguishable so as to not break up the mass and overpower the face with an abundance of detail.

CORRECTING

A new approach to rendering hair is needed to overcome the problem. Hair contains a great amount of detail because it is comprised of thousands of individual strands, but it is not until stepping back to view it as a whole unit that progress can be made. Don't think of the single strands but the overall flow and patterns it creates. Thinking of hair as smoke keeps you from getting stuck in the details and helps you to notice the larger shadowing systems at play. Always remember, form before detail. Determine the major forms and their lights and shadows. Establish those with no detail. Next, find the second-largest masses and forms and establish those.

Wiry hair has a tendency to be an eye magnet for two reasons: its striation and detail. Light and dark parallel lines create a striated pattern, which naturally draws the focus like a bulls-eye. If the hair is not the focal point of the image, then this creates a problem since it is drawing attention away from the focal point. Additionally, when many individual strands of hair

are rendered, the general detail level for the area can be much higher than surrounding areas and again, can be drawing the eye from more important points.

Let's be clear, I am not speaking against rendering individual hairs, but doing so should be the exception and not the rule. The rule is that hair should be painted with the form in mind and have a natural, flowing quality. As an accent, a few strands can be indicated around the head to imply that the rest is also individual strands. Such a technique is called implied detail, which makes use of the brain's phenomenal ability to extrapolate based on limited information. By showing the brain a scattering of individual strands and making the rest of the hair follow the same form pattern, color, and texture, the brain will make the assumption that it is all made of individual strands and contains an equal amount of detail. With the mind working in such a way, it is redundant to give the viewer details that his mind will not need, and it frees the artist to say much more with much less (a true challenge and sign of mastery).
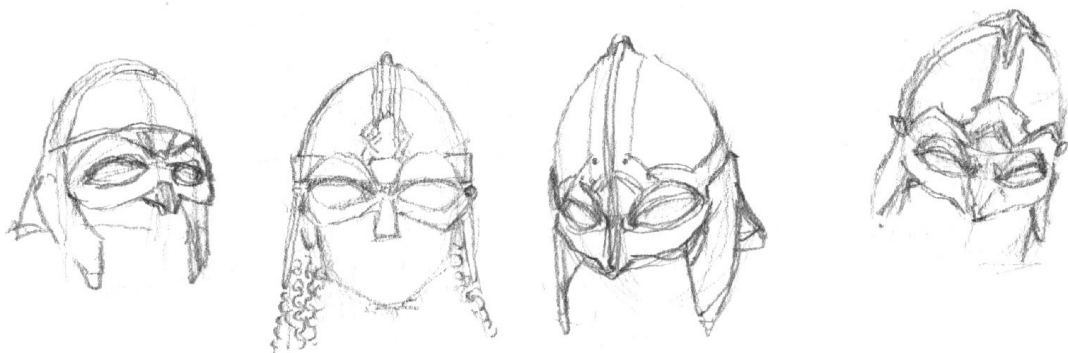
IDENTIFYING

I feel a little guilty for mentioning anything against the artist whose work is seen here. He is a professional and knows what he's doing, but as I've also been a portrait artist and made the same mistake, I'm qualified to speak on the subject.

Portrait painting from photos can be great since the subject never moves, but a problem arises because the camera captures an enormous amount of detail in the hair. Even if the artist only renders half the detail seen in the photo, it will be far more than is necessary and will outweigh the ambient detail in the rest of the image.

CORRECTING

Using the Smudge Tool with a bristly tip, the hair was repainted following its direction. This serves to break up the harsher edges and give a softer contour against the background. Individual strands along the bangs were repainted into slightly large "bands" or "ribbons" of hair. At this point the hair was too soft, so a few individual hairs were added back in to break up the patterns and add points of detail for the eyes to find.

