PAINTING MYTHOLOGICAL CREATURES IN PAINTER
A GUIDE TO USING A BRIEF TO CREATE CREATURE CONCEPTS

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Chapter 01 - Charybdis

Software used: Painter

Introduction
According to Greek mythology the Charybdis is a huge, blubbery sea monster who long ago was transformed from a beautiful nymph who happened to be the daughter of Poseidon and Gaia. Now possessing a huge mouth and fins instead of limbs, she swallows vast quantities of sea water three times a day before disgorging it to create treacherous whirlpools. In this tutorial I’ll be depicting Charybdis in her monster form, rising from the depths to ensnare unwary fishermen with her turbulent belching. I’ll be using Painter 12 for the whole tutorial.

Concepts
The first stage is to create some concepts for the creature. I sketch out a few rough ideas, taking no more than ten minutes per piece.

Then I have a look to see which one is worth taking forward. I don’t bother with colors at this stage and instead concentrate on defining form through the use of values, that is, lights and darks. I quite like the idea of a fat turtle-looking beast so with that in mind, I go onto the next step (Fig.01).

Beginning the Color Sketch
I create a small canvas 900 pixels high in the same aspect ratio as my final image will be. Then using the Mixer palette, I create a palette of the colors I intend to use: turquoise for the sea and the bulk of the creature, and a contrasting orange for the sky. Using these colors I begin to sketch out my composition. I want to show Charybdis in the act of creating a whirlpool to drag an unwary boat into the depths.

The problem I’m faced with is that if I depict this from above the surface the swirling water will obscure Charybdis herself, whereas if I attempt the scene from below I’ll have the same problem with the fishing boat. I therefore decide to split the composition between underwater for the bottom three-quarters of the canvas and open air for the rest: it’s a cross-section, as if the scene has been sliced vertically (Fig.02).

I start with the sky, roughing in some clouds, and the surface of the water, which is undulating...
and choppy. Beneath the surface the effect of the sunlight decreases rapidly until at the bottom of the image the water is almost black. The sunlight that penetrates the surface is not uniform and forms beams due to the turbulence of the water, much like sunlight passing through gaps in cloud. In terms of the coloration there will be more orangey light present in the water close to the surface. As the light passes further into the depths it will become more and more blue/green in color. I exaggerate the turquoise hue for effect, but it is worthwhile noting that water is in fact blue, not colorless as is often thought, and this is clearly visible in large bodies of clear water. The deeper the water the deeper blue it appears.

**Using References**

Being that Charybdis is a character from Greek mythology it’s fitting that the boat is of Greek design. I search out a likely contender using Google images and use the image as a loose reference for my own (Fig.03).

**Resample the Image**

Unfortunately my Painter has just crashed and I’ve lost my Mixer palette! Rather than create another Mixer palette I use the Create Color Set From Image option on the Color Set palette, which generates color swatches based on the colors I’ve already painted. Happily this isn’t part of the tutorial, just something I thought I’d mention in case anybody spots that my Mixer palette has disappeared!

I resize (or more accurately, resample) the image to full working size, which is 5000 pixels tall, making sure to keep my aspect ratio consistent with my specification. I often work larger than the specification requires and then downsize as my final step. This allows for finer detail. I zoom in to 50% and with an Artists’ Oils brush, begin to dab in some basic detail. The Artists’ Oils brush I use has Pressure-dependant opacity and Grain set to 50%. The grain option allows the paper texture to show through the strokes where the paint is thin. Papers are selectable from the Papers panel and it’s worthwhile playing about with the size and contrast of your papers in order to get the most pleasing effect (Fig.04).

**Adding Basic Detail**

I start work on the monster’s head and upper torso, making sure I don’t go too bright with my values on account of the surface of the water reflecting away a good deal of sunlight. The closer an object is to the surface the more orangey light it will catch so this is why I include quite a lot of orange on the head and upper torso, and less and less on the body as it fades away into the murky depths.

I pay attention at all times to the direction of my light source in order to ensure the shadows are consistent. Later, I’ll be adding a mottled pattern to simulate light shining through the waves, but for now I’m just treating the light source as I would in the open air (Fig.05).

**Adding Fine Detail**

Once I’ve roughed in the features on the head and torso I zoom in 100% for the detail. I don’t usually have a plan as to which areas of the image I’ll tackle first; I just make it up as I go along. This time I decide to complete the head
and upper torso before going on to the rest of the image. As well as my Artists’ Oils brush I use a circular, grainy brush also set to Pressure dependant opacity and with a subcategory of Grainy Soft Cover. I set this brush to around 18% Hue variability using the Color Variability panel. This gives a pleasing mottled effect to my strokes.

I have deliberately avoided making the creature’s mouth too symmetrical so I can have fun sprinkling teeth and wobbling fleshy flanges all over the place. As always I use the Navigator to move the canvas as I find it quicker and easier than the drag method (Fig.06).

**Painting Texture**

Texture can be communicated via brush strokes and also via Paper texture, but it can also be manually painted. Here I add some imperfections to the shell and skin of Charybdis whilst always being mindful of the direction of the light source. I include some barnacles, which I paint by dabbing bright dots on top of darker dots, leaving a small crescent of shadow underneath. Variations in color can either be blended together or their boundaries left sharp. I find it’s good to use a combination of these effects to produce some pleasing textures (Fig.07).

**Super-fine Detail**

For the focus of the piece, which is the creature’s head and mouth, I include some very fine detail. I zoom in to 150% and use my 3 or 4 pixel circular brush to sharpen the teeth and to create some more intricate textures around the gums. Working this small doesn’t mean I should sharpen every line – that would make it too clinical-looking – it’s more a way of accentuating key areas to attract the viewer’s eye (Fig.08).

**Tilting the Canvas**

If you’re like me and drawing a good curved line is a challenge at the best of times then you might find Painter 12’s Rotate facility useful. By clicking on the Rotate Page icon on the toolbar, then dragging the cursor across the image, you can rotate your canvas quickly and easily to any orientation. You can then paint just as you would normally and when you’re done, reset the orientation by double-clicking the icon or clicking the Reset Rotation icon in the Navigator. Rotating your image doesn’t affect the actual pixels so you can do it as many times as you like. You can also rotate by pressing Spacebar and Alt and holding them down together as you drag your cursor (Fig.09).
Turbulent Water

The thought of painting water in motion is intimidating, but in actual fact it’s quite easy if you take it steady. The first step is to get the colors down. We’ve already got the hues sorted for the basic ocean depths so now we need to create a whirlpool effect. To do this I color pick brights and darks from the immediate environment and sketch a series of arcs in an inverted pyramid. I use a light pressure on my pen so that I don’t create anything too solid-looking. I try not to make the pattern of lights and darks too regular as I don’t want the whirlpool to look striped. The boat is almost at the centre of the whirlpool and this means that light reflected from its hull and sail will be picked up by the swirling water. So, using browns and oranges I paint hints of reflection in the ocean below the boat (Fig.10).

The next step is to blend our colors. I use a version of my circular brush set to 0% Resaturation. It’s important not to blend too much, so I calibrate my brush using the Brush Calibration panel to respond only to hard pressure. This makes it easier to apply a light touch.