"YAMILA" BY GERMÁN COVACEVISH, FB.COM/ARTCOVA
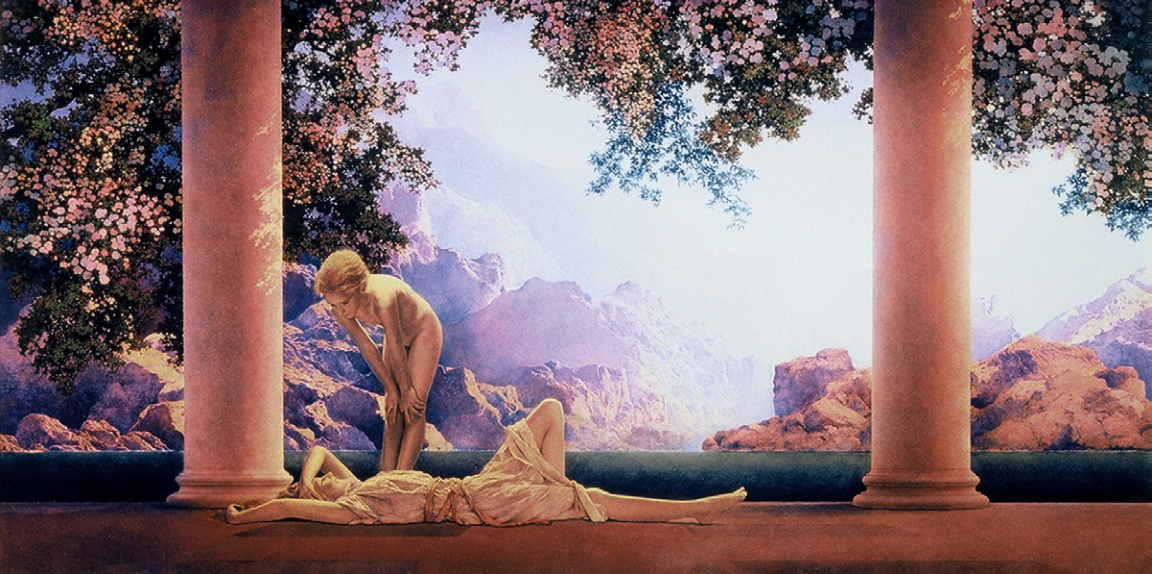
MISTAKE 8:
CONFLICTING STYLES

Hollywood doesn't make it common practice to switch actors during the course of a movie. Neither do they switch the genre from, say, a romantic comedy to fantasy and then to drama. Any such change would jar the audiences. In the same way, pictures with mixed and matched styles are jarring. To complete half an image cartoon-style and the rest in impressionistic paints would create a great division in the piece, and not the good kind. It comes off haphazard or sloppy.

IDENTIFYING

Conflicting styles are most often presented with background elements being photo-based and the foreground character hand-drawn. Though the photo is usually manipulated with various filters, it still retains far too much detail and visual information to be suited against a simple drawing. At other times, an artist's strength is in landscape, which can lead the background to be realistically rendered while the character is again left too simple in comparison.

Another time *conflicting styles* arises is when the artist has good primary reference for part of the image but not the rest. The referenced area is often far more accurate and well rendered, while the rest suffers from general inaccuracy and lack of equivalent detail.

CORRECTING

Begin by removing any photo elements that are conflicting. Instead, paint those areas with the photos as reference but in a complementary style to the rest of the artwork. Pay attention that the level of rendering does not become too imbalanced from

non-referenced areas to referenced areas. If you choose not to remove the photographic elements, then at least pay close attention to their lighting direction and color tone so that they will match the rest of the image. Some reworking of color balance and shadow placement may be needed. As many anime prove, a wider difference between areas can be tolerated if the lighting and color scheme are consistent.

Additional point: I am not condemning the use of photographic elements as part of the image. I know several concept artists who do so to great effect, but it is a tricky technique. For the artists who do it well, it is a pre-thought part of the piece's execution, not a crutch used to cut corners.

THE LAST THREE MISTAKES

The first three mistakes, *inaccurate drawing*, *inconsistent lighting*, and *fragmented values*, are very common and arise far more often than any of the others. What is to be noted is that the eighth through tenth mistakes are rarely found to be the main problem in a piece, a fact that was confirmed by the difficulty of finding examples where they were. That is to say that while a piece may have *conflicting styles*, *over-texturing*, or *sketchiness*, these mistakes are most often secondary in severity to one or more of the earlier mistakes. That being the case, you will see less drastic change in the examples for the final three sections than in many of the others.

IDENTIFYING

The character and the background are at odds style-wise. The figure is rendered very "sketchy," with rough sketch lines still visible, while the background uses smooth tones and no sketch lines. Such a conflict can leave the viewer feeling that perhaps the piece is unfinished.

CORRECTING

Faced with two conflicting styles, the artist must first choose which style will be dominant. In this case, I chose to adjust the figure's style to more closely resemble that of the background. This was done by first reducing the brightness of the reflected light and shadow areas. Next involved painting out the sketch lines to create smoother tones and slightly overexposing the bright areas as they are on the floor. This kind of correcting is not often simple or quick but may be exactly what the piece needs.

MISTAKE 9:
OVER-TEXTURING

God is in the details, they say. And textures are all details. Strong and varied textures can ground a scene with tangible realism while inviting us to believe in the place depicted. They can help sell a matte painting as the real thing and take the visuals of next-gen games to a new level. Yet they are all flash and no substance. Like the frosting on a cake, they sweeten what's beneath and pretty the appearance, but take away the cake and you're not really left with anything.

The problem of *over-texturing* arises when an artist begins using textures as a crutch to replace solid design and fundamentals. Instead of learning how to render something by hand, the artist cuts corners by dropping a texture in. The practice of using textures in images is especially common in the concept art field and is not to be condemned, but overuse or over-reliance can be problematic.

IDENTIFYING

All images have a level of average detail. In cartoonism it is very low, in impressionism medium,

N.C. Wyeth shows above that detail and texture don't make an image. Real image strength comes from dynamic design, controlled values and a coherent color and lighting scheme.

and in photorealism it is high. Because photographic-based textures have an innately high level of complexity/detail, they can be out of place when added to a much lower-detailed image. Texturing only works when a piece has strong fundamentals (design, values, colors) and a moderate level of pre-existing detail. Professional matte paintings, for instance, can get away with texturing because the ambient detail level is equivalent to the photographic element added.

Over-texturing shows up in two primary ways: through photographic textures and photographic-based textured brushes. Look for *over-texturing* in rocks, stonework, foliage, and wood grain, as well as apparel such as chain mail and denim. Unless the artist is astute, the lighting direction of the texture is often different from that shown in the rest of the image. This can unconsciously convey that something is off and weaken the overall impression.

CORRECTING

I remember teaching a children's drawing class when the students were introduced to using a tortillion, which is tightly wound paper the size of a pencil and tapered at the ends. It's used to smudge or blend the pencil graphite to create smoother tones. Immediately the overall quality of the students' shading went down because they would do shoddy pencil work and then scrub the heck out of the shadows with the tortillion, trying to make them smooth. It didn't work. They were relying on the tortillion to make up for careless pencil shading as if it were a magic bullet. The tortillion can only enhance what's already there, not correct it. The same holds true for digital texturing.

Shortcuts in art don't pay off, and using textures to cover for poor execution is a shortcut. If you are incapable of rendering by hand the texture you want to use, then you probably shouldn't use it. It would be more beneficial for you to learn how to do it by hand; then you'd be qualified to know when to use the texture. That said, subtlety is key if you're going to use textures.

Because textures should never upstage the subject, there are several things you can do to see that they fit more comfortably in your artwork.

• Lowering the opacity can instantly take away textures "cut and paste" obviousness so they meld better with rest of the image.

• Simplifying them through filters such as Surface Blur can reduce the innate density of detail so it more closely matches the local detail level.

• Changing the Blend Mode in Layers to Overlay, Screen, or Multiply (depending on the situation) allows some of the underlying art to show through and causes the texture to expound upon it rather than replace it. If using the Overlay setting, try desaturating the texture so it uses the same colors as the layers below it, otherwise it will compound the saturation of both layers.

In any case, painting over the texture to blend it into the rest of the image brings the area back to a handcrafted appearance.

IDENTIFYING

The further down you go on the list of mistakes, the less likely it is that the mistake will be the only one present or the primary one involved. In this case, *over-texturing* and *conflicting styles* overlap. The background upstages and distracts from the main subject by having more sharp details and visual busyness brought on by the overuse of a highly textured brush. Additionally, the background and foreground use completely different color schemes, which is a weakness in an image with a subject as carefully realistic as this.

CORRECTING

The simplest way to address the heavy texturing (within the scope of this image) was to filter the background using Filter > Blur > Lens Blur. Softening the textures shifts the attention back to the subject. The color scheme was also shifted warmer to be more consistent with the rest of the image as well as being moderately desaturated so as to not to be distracting.

MISTAKE 10:
SKETCHINESS

For many artists, the sketching stage of a piece is their favorite part, and for good reason. It's a time you can really play it fast and loose with nothing constraining your creativity. It's also a time when you can work out the problems and details of the image without revealing the process or stumbles to others. Most of the time sketches are the unseen "behind-the-scenes" record of a piece's creation, but other times the rough sketchiness shows through and mars the picture's polish.

Yes, some sketches hold up just fine on their own, but what we're discussing here are the pieces that have tried to step beyond the sketch to being a finished piece but fell short. The majority of the time *sketchiness* shows up is when the artist started the image as a traditional drawing and then tried to convert it to a full-color digital painting. There are many reasons why *sketchiness* may arise during the process. These may include (1) ran out of time, (2) too timid to paint out the guidelines, (3) didn't know what to do next and stopped, or (4) simply didn't recognize the mistake even existed.

IDENTIFYING

Unlike *inaccurate drawing*, which can be difficult to spot, *sketchiness* is much more apparent. For a piece that started as a traditional drawing, look for pencil lines showing through, especially contour edges. The pencil work will also be visible as a desaturated area compared to the rest of the image. To be clear, there is nothing innately wrong with pencil work in a digital piece, but when the artist has committed the piece to becoming a painting and no longer being a drawing,

then the monochromatic roughness of the pencil work stands at odds to the fluidity of the digital paint. This issue can often overlap with *overemphasized edges*, so be sure to review that section and its examples if you come across this problem in your work.

Sketchiness can still arise in digital-only work but usually manifests as a general roughness or unfinished appearance. Look for edges whose position has been drawn multiple times but never properly defined. Such edges indicate an indecisive mindset, which will weaken the piece. Similarly, look for areas where the color is undetermined. This can be seen where it has been painted and repainted with different colors but no one color has been made dominant. It's fine to change your mind and let the piece evolve as it progresses, but see the process through and don't leave areas half-finished.

This brings us to the very-obvious unpainted areas. These are areas where the artist has simply neglected to paint, leaving a blank spot where something should be. The "something" is often a subject the artist struggles with, such as hands, faces, tech, or metal. Unpainted areas are also common to the edges of a piece, where the artist simply doesn't paint the image to the borders of the canvas. Again, unpainted areas, like pencil lines showing, can be fine when they are part of the original plan of the piece and things are set up to support them, but when they occur out of ineptitude or negligence, the difference can be easy to spot.

CORRECTING

In the case of pencil work showing (as seen in Example 1), you have several choices. If the pencil exists on its own layer separate from the paint, then the easiest approach is simply to hide the layer. It's possible that the paints aren't far enough along to continue the piece without the guide of the drawing, so begin turning down the opacity of the pencil as the piece progresses. The more that is established by the paints, the less you need the guidance of the pencil to the point where you can remove it altogether.

If the paint and pencil are on the same layer, then prepare for a more time-consuming fix, because you'll have to manually paint out all the pencil work. This can be done in the straightforward fashion of painting over each area with the appropriate tone. Be sure not to just paint up to the line but through it, and then come back from the opposite direction and reestablish the edge.

Another option is to use the Smudge Brush to blend the pencils into the paints. This must be done purposefully and not haphazardly. Using the Smudge Tool with strong-edged brush shape and a Strength setting of 65–85, think of the Smudge Tool as a paintbrush while working the pencils into the surrounding area. The tip size should be kept about the same size you would use if you were using a brush in the same area. After this has been done, the areas the pencils were worked into can have a shift of saturation compared to the surrounding areas due to the monochromatic nature

of the added pencils. You can use a brush with a Blend Mode of Color or Overlay to shift the hue and saturation back to correctness. Make sure that none of the edges or details were lost during the process.