Last of all are the bubbles. I draw the bubbles in little groups that either follow the swirl direction of the whirlpool or cling to the surface in the general vicinity. For each bubble I paint a dark, slightly irregular arc representing the lower part of the bubble and a bright highlight representing the top. Inside the bubble I’ll sometimes dab a hint of color, either brown for reflection of the boat or the monster’s skin, or turquoise to represent the depths beneath. I am careful to make my bubbles slightly irregular and different sizes to give a more authentic effect.

Little Fluffy Clouds

To add interest the piece I’m going to paint some fluffy clouds on the horizon. I’m deliberately going for a semi-surreal effect because I think that will fit in well with the overall concept of mythology. Using my Artists’ Oils brush I paint a series of dark arcs directly onto the rough texture of the sky. I press harder on the side opposite the light source (the Sun) in order to indicate shadow. I make the arcs smooth and vary them slightly in size. I’m also careful not to make their positioning too regular. When that’s done I choose a brighter orange and basically just fill in the pattern I’ve created, taking care to leave more dark paint visible on the side opposite the light source (Fig.11).

Blending the Clouds

Blending is a two stage process. First I use low-pressure dabs of the circular brush to add blended highlights, and I also introduce some high contrast oranges into the shadows to add interest. Then, with the pure blending brush, I blend the centres of the cloud billows whilst taking care to leave the edges relatively sharp. A good guide when blending at this stage is to only blend colors that are similar. If you try to blend across too great a range the result will often be a muddy mess. I blend the rest of the sky using the same technique (Fig.12).

Waves

When painting the surface of the ocean it’s important to use free-flowing strokes, blending as required. I use quite a lot of orange to
represent light reflected from the sky. Some of the orange color penetrates the surface in the form of rays, but they decrease in size and intensity as depth increases. In the peaks of a couple of the waves I use high saturation color to communicate the transparency of the water, otherwise it would appear too solid (Fig.13).

Wavy Detail
I zoom in to 100% to add fine detail on the ocean surface, which mainly comprises of flecks of foam from the crests of the waves. I also include some extra foam and bubbles to emphasise the turbulence of the whirlpool (Fig.14).

Detailing the Boat
Working loosely from my reference image I apply detail to the Greek fishing boat. I start by blending the colors on the sail and adding some more saturated orange to indicate sunlight passing through the material. The corners of the sail are out of direct sunlight, so I beef up the shadows in those areas. I paint the two characters at opposite ends of the boat, clinging on for dear life as the boat goes under. For the ropes supporting the sail I use the straight Line tool, pressing V to enter line mode and clicking on the start- and end-points. To return to normal painting mode I press B (Fig.15).

Undersea Lighting
In the penultimate stage I want to add some additional lighting to Charybdis. When strong sunlight shines on turbulent water it creates
a rippling pattern of highlights on objects beneath the surface and that’s what I’m trying to replicate here. Because it’s very difficult to judge the exact strength of the lighting I’m going to use a layer. In this way I can alter the layer’s opacity and even delete it and start again if it all goes wrong. I create my layer with a Lighten attribute and set it to 50% initially. With my circular brush I apply some low-pressure white strokes in vague diamond shapes across the monster’s body. I am careful not to extend these highlights into the shadows because they only occur where the light strikes directly. I try and mould the shapes to the body form too, so that it appears like we’re wrapping the effect around a real object rather than just applying a flat filter. When I’m happy with the overall look I adjust the layer opacity, drop the layer to the canvas, zoom in 100% and tidy up here and there (Fig.16).

Final Tweaks
At this point I take a break from the image and come back to it a few days later. This helps give me a fresh perspective. I think everything looks okay apart from a couple of dark clouds in the top right, which tend to draw the eye and detract from the action. With a big Artists’ Oils brush I paint over the clouds with brighter colors then use the circular brush and blender to merge the area back into the sky. Finally I resize my image down to 2480 x 3425 pixels, tweak the contrast a little to enhance the intensity and save the image as an uncompressed TIF file. And that’s Charybdis completed; I hope you enjoyed the process (Fig.17).

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Chapter 02: Leshy

Software Used: Painter

The Leshy is a forest-dwelling creature from mythology, who is able to change size from the smallest blade of grass to the tallest tree. He appears in the form of a pale-skinned man with green eyes and a beard made from grass and vines, and is sometimes rumored to have a tail, hooves and horns. The Leshy is the friend of other forest denizens and is often depicted in the company of bears or gray wolves. Because his official title is Lord of the Forest he carries a wooden club, presumably in case anyone disputes it.

For this tutorial I'll be using Painter 12 to illustrate the Leshy in his native habitat. I did wonder whether to show the Leshy in miniature form; but I think that would make him too ineffective-looking, so instead I'm opting for full-on giant mode.

Concept Sketch

I quickly sketch several representations of the Leshy, with his grassy beard, hooves and club. I browsed some horned animals on the web and considered what different types of horn would look like. Goat and oxen horns would make him appear too demonic and bull horns too mundane, so I went with moose antlers which fit in well with the woodland environment. To simulate a pencil I use a circular brush set to Grainy Soft Cover, with Pressure-dependent Opacity set to 100% and 95% Grain. The Grain setting allows me to give that characteristic charcoal roughness when I boost the contrast of the paper settings. I also sketch in some bright highlights to help give the concepts dimension and form (Fig.01).

Color Concept

I then paint another concept of my chosen character, this time in color. I paint it small and quickly, taking about 10 minutes. The idea with the color concept is that it gives me a feel of how the finished image might look in terms of color and composition. I decide that despite my initial sketch appearing OK, the Leshy strikes me as too human looking, more like an old bloke with a green beard than a mystical Lord of the Forest. For that reason I go back to my sketching and create another concept, this time depicting the Leshy as thinner and less human in appearance (Fig.02).
Outline sketch

I collect a few reference photos to help me with key areas such as the Leshy’s pose and the forest floor. Next I create a 1448 x 2000 pixel canvas in a low value color. I don’t like starting with a pure white canvas as I find it a bit dazzling and also it prevents you from adding highlights in the sketch stage.

On this new canvas I create a layer onto which I sketch my new; slim-line Leshy, referring to my character reference to get a general idea of the torso anatomy and the hand positions when gripping the wooden club (Fig.03).

Filling out the Sketch

Once I complete the outline sketch in black pencil I add areas of shadow. I don’t press too hard as I want the texture of the paper to show through. The final sketch stage is to create another layer above the sketch layer. This is my highlight layer: I switch to white and sketch over the areas that are affected by my primary light source, the sun, which will be above the character and slightly to its right (the left as we see it here) (Fig.04).

Creating a Palette

After browsing my reference photos I now create a color palette. I display my Mixer palette, clear it and dab onto it a new selection of colors based on the most prevalent colors in my reference photos. I have decided my scene will be damp and misty so I keep most of my colors in the mid to low saturation range whilst ensuring they cover a full range of values (light to dark).

When I’ve got the basic colors down I use the New Color Set From Mixer Pad option in the Mixer panel menu. This gives me a number of swatches in my Color Set Library panel, some of which I delete to keep the size manageable. I won’t be sticking strictly to these colors, but they do give me a good base on which to start (Fig.05).

Blocking in Colors

Still working at a relatively small level (2000 pixels high) I apply color directly to the canvas beneath my two sketch layers. So now I have the canvas, which is blank; layer 1, which contains the color; layer 2, which has the black pencil lines on it and layer 3, which has the white pencil highlights in it.

I make the decision to have my Leshy standing in a woodland clearing so that he doesn’t get lost amongst the trees (or get his antlers caught: I guess that’s why he finds it useful to change size). As he is very tall in his current incarnation I paint the horizon line close to the bottom of the canvas. This gives the impression that he is towering above us. As a general rule, characters who are the same height as the viewer will have their eyes in line with the horizon no matter how far in the distance they appear, assuming a flat surface.

In the foreground I slop some bright and dark colors to represent rocks. The middle distance is dominated by grass and bracken with the odd clump of weeds and a mass of brambles thrown in for good measure. The nature of the vegetation may well change further down the line, but right now my priority is covering the canvas with paint to give me a representative base from which to go forward.

The forest itself is represented by the looming shapes of trees, painted using desaturated greens and browns to suggest distant objects on a misty day. The trees are too far away to explicitly detail all but the largest boughs and branches, so I use blobs of a lighter value to represent the networks of smaller twigs. In order to avoid the forest looking like a solid mass I dapple the edges of the tree forms with dabs of sky color, which gives the effect of individual clumps of branches through which patches of sky can be seen (Fig.06).
Resize Up

Once the color is blocked in I resize the image upwards whilst retaining the aspect ratio. So 1448 x 2000 pixels becomes 3528 x 4500 pixels. This is larger than my final image will be because I like to work at this size in order to easily paint fine detail. Zooming in to 100% now reveals a mess of textures and paint blobs. This is good; if it wasn’t a mess I’d start to worry.

The textured, random nature of these brush strokes and blobs is very useful when painting vegetation and other non-ordered subjects. The human brain is not particularly good at inventing believable organic shapes from scratch, but it is good at finding patterns in randomness or semi-randomness. The messy brush strokes provide good stimulus from which embryonic clumps of grass, rocks and branches can emerge (Fig.07).

Painting the Forest

Using an Artists Oil’s brush with 50% Grain I add detail to the background forest. I use value as a method of communicating depth, with trees nearer the viewer being of lower value than those further away. I keep my strokes relatively loose so that they don’t overwhelm my main character with detail. Also, I make sure my brush strokes aren’t too sharp, for the same reason (Fig.08).

Suggesting Branches

Against the outer edges of the paint blobs representing the branches I etch lines of sky color. This gives the impression of branches being present without my having to laboriously paint every one of them. I allow some of the original texture to remain in the main body of the tree, smoothing it over very lightly with a blending brush so that no pixilation remains from the original upsizing (Fig.09).

Creature Detail

I now move on to the creature itself. I tend to add detail to a blocked-in color image using a three-stage process. First, I use the Artists’ Oils brush to further define the forms. The grain in the brush gives a nice textured effect and the pressure-dependent opacity ensures that a soft touch will blend the strokes (I always advise that in the General panel you set your Opacity to Pressure). A good tip when using Grain with Artists Oils is to set the Grain at around 50% because, oddly enough, increasing it beyond this value starts to decrease the effect.

For the next stage, which is the very fine detail, I’ll use my circular pencil brush with added Bleed and low Resaturation. I only use this in the areas that need extra detail so I don’t go over the whole thing again. Lastly, I use a blending brush to subtly merge similarly colored areas of paints in areas that need it. I’m very careful not to blend too much and to leave sharp boundaries where necessary (Fig.10).

Leshy Limbs

The arms and legs of my Leshy are composed partially of mossy roots that merge into the flesh of the forearms and shins. I paint these vegetation areas with darker greens, browns and reds. In order to give the impression of dark coloration rather than shadow, I include some specular highlights – little dots of bright paint reflecting the main light source (Fig.11).

Painting Antlers

I loosely reference the shape of a pair of antlers from a photo of a moose, simplifying and modifying them a little. The lighting in the photo does not match that of my image so I need to understand the shape of the antlers. The lower portion curves towards us and back up to point at the sky. The central and rear portion curves more gradually upwards, passing through the
vertical and, right at the tip, curving back just a little towards us. When we combine this with the position of our light source it gives a deep shadow underneath the lower points contrasting with the bright surface above. The shadow increases with height as the antler becomes more oblique to the light. Along the edges of the antlers I add thin lines of highlight and shadow to show thickness; otherwise they would look like they’re made of paper (Fig.12).

**Just Add Wolves**

According to the myth, the Leshy was often in the company of bears or gray wolves. I go for wolves and after I find a couple of reference images I paint three of the animals into the background using the small circular brush. I avoid using dark colors because the wolves are in the middle distance and therefore affected by the misty atmosphere. Because they are so far away we can’t make out the grain of their fur so I use a mottling, blended effect to portray their coats (Fig.13).

**Mossy Rocks**

In a damp environment like this rocks are likely to have moss on them. One useful tip for painting moss is to initially paint it using very dark colors then partially cover them with brighter greens. This helps give the impression that the moss has some thickness and is not just green paint smeared over the rock. For the rocks themselves I again use a combination of the Artists Oils brush and circular brush, the latter used primarily for detail. I set the color variability on the circular brush using the Color Variability panel. I set Hue, Value and Saturation to 18%, 1% and 1% respectively. This has the effect of a pronounced mottling of the hue (the color), and a slight variation of value (light and dark) and saturation on each brush dab (Fig.14).

**Vegetation**

The painting of vegetation can be approached in many different ways. This time I use the basic textures and colors already down on the canvas to sketch a dark, random mass of shapes representing grass, brambles and leaves. There are already a variety of shapes and patterns present from my initial coloring and these help with the impression of tangled foliage. With my blender brush I smooth this paint so that it appears out of focus. This is the background for my actual vegetation, which I paint on top using mainly, brighter colors and sharper strokes. I use some reference for the different types of plant, e.g., mbrambles, but I take care not to add too much detail to any particular area (Fig.15).

**Appropriate Detail**

As the vegetation gets further away the detail decreases until it fades into ill-defined areas of color. When combined with the color fading this gives a good impression of depth and it ensures that our main character stands out against the background (Fig.16).

**Finishing Off**

As is customary I leave my image for a day or two then come back to it to see if anything else needs doing. I apply a bit more detail to the Leshy’s face and blend some background areas that I had missed before (Fig.17). Last of all I save a copy of my image in TIF format at the specified size of 2480 x 3425 pixels. I ensure Resolution is set to 300ppi so that the image can be printed if required. That concludes the tutorial and I hope you’ve enjoyed it.
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Chapter 03: Hidebehind
Software Used: Painter

Introduction
The somewhat unimaginatively named hidebehind is documented in American folklore and is reputed to be a fearsome, nocturnal creature that lives in the woods and preys on unsuspecting humans. Vicious and secretive, it was blamed for the disappearance of colonial loggers when they failed to return to camp. As you might have guessed, the key feature of the hidebehind is its ability to swiftly hide behind things, usually trees, whenever someone glances in its direction. The hidebehind is described as a large and powerful animal, although this is likely to be an assumption owing to the fact that nobody has ever seen one... or at least, seen one and lived.