The approach is much the same with purely digital pieces; either you'll need to manually repaint areas or you'll use the Smudge Tool to work flaws into the surrounding area. Either way, be sure to take time to polish the image afterwards with details, clean edges, etc.
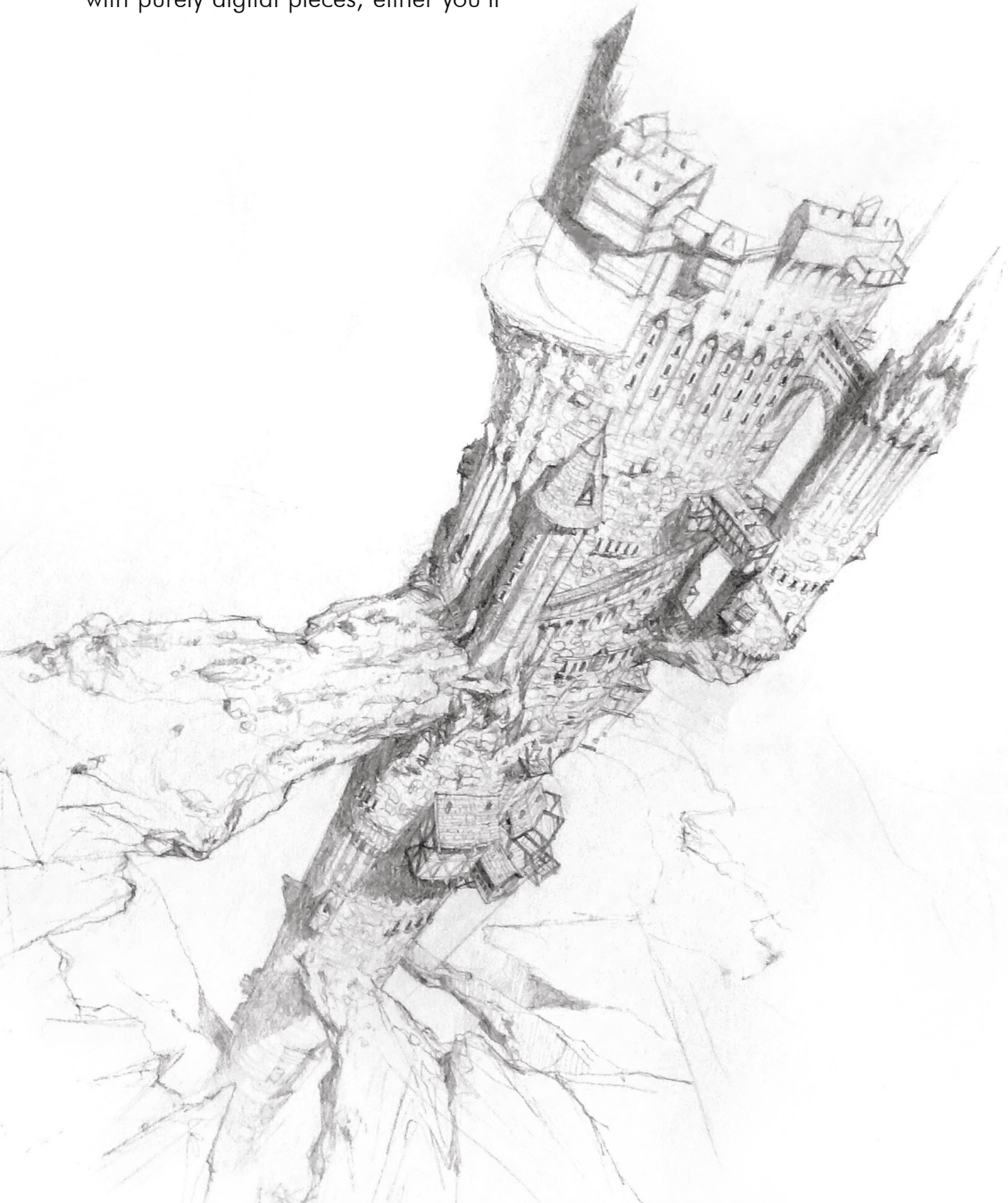
IDENTIFYING

This pencil drawing has been given a simple, digital color treatment. The rough graphite is readily visible throughout the image. The clear visibility of the line may be due to the pencil layer being placed over the paint layer, which would make it impossible to paint out. A good rule of thumb is to place the pencil layer at the bottom and the paints above it. That way, the more paint added, the less pencil you have to contend with.

CORRECTING

The first step was to use the Smudge Tool with a squarish brush tip to "paint" the pencils into the surrounding areas (tool Strength setting of 65–85). Just as you would with the Brush Tool, attention

was given to the size and direction of the strokes and not blended in a haphazard manner. Now that the image was a digital painting, the issues of lighting and color needed to be addressed. The blueness of the sky and the orangeness of the ground didn't mesh, so colors and light were adjusted with the aid of scenic reference images to give a more realistic interpretation of the scene. It was my desire to do only enough to answer the issue of *sketchiness* and basic lighting and not reinvent the scene. The image could still be taken in multiple directions from here and given a higher level of visual polish.
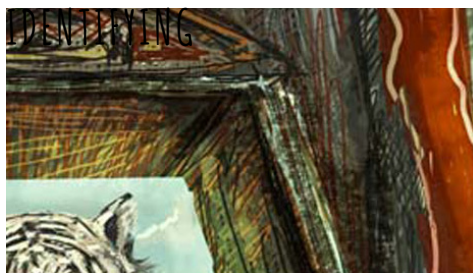
IDENTIFYING