In this tutorial, I'll be painting the hidebehind in its natural habitat. Because the creature has no official description other than big and fearsome, I needed to invent something of my own. Due to the nature of the hidebehind, I decided the image should be an environment-based piece and for this reason I worked in landscape format.

I used Painter 12 for the whole tutorial.

Gathering Reference and Making a Start
My first step was to gather some inspiration and get some sort of rough landscape down on canvas. For inspiration, I looked for photos and paintings of woodland and partially desaturated them so I could better see the tonal ranges. Seeing as the hidebehind is a nocturnal creature, my scene needed to take place at night, under a full moon. With this in mind, I checked out a couple of Frederic Remington paintings. Frederic Remington was an American painter who depicted a number of moonlit settings in his work. I took note of the palettes he used and the way he portrayed light and shadow, and tried to emulate that in my initial sketch.

Moonlight creates a different visual effect to sunlight, even though it is essentially the same thing. In our eyes, we have two constructs that allow us to see and these are called “cones” and “rods”. Cones allow us to see colors and function well in bright light. Rods are very good at seeing in dim light, but are unable to perceive color. This means that in moonlight, which is many thousands of times dimmer than sunlight, we see using rods and can therefore perceive much less color than we can during the day.

Another attribute of moonlight is that it casts very dark shadows, because there is so little light being reflected from the sky and other parts of the landscape.

I created a small canvas of 1400 x 967 pixels, which represented the same aspect ratio as my
intended final image. Working with a big Artists’ Oils brush and a rough canvas Paper texture, I color-picked from a Frederic Remington piece to get the basic tones down, using very dark colors for the shadows and ensuring they were consistent with a bright moon somewhere over the viewer’s right shoulder (Fig.01).

The Hidebehind
I included a large tree trunk in the foreground and it’s behind this that the hidebehind would, er, hide behind! I considered making the creature man-like, but I thought that a humanoid creature concealing itself behind a tree is not a particularly difficult or a noteworthy feat. So I decided to make the hidebehind a quadruped, with long front legs and squat hindquarters. I also gave him a hugely long snout, like a crocodile. When he conceals himself amongst the trees he must sit back on his haunches and angle his head vertically, so that his snout does not poke out the side of his hiding place. In this way, we can communicate to the viewer that this behavior is something inherent to the hidebehind’s nature and not just what he happens to be doing at the time.

I roughly sketched the creature’s form, using my Artists’ Oils brush, ensuring that the shadows were consistent with my primary light source, which was the full moon. I also gave him big, staring eyes on account of him being nocturnal (Fig.02).

Cementing the Basics
Still working small and painting roughly, I blocked in my colors across the whole canvas, making sure that all the main elements were where I wanted them to be and the lighting worked well. I included the figures of two loggers coming home from a hard day’s work. I placed them left of centre, but not too far towards the edge or they’d become lost and the relationship between them and the hidebehind would not be as strong.

As usual, I frequently flipped the image horizontally as I progressed, in order to pick up things I would otherwise overlook (Fig.03).

Upsizing
When I was ready to begin work on the detail, I upsized my image to its final size - 4960 x 3426 pixels. The paper texture I’d been using in my rough stages was even more pronounced now and I tended to use it as a base to add random detail later on, such as grass and tree bark (Fig.04).

The Night Sky
The way I approached painting the sky was to have some distant, fuzzy clouds lit by moonlight and some closer, dark clouds that are maybe the remnants of a rainstorm. I represented the clear sky using a deep, low-saturation blue and later I dotted some stars in there. Go out during the full moon, under a clear sky, and let your eyes adjust for a few minutes. You’ll see that the sky is actually several shades lighter than the horizon and so in this piece, I tried to replicate that effect, exaggerating it slightly for emphasis.
I added a hint of warmth to the horizon to represent the lingering light of the sun (Fig.05).

**Blending the Sky**

Once I was happy with the overall look of the sky, I set about blending the colors for a more convincing cloudy effect. I did this in two stages. First, I used a basic circular brush set to Grainy Soft Cover and with Opacity set to Expression Pressure. I also set the Color Variability to H: 18%, S: 1%, V: 1%. This meant that every dab would vary noticeably in terms of hue (color) and only very slightly in terms of saturation and value (also called tone, or light and dark). The greater the saturation, the more obvious the hue variation is, so because I was using low saturation colors the variation is still quite subtle. It results in faint purples and greens being present when painting with a blue brush and I found that helped to replicate the look of the eyes in a low-light environment.

When I’d gone over the sky areas with the round brush, I used an Artists’ Oils brush with Amount set to 0% and Grain set to 50%, for proper blending. I used this brush sparingly, teasing the edges of the clouds and blending the areas of open sky a little more strongly (Fig.06).

**Teeth**

The creature’s muzzle is basically a long beak lined with teeth. I faded it into darkness towards the top of the canvas so that it does not lead the viewer’s gaze out of the image. I was also careful to include the black shadows in their appropriate places, as these related to the position of the moon.

Because the moonlight is so dim, I resisted the urge to use a lot of bright highlights. I used the occasional bright specular reflection later, but overall I kept the values restrained in the mid to dark range. In terms of color, I gave the creature a blue tint and the tree trunk a brown tint, to provide a better distinction between the two (Fig.07).

**Painting the Eye**

I gave my hidebehind a huge staring eye, all the better for him to see his prey at night. First, I painted a dark circle to represent the full eye, followed by a lighter iris. On the surface facing
the off-canvas moon, I painted a couple of specular highlights. Around the highlights, I also painted a diffused area of lesser brightness to simulate the surface film over the eye. On the side of the eye opposite to where the moonlight falls, I dabbed a little higher contrast blue, as if the light is passing through the transparent eye and emerging on the other side. Last of all, I add a couple of eyelids, adding a shadow line on the top one and a highlight line on the lower one, in order to give the impression they have thickness.

It’s perfectly fine to use layers when painting something like this, but usually I don’t. I find that working directly onto the canvas concentrates the mind and forces me to understand how each brush stroke affects the existing paint. Also, I find more than a couple of layers confusing and always end up painting on the wrong one! (Fig.08).

### Alien Muscles

Just to clarify, I mean alien as in “unusual”, not extraterrestrial, although the same concept applies. It’s more difficult than it looks to create an animal that looks viable, but doesn’t resemble an existing creature, and a big part of that is getting the musculature right. Here I went with powerful shoulders and chest muscles, and strong, wiry legs. The upper arms are vaguely humanoid, with the triceps and biceps muscles clearly visible.

Where the shoulder attaches to the body, I painted some creases and fatty overhangs to give the impression that the arm is not just stuck on there. The broad chest muscles suggest a creature with powerful forelimbs and the ability to move quickly. I also added folds of flesh to the mid and lower back, to make it apparent that the creature is a little overweight, no doubt from consuming too many loggers.

For the feet, I went with hooves, emphasizing that this is a fast-moving beast. Because the hidebehind is squatting rather than standing, I painted his hind feet parallel to the ground, just like a sitting dog (Fig.09).

### Painting the Ground

In low light we can see less detail than in strong light, such as sunlight. The key thing here is to avoid making the ground and the environment too fussy and instead to concentrate mainly on the contrast between dark shadow and the moonlit grass and rock. I used firm pressure in order to produce the sharp lines of the shadowed areas and lighter pressure for the tufts of grass, the stone and the earth textures (Fig.10).