The image has a rough appearance due to lots of varying colored strokes from a small, hard-edged brush. These stand at odds against the smoothness of the background and various parts of the character, giving it an unfinished look.
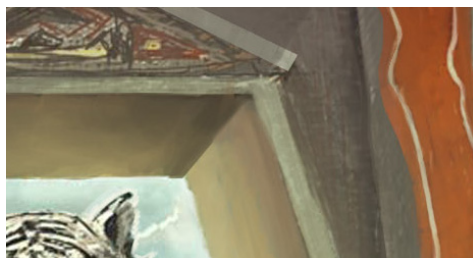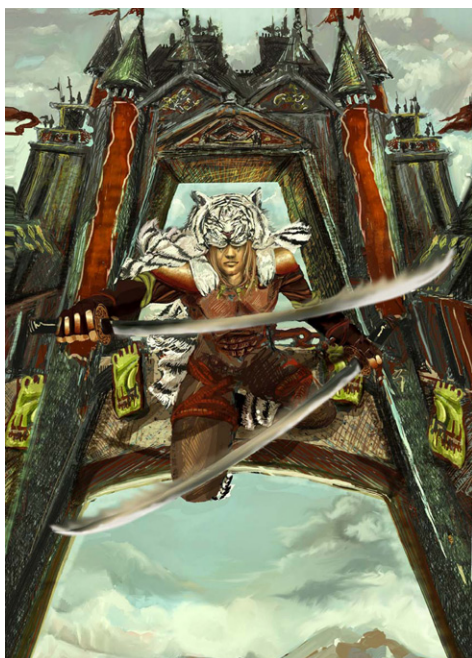
CORRECTING

Again, the Smudge Tool was used as a first step to blend the rough strokes together. Additional hand painting was added over that to define an area's color and edges. To make the character "pop" forward more, a minor spill light was added behind him and atmospheric haze put over the tower tops to indicate greater distance.

"INTO THE BATTLE" BY VANESSA BETTENCOURT, NISTARN.DEVIANTART.COM

ALL TOGETHER NOW

We've covered all ten of the most common problems individually, so now it's time to bring it all together. In this section we will look at three different pieces, first analyzing each to identify what problems they suffer from, and then correcting them and comparing them. These critiqued examples will guide you in how to approach the process in your own work. The next page has a checklist with points to remember on each mistake and is the same as the mental list I used to analyze the examples.

CHECKLIST

1. INACCURATE DRAWING
Flip image horizontally to help reveal flaws.
Compare proportions to a figure drawing guide.
Double-check perspective lines for consistency.

2. INCONSISTENT LIGHTING
Are all image elements lit from the same predetermined source direction?
Is the color of the light source tinting all it shines on?
Is the light strength (intensity) equal to its source?

3. FRAGMENTED VALUES
Create a value scheme version of the image (page 20).
Are the lights too bright in the dark areas?
Are the darks too deep in the light areas?

4. AIRBRUSHED
Are any of the edges "haloed"?
Does the piece have an overall hazy appearance?

5. OVEREMPHASIZED EDGES
Are there harsh emphasized edges on the facial feature?
Are any of the original sketch lines showing through as hard edges?

6. CHALK AND CHARCOAL
Are the highlights and shadows dull or muddy?

7. WIRY HAIR
Is the hair streaky and overly detailed?

8. CONFLICTING STYLES
Does the foreground and background share rendering styles?

9. OVER-TEXTURING
Is there an overuse of photographic or brush textures?
Most common in rocks, stonework, foliage, wood grain and fabrics.

10. SKETCHINESS
Are any areas rough, unfinished or undetermined?

Inaccurate drawing (perspective): Based on view of character the eyelevel/horizon line is just above half way vertically however background is depicted with horizon near top of image.

Inaccurate drawing (anatomy): Top front of head too high.

Inconsistent lighting (direction): Face lit from the left when it should be under lit.

Inaccurate drawing (anatomy): Head and hands slightly large compared to body.

Inconsistent lighting (color): Clashing color schemes give disjointed appearance.

Inaccurate drawing (anatomy): Arm length too short compared to head and body.

Repetitive patterns: Folds of sleeves too uniform in shape and spacing.

Repetitive patterns: Rocks too uniform in shape and spacing.

Wiry hair: Hair has stringy look.

Inaccurate drawing (perspective): Horizon line dropped to match eye-level we see the character at.

Inaccurate drawing (anatomy): Top front of head lowered.

Inconsistant lighting (direction): Changed lighting direction to be lit from below.

Inaccurate drawing (anatomy): Head and hands size slightly reduced to match body.

Inconsistent lighting (color): Removed warm light from front side of character to simplify lighting color scheme.

Inaccurate drawing (anatomy): Elbow dropped farther back to increase arm length.

Repetitive patterns: Variety added to fold shapes and spacing.

Repetitive patterns: Variety added to rock shapes.

Inconsistent lighting (intensity): Brightness increased to match visible output.