### Making Rocks Look Real

Because I had already done the groundwork for the rocks, they already had basic form and texture. The dim light means that I had less of a value range to play with than if it were daytime, so I was careful not to make my lighter colors too bright.

When painting the rock, I tried to imagine its three-dimensional form in my head and divide the rock into planes. The planes directly facing the light are generally the brightest, whereas those facing away at an angle are dimmer. If a plane is not impacted by the light at all, then, bearing in mind it’s moonlight and the shadows are dark, I would paint it as almost black. I emphasized some of the edges that separate planes with faint highlights and this helped bring out the shape of the rock. As I painted, I...
color-picked from the canvas and also from the Temporal Color Palette, which I had assigned to the ‘1’ key for easy access. To add the final touches, I used my circular brush with the Color Variability set. This gave a nice mottled effect, ideal for anything organic (Fig.11).

The Loggers
The two loggers comprised the secondary focus; the primary focus being the hidebehind himself. I painted them looking in the direction of the creature, but their relaxed gait and neutral expressions shows that they haven’t actually seen him. Perhaps they saw a movement out of the corner of their eyes and, like the legends say, when they turned their gaze towards it, there was nothing there.

I then zoomed in to between 100-150% to add detail to this area. Because these two gentlemen were also the secondary focus of the piece, I used a slightly stronger color for their skin, so that they were not lost in the landscape (Fig.12).

The Path
To make sure the two loggers weren’t just wandering aimlessly around, I included a path that meandered from the distant trees then moves off left (in the current orientation) across our field of view. I left the path ill-defined, as it would be if it were a well-travelled footpath, rather than a purpose-built affair. I painted it in a light, desaturated brown color so that it looked dusty (Fig.13).

Adding Interest
To add a little interest, I painted an old wooden hut in the middle distance and surrounded it with bushes and discarded planks of wood. I kept the paint values within a very narrow range so as not to draw too much attention and I kept the detail to a minimum for the same reason. I also included a pile of tree-trunks not far from the hut, to reinforce the idea that the loggers have been working in the area (Fig.14).

Rocky Outcrop
I turned a blob of paint in the middle-distance into a rocky outcrop. Again, there’s no need to go overboard on definition and so instead, I let the brush textures suggest most of the detail, and only concentrated on the direction of the light source and the position of the shadows. I find that reducing the paper dimensions in the Paper panel can give a really good grainy effect, which helps to prevent the over-smooth result you can sometimes get with digital brushes (Fig.15).
Heavens Above
I dotted a few stars into the darker patches in the sky to represent the gaps between the distant clouds. I also varied the sizes of the stars just slightly, and over the larger ones, I applied a couple of dabs of a Glow brush set to a deep red color (Fig.16).

The Foreground Leaves
I had already roughed in the leaves on the foreground trees and so now it was time to refine them. I didn’t want to paint every leaf and besides, it was too dark to distinguish such details, so I used a small circular brush to paint a jagged outline against the night sky. To achieve the sharp edges I color-picked the sky in that area and used that to paint the gaps between the leaves. Here and there, I left thin lines to represent branches and twigs (Fig.17).

Finishing Up
I went over the entire image and cleaned up any loose ends, and then left it for a short while before coming back to it and checking again. The first thing I noticed was that the two loggers were still slightly lost in the background. To remedy this, I used a quick method of highlighting using a new layer set to Overlay.
set the layer to 40% and dabbed some bright white paint onto it, then dropped the layer onto the canvas. This had the effect of strengthening the light falling on the two gentlemen by increasing the brightness and saturation of their shirts and skin.

I decided to shorten the shadows throughout the image, effectively making the unseen moon higher in the sky. I also adjusted one of the tree shadows, so it was partially falling on one of the loggers, which I think helps to integrate the two characters with their environment.

When I was happy with the image, I increased the image contrast just a touch and saved it as a TIF (Fig.18).

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Chapter 04: Mamalarang

Software Used: Painter

Introduction

A mamalarang, so I’m told, is a witch who uses insects to infest the bodies of her enemies, eventually resulting in their death. She is of human appearance and her power lies in her insect magic. The mamalarang ties hair from her intended victims around a bug, and by jabbing the unfortunate creature with a pin she tortures her enemies with all sorts of insect-based nastiness.

Before I began I had a think about how I wanted to portray the mamalarang. It was important to get across the message of her primary characteristic, which is her ability to hex her enemy with bugs. I thought the best way to communicate this was to show her in “bug prodding” mode, alongside a selection of her victims who are feeling the effects.

I assumed she would perform this magic from a distance. This suggested a collage rather than a straight scene portrayal, so I knew I could show her and her victims in the same image. Furthermore, because her outward appearance is that of a human, I could show just her face and hands and not bother about the rest of her body.

Outline Sketch

I created a small canvas of 1500 pixels in height with the same aspect ratio as my final image specification. I created a new layer to sketch out my initial idea. In the upper half of the image I had the head and hands of the mamalarang. She is grasping a hefty beetle in one hand and getting ready to stab it with a needle.

I made the beetle oversized to make it clear what she was doing, and also as a way of adding interest to what would otherwise be a bland section of the canvas. Beneath her we have three unfortunate victims in varying states of insect infestation (Fig.01).

Rough Value Sketch

I’m not particularly good at producing clean sketches right from the word go and that’s why I often use multiple layers. I can sketch as many ideas as I need on successive layers and merge or delete the old sketches as I go. I created my value sketch (lights and darks) and reduced the opacity of my outline sketch layer so I could use that as a guide. I created another layer on top of that and it was onto this new layer that I sketched my Values.

Because my composition is based around a collage of two scenes I had two main light sources. One was for the mamalarang and one for her victims, whom I situated in a jungle. The mamalarang is illuminated with some up lighting, which emanates from an invisible light source somewhere between her hands. I illuminated the jungle scene from the top right and made a mental note to remember to simulate the dappled shadow effects of the trees and foliage when it came to the painting stage.
I also took the opportunity to revise my initial characters at the bottom of the canvas. My original sketches were too inhuman in appearance so I replaced them with some new guys. I wanted to give the impression that they were normal human beings whose bodies were bulging with emerging insects (Fig.02).

Underpainting
I merged my outline sketch and my value sketch together so I had a single layer and a blank canvas. I created another layer in between the two and quickly painted my color scheme onto it using a pressure-dependent Artists’ Oils brush with 50% grain. I often use color sets as my main method of selecting color. However this time I used only the Temporal Color palette, which I assigned to the \ key using Edit > Preferences > Customise Keys and choosing the Toggle Temporal Color Palette option under Other Shortcuts 9 (Fig.03).

Upsizing to Working Dimensions
I dropped both layers to the canvas and resized upwards to a working size using Canvas > Resize. My working size was actually larger than my specified final version so I could easily add detail without resorting to unfeasibly small brush sizes (Fig.04).

Beginning Rough Detail
Working directly onto the canvas with a big Artists’ Oils brush, I addressed the mamalarang’s rough facial detail. It’s essential to remember where your light source is coming from. In this case it’s coming from somewhere below her chin in a spooky up-lighting effect. This gave good illumination to the center of her face whilst the cheeks and forehead receded into darkness. This then made it look as if she was staring out of the page at you (Fig.05).

Whilst it’s always helpful to use references for faces there’s no substitute for learning the form of the head and its three-dimensional surfaces or planes. Often it’s easy to find a character reference, but difficult to find one lit in the way you want, unless you shoot your own. Because lighting can significantly change the appearance of a face, it’s a useful skill to be able to apply.
your own lighting model to an image you’ve drawn from reference. There’s no quick way to achieve this other than to practice drawing the human form and becoming familiar with its structure.

Loony
For reasons I didn’t fully understand, my mamalarang was looking more and more like a lunatic with every passing minute. I made a note to address this very soon. Meanwhile I continued to add rough color detail and flipped the image every so often to gain a fresh perspective. During these stages I wasn’t bothered about getting my colors to blend. It was more about keeping true to the original values and ensuring the colors were fitting and didn’t clash (Fig.06).

Facial Detail
I zoomed in a bit on the face and add some finer detail. In addition to my standard Artists’ Oils brush I used a circular grainy brush set to Grainy Soft Cover. I set the Color Variability on this brush to H: 11%, S: 1%, V: 1%. This meant that each dab would vary quite a lot in hue (color), and very slightly in saturation and value. This gave a faint mottling effect, which was well suited to skin, especially the witch’s (Fig.07).

Changing the Expression
Then it was time to deal with the witch’s crazy expression and make her a little more focused in her madness. I brought the eyebrows down and together, which pulled them in towards the bridge of her nose. I then brought her eyelids closer together and made the lower eyelid almost horizontal against the eye. This gave the impression that she was creasing up her face in spiteful anger rather than surprise (Fig.08).
Highlighting Hair
In order to provide some highlights on her hair I assumed a secondary light source that shone from above and behind. This light source was cheating a little as it didn’t affect any other part of the image. Its purpose was just to ensure that the mass of dark hair was not too flat.

When painting hair it’s a good idea to paint clumps of hair rather than each individual strand. In this instance I used light pressure on my Artists’ Oils brush for the highlighted strands, with stronger dabs for the occasional bright specula highlight (Fig. 09).

Using Reflections to Enhance Form
As well as value (light and dark), reflected light is also very useful when portraying form. I colored the beetle’s shell red, and once I’d got the basic values down I added some reflected light. On the top of the shell I painted some low saturation, mid-value highlights to represent the diffused light from the sky. On the beetle’s sides I used a more highly saturated mid-value green to simulate light reflected from the forest floor. I often exaggerate this effect as I find it can really add to the impact of a piece (Fig. 10).

Realistic Skin
As well as using the circular brush with Color Variability I also blended the skin using my Artists’ Oils blender – essentially the same brush I used for painting, but with the amount set to 0. I was careful not to blend too much and also to leave some of the creases sharp edged, otherwise I would have ended up with a fuzzy mess. I also added some more highly saturated color at the junctures between light and shadow to simulate the light passing through the skin. This is called sub-surface scattering. The skin was finished off with some subtle specular highlights (Fig. 11).

Witchy Accessories
I then decided that my mamalarang’s insect pendant looked too similar to the beetle she’s holding. I flipped it upside down and moved it onto her garment so that it looked like a brooch. I don’t know if it’s commonplace for witches to wear brooches, but there’s nothing to say she shouldn’t (Fig. 12).

Painting Metal
I wanted her brooch to be metallic, so I used mid-gray as my base color. Bright specular highlights helped reinforce the metallic look as well as reflected light from the witch’s skin and clothing. To finish off I made very sparing use of the Glow brush, set to a highly saturated low value orange, and dabbed it around the brightest highlights (Fig. 13).
The Forest Scene
So far I'd concentrated on the top half of the image so now I wanted to get started on the rest. I zoomed out to around 50% to strengthen and further define the lights and darks representing the dappling of sunlight filtering through the tree canopy.

To simulate depth I used a couple of techniques. First, I reduced the saturation of the more distant foliage so it looked like there's a light haze in the air. Then I included a path in the picture, which curves off into the distance. Both these methods together helped to prevent the environment from appearing flat, like a painted backdrop on a stage (Fig.14).

Foliage
Unless your foliage is close to the viewer then it's probably best not to try and paint every leaf and every twig individually. Too much detail in the background can distract from the real focus and it's very time consuming to do it that way. Here I used my Artists' Oils brush followed by my circular brush to suggest clumps of leaves and the odd branch or two.

Sometimes instead of actually painting the bunches of leaves, I'll pick the background color and “eat into” the foreground foliage paint. This creates gaps in the leaves through the use of negative space (Fig.15).

Bug Bloated Bodies
My characters are infested by bugs so I wanted that clearly communicated. I thought that simply painting clouds of beetles and flies wouldn't give the effect I needed because it would just look like the characters were being attacked. Instead I added some grotesque boils and gashes to the bodies of my characters, where the bugs are bursting out. I painted some specular highlights on these areas in particular to emphasize the taught flesh and the infected red hue (Fig.16).

Adding Contrast
One method of accentuating the lighting on your piece is by using an Overlay layer. Here I wanted to make the sunlight on this character brighter and more striking. I set the Overlay layer to around 70% and painted over the
sunlit areas with a bright, slightly orangey brush. When I finished I dropped the layer to the canvas and tidied up with the small circular brush (Fig.17).

**Adding Bugs**

I only added these bugs when I'd fully rendered my character and his immediate surroundings. I did this because otherwise it would have been too time-consuming to paint around them. I could have used a separate layer for the bugs, but with the exception of tweaking I like to paint directly on the canvas. I included a great cloud of flies and beetles swarming out of his mouth just for fun (Fig.18).

**Painting the Forest Floor**

Take a walk in the woods or indeed anywhere in the countryside and you’ll see that nature is not particularly orderly. It's difficult to tell where one plant ends and others begin, especially in an overgrown environment. Stones, grass, plants and tree roots are sometimes impossible to tell apart. For this reason I tried not to think in terms of individual bushes or plants, but concentrated on the values and the gross shapes.

When I had a patch of shadow I quickly painted some leaf edges, but I didn't go so far as to link them together or attempt to paint the network of branches and stalks that connected them. In this way I hoped to achieve a more random, natural look. I also kept in mind that I had some distant haze going on. This meant that the further away the foliage was the lighter the shadows became and the fewer details I needed to paint (Fig.19).

**Contrasting Elements**

The big beetle is a key element in the image so I wanted it to stand out. I achieved this by keeping the color values on its legs very dark where they overlapped the forest scene. The bright distant haze contrasts nicely with the dark legs and pushes the beetle into the foreground (Fig.20).
Don’t Forget the Hair!
My beetle has hair. Not actually on its head, but wrapped around it, as this is the method by which the mamalarang can magic up her devious insect hoards. Again, I used the method of adding a little blue reflected light from the sky to give the impression of shiny hair rather than dull smoke, which it would otherwise look like (Fig.21).