Wiry hair: Hair was reworked as soft ribbons rather than strands.
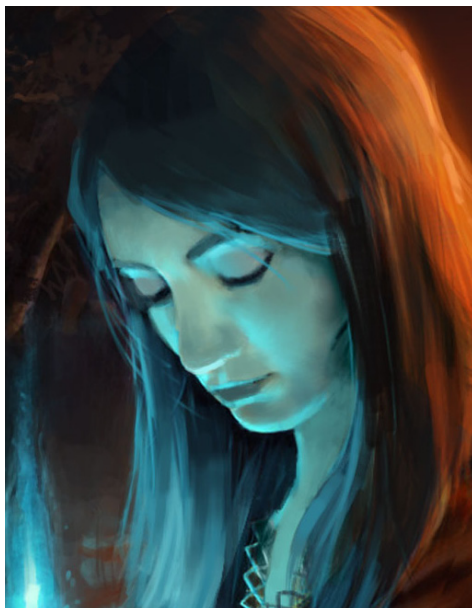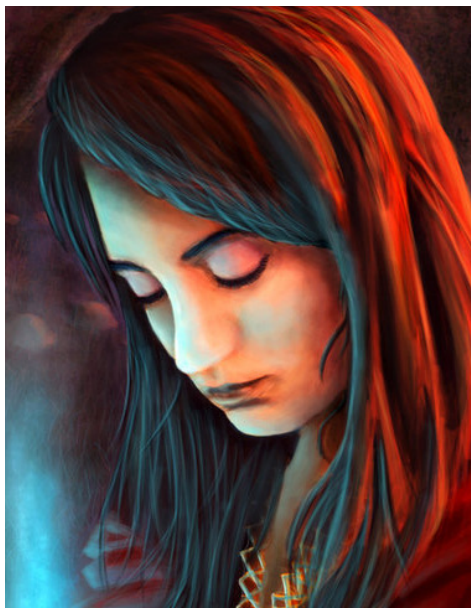
Inconsistent lighting (direction): Bottom eyelids lit from below.
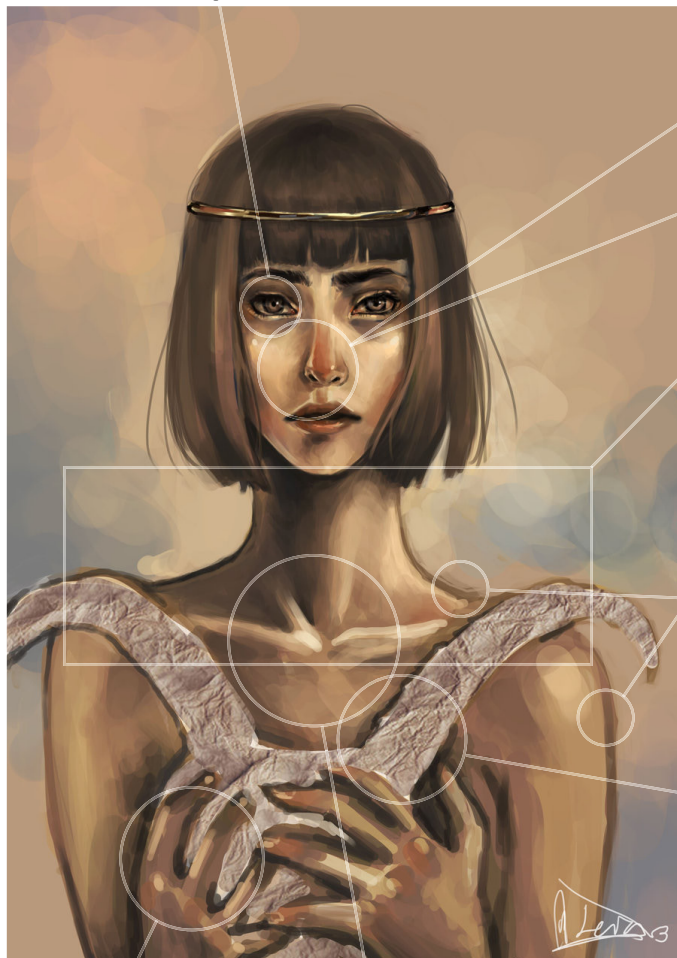
Inaccurate drawing (anatomy): Nostril shapes uneven.

Fragmented values: Overly deep shadows used on nose and elsewhere on face.

Inaccurate drawing (anatomy): Neck slightly too thick and long. Shoulder levels also uneven.

Overemphasized edges: Outlines visible throughout image.

Conflicting styles: Wide style difference between the horns and the rest of image.

Fragmented values: Lights shown too light for being in a shadowed area.

Inconsistent lighting (intensity): Strong shadows in area that should be well lit.

Inconsistent lighting (direction): Shadowed lower lid and lightened top of cheek.

Inaccurate drawing (anatomy): Nostril shapes balanced.

Fragmented values: Brightened nose shadows and softened shadows edges.

Inaccurate drawing (anatomy): Thinned neck, raised and evened shoulder level.

Overemphasized edges: Outlines removed but contour allowed to remain dark due to adjusted lighting adjustments.
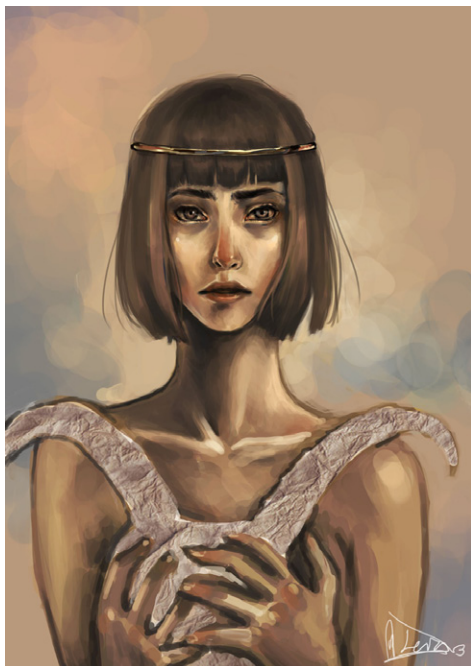
Conflicting styles: Mixed paint with original horn texture to better mesh with rest of image.