Tidying Up
I was almost done. I left the painting for a couple of days, then came back to see if I could spot anything that still needed doing. Because I started from a sketch and made any changes early on there shouldn’t have been any nasty surprises. Happily in this respect it seemed OK. I thought it would be nice to give my witch a couple of ladybird earrings and tidy up a few brush strokes (Fig.22).

Last of all I resized my image down to the specified size and saved it as a TIFF file (Fig.23). That concludes this tutorial and I hope you’ve found it useful.

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Jiang Shi
Chapter 05: Jiang Shi
Software Used: Painter

Introduction
A Jiang Shi is a type of vampire zombie from Chinese folklore. According to legend, the Jiang Shi rests in a coffin during the day, or hides in a cave, and then comes out at night to terrorize the local community and seek all types of warm-blooded prey. When it catches its quarry it absorbs their life essence, or Qi. In typical zombie fashion it holds its arms outstretched when it’s hunting although it’s also rumored to hop everywhere, which is not typical zombie – or vampire – behavior.

Defining the Artists’ Oils Brush
I use two basic brushes for most of my paintings. The most important one to me is the Artists Oils brush, which I use in combination with paper grain to produce an authentic oil painting effect. The most important thing is to link the opacity with an Expression setting of Pressure. I set the value of opacity to 100%. For the grain I use a mid-range value as this maximizes grain appearance with Artists’ Oils (for some reason the effect decreases again as you increase from 50 to 100%).

For the Artists’ Oils specific settings I set the amount to 100% and have high Viscosity and low Blend. Bristling and Clumpiness I set fairly high and Trail-off very low at 4%. I work with the Wetness at 100%.

For this and all my brushes I tweak the brush-specific Brush Calibration settings in the Brush Calibration panel so that I get a full range of pressure settings, from feather-light blending to hard lines (Fig.01).

The Circular Brush
My second basic brush is the circular brush, which is simply a Grainy Soft Cover brush with 100% opacity linked to Pressure. I set the Grain value very high as grain works as expected for this brush variant. I link both Resaturation and Bleed to Pressure and set them medium-low. This allows for blending at low pressures and solid paint when the pen is pressed harder. Again, I spend a little time tweaking Brush Calibration to make sure the brush performs optimally. Dryout I set very high to prevent my strokes running out of paint (Fig.02).

Painting Concepts
I roughly sketch a couple of color concepts using the Artists’ Oils brush. One character I have in semi-profile and the other is reaching towards the viewer. At this stage I’m not bothered about detail, just overall composition.
I decide that I like the latter pose best as it provides the best involvement for the viewer (Fig.03).

Choosing the Face and Head
My character concepts are quite small so I decide to do some separate concepts for the face. I spend about 10 minutes on each with the intention of picking the most appealing and using it as a base for my final character. I decide to go with option B in the end. I found A too miserable, C was too devious, D looked more mentally challenged than vampire and E was too reptilian. I included F because he makes me laugh (Fig.04).

Beginning the Painting
Before I start I collect some references. I also find a couple of photos of traditional Chinese clothing and an excellent Chinese hat. In order to get a reference for the hands I take a photo of myself in a similar pose to that of my concept character and then use Smart Blur to remove all the distracting detail. I create a canvas of 700 x 967 pixels and, loosely referencing my collected images, sketch the initial outline of the Jiang Shi using a dark Artists Oils brush. It has next to no detail at this stage and represents just the basic pose (Fig.05).

Rough Color
The next stage is to add rough color using the Artists Oils brush. For my concepts I used a limited range Color Set palette composed of orangey reds, but for the actual painting I’m going to pick colors as necessary from the Temporal Color Palette, which I have assigned to the \ key for ease of use.

I choose a hue contrast between my character and the background, which is a rocky cave wall. This makes him stand out and hopefully appear to be reaching for the viewer. Again, details aren’t important right now, but in addition to the composition I’m now looking at defining my character’s form via light and shadow. In this case his hat is particularly integral to producing that effect as the shadow it casts over his eyes and forehead gives solidity and form to the focus of the piece – the face. It also portrays a more
sinister ambience rather than having the whole head lit uniformly.

I make the shadows more desaturated than the directly lit areas, to account for light reflected from the gray-blue walls of the cave. This has the added advantage of providing some linkage between the character and the background. Contrast is good, but if it’s overplayed the result can end up looking pasted and flat (Fig.06).

Resizing the Image
I’m going to work fairly large in order to be able to easily add fine detail, so I resize the image from 700 x 967 pixels to 3619 x 5000 pixels. It’s very important to keep the aspect ratio (X vs. Y) the same to avoid stretching and distortion. When resizing upwards it also blurs your brush strokes, but that’s fine because I haven’t yet added any detail and any blurring will be painted over later in the process (Fig.07).

Making a Start on Detail
If you’ve seen any of my other tutorials you’ll know that I don’t have any sort of strategy for which parts of the painting to detail first. Sometimes I’ll begin with the background, other times with the focus and often I’ll just jump all over the place on the painting and do a bit here and a bit there until it’s all done. For no particular reason, I’m starting on this piece with the face. The rough brush strokes I’ve added have already taken the face in a pleasing direction. I accentuate the mottling on the cheeks and around the mouth, and tweak the blobby nose to make it lopsided and distorted. As for the mouth itself, in the rough brush strokes I can see a crooked toothy grimace onto which I further define fangs, exposed gums and taut skin (Fig.08).

Zombie Clothing
Once I’ve got the face looking broadly as I want it I zoom out to about 33% and have a play around with the zombie’s garments. I have a small black and white photo of a guy in traditional Chinese robes so I use this to inspire some ideas about what the Jiang Shi is wearing. The photo is too small and blurred to make out any details, but that’s OK because I’m painting
the Jiang Shi’s clothing as very ragged and disordered, as you’d expect from a vampire zombie. Because of this I can get away without making the clothing functional and instead build it from folds, creases and swathes of ragged material (Fig.09).

**Little Touches**

I add a bit of embroidery to certain parts of the creature’s robes, and a few other intricacies too. I make sure I keep these areas localized—otherwise the clothing would appear too fussy (Fig.10).

**Painting the Arms and Hands**

When painting the hands and arms I keep my reference photo handy so that I can keep checking my painting against the photographed pose. One important point is to bear in mind the direction of the light source and where in space your painting elements are situated. Combining this information will give you the position of your highlights and shadows. It’s not necessary to try and paint shadows with ray-tracing accuracy, but they need to be roughly in the right place for the painting to read right.

Using the Artists’ Oils brush I refine the hands and arms, using saturated oranges and yellows for directly lit areas and desaturated oranges for shadows (which look blue when viewed against the saturated colors). Because the Jiang Shi is undead I add some areas of decomposing flesh to the arms. Of course, you can get plenty of references from Google for such gruesomeness, but personally I prefer to paint it from my imagination (Fig.11)!

**Smoothing the Skin**

To add fine detail I zoom in to 100% and use my circular brush. Using a hard pressure on this brush produces dense lines whilst a lighter pressure blends existing paint. I also use a third brush for blending only, which is a copy of my circular brush, but with zero saturation. This allows for a smoother blend and should be used sparingly to avoid an excessively digital, fuzzy look (Fig.12).
Spicing Things Up

It’s a good idea to make sure all your main elements are present as early as possible, but small changes can be made any time. In this instance I decide that because this guy’s hand is looking a bit smooth and ladylike it could do with some roughening up. I take a chunk out of the fleshy part near his thumbs, being mindful to add a variety of reds and a couple of tiny white highlights to make the wound authentic looking. I also add a few more wrinkles to the skin using the circular brush (Fig.13).