Fragmented values: Lights darkened to match area light.

Inconsistent lighting (intensity): Darks brightened to correspond with lighting intensity.
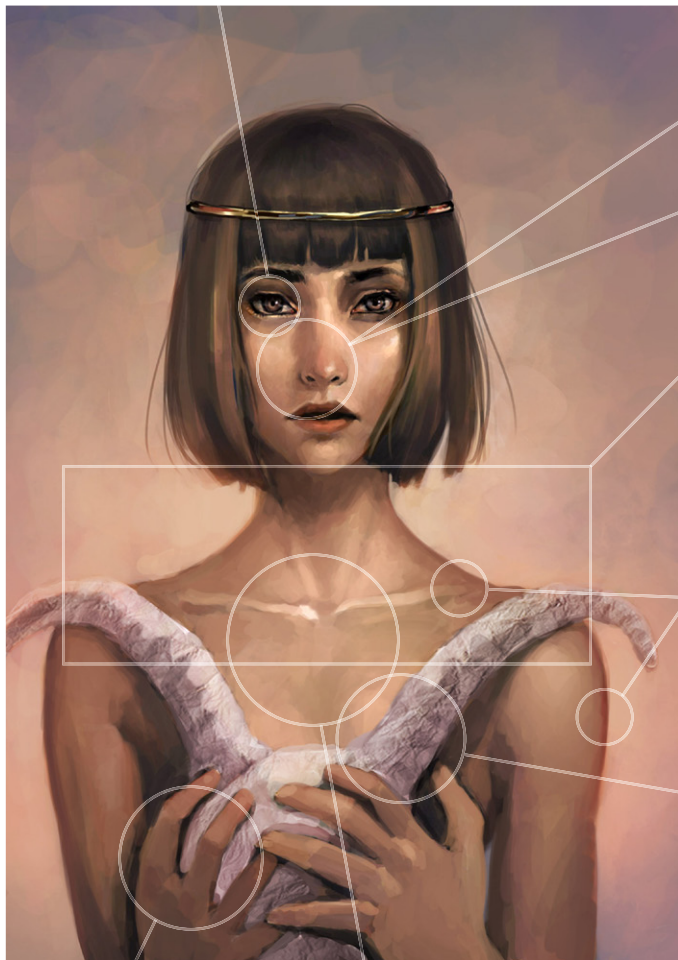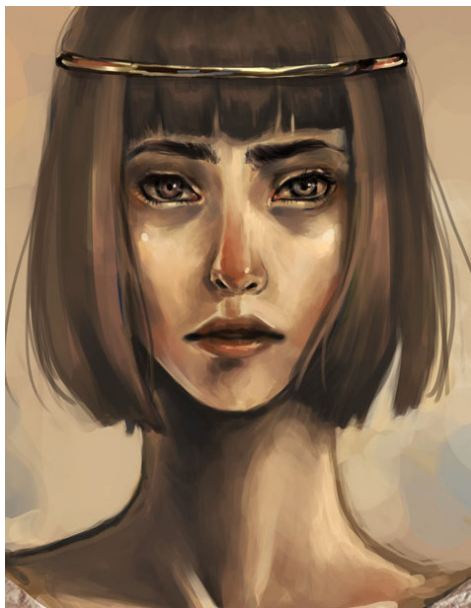
Inaccurate drawing (anatomy): Eye slightly too small.

Inconsistent lighting (direction): The light in front of the character would create a cast shadow up on the wall.

Inconsistent lighting (color): Faces have too much red in the shadows for being lit by a green light source.
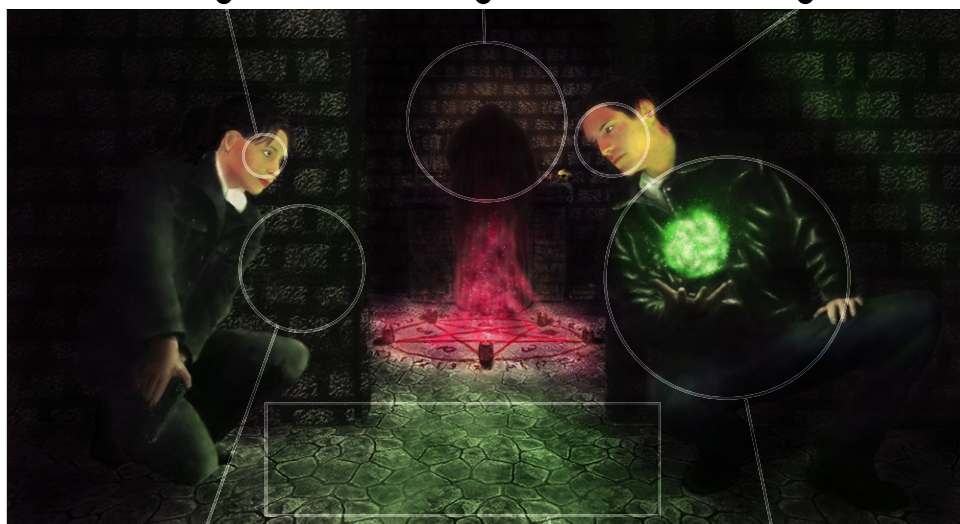
Over-texturing: The wall texture is distractingly busy as it has too much contrast between its lights and darks.

Over-texturing: The photo-based texture contains an overly high level of detail compared to the painted areas.

Inconsistent lighting (intensity): The character is underlit compared to the strength of the light source.
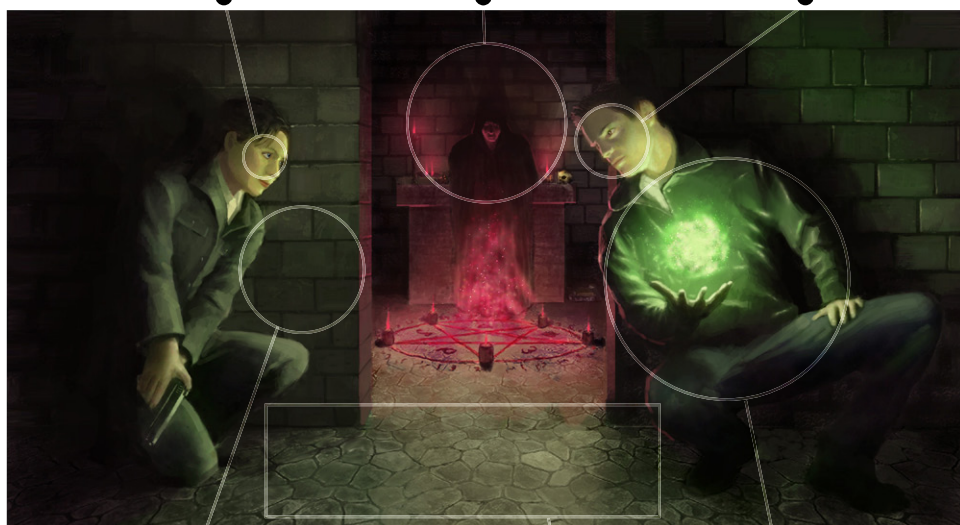
Inaccurate drawing (anatomy): Eye size slightly increased.

Inconsistent lighting (direction): Cast shadow added on wall. Candles also add to table for visual interest.

Inconsistent lighting (color): Red in face adjusted to better match lighting situation by being more green.

Over-texturing: The wall was hand-painted to remove the texture and lower the contrast of texture.

Over-texturing: Contrast was lowered and various stones were painted over by hand to remove excess detail and allow it to better fit with the rest of the image.

Inconsistent lighting (intensity): The character was brightened to match the intensity of the light source by adding more midtones.

"THE HUNT" BY LEIA HAM SHI YING, SILVERCAFFIENE.DEVIANTART.COM

FINAL THOUGHTS

If I can leave you with one thought it would be that dramatic results don't always require dramatic changes. Most of the changes made to the examples in this book took a fraction of the time that the artist took to create the original. So, take a moment when a piece is almost finished and slow down to analyze it. Just spend a couple of minutes going through the checklist (pg. 54) and see where any of the mistakes may have occurred and decide the best way to correct them. This little effort to address the ten mistakes can have a huge payoff for the time spent.

Enjoy your art and I hope this book makes your journey a little swifter and smoother,

Clint Cearley

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Trained in traditional media Clint now works primarily as a freelance digital artist for such projects as Wizards of the Coast's game Magic: The Gathering. Featured in both Spectrum 17 and 19 his work was also awarded the Master title in Exposé 10 (examples of his work on the following page).
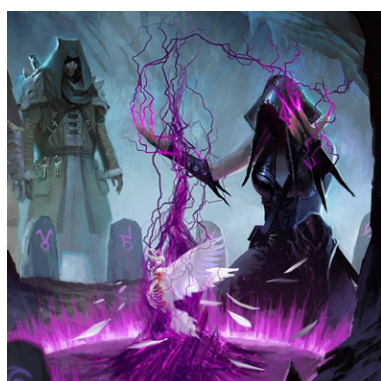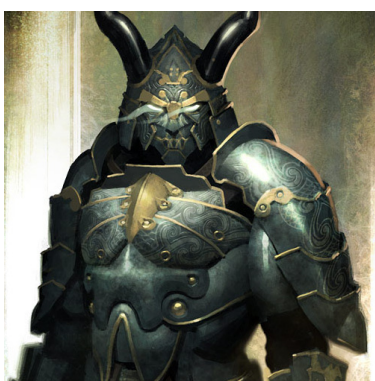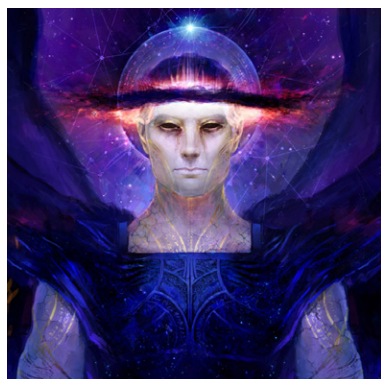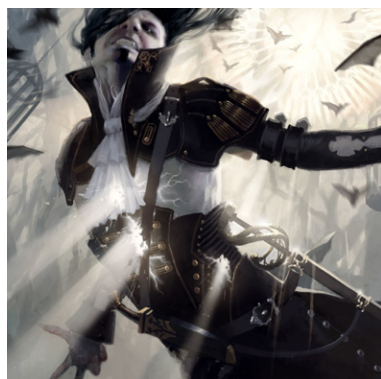
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