Rim Lighting

To add impact I indulge in a bit of fancy lighting by imagining a bright, localized light source to the left of the image. This provides some stark rim lighting that helps define the form of our Jiang Shi. I use this technique sparingly because it can easily make objects appear flat (Fig.14).

Artistic License

Strictly speaking, the lighting on both hands should be identical. However, because the creature’s right hand (on the left as we see it) is pointed towards the edge of the painting and his left hand is nearer the focus (the head), I accentuate the lighting on the left hand and decrease it on the right. This has the twin effect of drawing the viewer’s eye to the focus whilst not leading the viewer’s eye out of the image via a bright element close to the border (Fig.15).
Using an Overlay Layer
The focus of this piece is the head area of the creature and, to some extent, its upper torso and left hand (on our right). I decide to boost the saturation and value of the Jiang Shi’s head and for variation, I use an Overlay layer. I create a layer using the Layers panel and set it to Overlay. Then I set the saturation to 50% and with a high value, saturated orange I make light strokes across the sunlit areas of the face and head. I’m careful not to include the shadow because I want the shadow to remain dim and under-saturated. When I’m done I drop the layer to the canvas and continue as normal (Fig.16).

Final Clothing Detail
At 100% zoom I tidy up the Jiang Shi’s clothing. As I mentioned previously, it’s not particularly functional and it wouldn’t win any fashion design prizes but overall I think it works as intended. I add a couple of buttons in amongst the tattered strands of material and beef up the embroidery a little so that it catches the light on the uppermost sides of creases (Fig.17).

The Background
So far I’ve done very little to the background since my original small color sketch. Because I intend this to be a portrait painting, the background need be nothing more than a suggestion of environment. Legend has it that the Jiang Shi often spends his nights in a cave, so I’ve gone with a generic rock texture. I keep the fine detail to a minimum and use hopefully just enough to convey the location impression I’m after, whilst not overpowering our main subject (Fig.18).

The Straw Hat
The Jiang Shi’s hat in this instance is made from a straw weave. Happily I don’t need to paint a thousand strands of straw in order to make that clear. Instead, I suggest the texture by lightly sketching a number of long horizontal and shorter vertical lines. I paint the horizontal lines so that they follow the lateral ellipse of the hat shape, and the vertical lines so they converge at the apex. I am always aware of where my light source is coming from so I adjust the value of the paint color accordingly (Fig.19).

Applying Finishing Touches
A quick appraisal tells me that it’s almost finished so I leave it for a few days and come back to look at it with a fresh perspective. I enhance some of the detail, mostly around the arms and upper clothing, and also adjust the color balance a little in order to bring out the contrasts (Fig.20).

The last thing left to do is to resize the image down to its specified dimensions and save it as a 300ppi TIF.

That wraps up this tutorial and I hope you enjoyed it (Fig.21).

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Chapter 06: Cipactli

Software Used: Painter

The Idea

In Aztec mythology, Cipactli was a sea monster with a prodigious appetite, so much so that it boasted numerous extra mouths, which yawned from various joints on its body.

Physically Cipactli was a patchwork of different creatures and was said to resemble a fusion of crocodile, fish, and toad.

For this tutorial, I’m going to use this description to depict the hideous Cipactli, and demonstrate how a convincing creature can be created from even the most outlandish description. I will be using Painter 12.

Concept Sketches

First, I sketch out some ideas. As the description doesn’t specify which parts of Cipactli correspond to which animal, it’s up to me to choose. I experiment with him having the head of a toad, the torso of a fish (do fishes have torsos?) and the body of a crocodile, but the one I like best has a vicious fish’s head, the forequarters of a toad and the hindquarters of a crocodile (Fig.01).

Create the Canvas

Next, I create my main image canvas. I start small, only half the size of my specification, because at this stage I’ll only be fleshing out the concept and not laying down any detail (Fig.02).

Using the Concept as a Guide

I paste my concept sketch as a layer, reduce the opacity and use it as a guide. This doesn’t mean I have to strictly adhere to the original lines, but it does provide a timesaving method of replicating the basic shapes. Above this layer I create another layer, onto which I draw the sketch (Fig.03).

The Sketch

During the course of sketching, I decide that Cipactli should have six legs rather than four. After all, the specification doesn’t actually say how many limbs he should possess (and I’d guess that nobody really knew in the first place).
So I add the full body of a crocodile and join it in a Frankenstein-style to the toad’s torso.

I keep the environment simple yet representative of Cipactli being a sea-monster (in other words: cliffs, rocks, sand and water). When I’ve finished the sketch I remove the concept guide layer so that I’m left with the canvas and the sketch layer (Fig.04).

**Underpainting**

I create a third layer between the canvas and the sketch layer. This is for the underpainting. I use the term “underpainting” to signify a value study, which is an image that concentrates on the lights and darks rather than hue or saturation. In this case, for my underpainting, I’m working with a palette of oranges and reds. This has the effect of warming the image when the final color is applied, making it appear more vibrant.

Picking colors directly from the Color Set Libraries panel, I do my underpainting on the recently created layer. I use a large Artists Oils brush with pressure-dependant opacity and 50% Grain, not paying much attention to detail and instead focusing on getting my lights and darks looking right.

In terms of lighting I’m going to have a diffused light source top right (the sun) and a very bright, but localized, light coming from the left-hand side of the canvas. I don’t know what this secondary bright light source might be; it really doesn’t matter, as it’s just a technique for providing some rim lighting in the otherwise shadowed areas of foreground objects, in order to get them to stand out (Fig.05).

**Demonstrating Depth**

I paint the background in higher value (lighter) tones than the foreground, to give the impression of distance. Whatever we do, we don’t want the creature to be lost in the background.

Next I reduce the opacity of the top level sketch layer to around 50% and drop all layers to the canvas. With a couple of brief exceptions, I’ll be painting directly to the canvas for the rest of the tutorial (Fig.06).

**Mixing the Colors**

To create a color palette, I use the Mixer panel and mix some warm yellows, pinks and oranges, with a smattering of higher saturation reds. Then I use the Create Color Set from Mixer command, which creates a Color Set panel based on the Mixer contents. Normally this results in more
colors than you need, so I right-click on the ones I don’t need and delete them. There’s nothing to stop you working directly from the Mixer, or even using the Color Wheel or Temporal Color palette to choose colors – it’s all down to preference (Fig.07).

Resize Up
It’s time to resample my image to working size. I use Canvas > Resize to set the pixel dimensions to 3040 x 4200 pixels. This is larger than the specified final size of 2780 x 3425, but I normally work larger in order to paint the fine details more easily, then resize down at the end. The key points to remember when resizing are to keep the aspect ratio the same (e.g., 400 x 500 may become 800 x 1000) and never resize upwards after you’ve added detail, or you’ll need to do it all again.

When I work on the detail, I often have no preferred plan of attack in regards to which bits to do first. Sometimes I’ll start with the image focus, sometimes the sky, and sometimes – like now – I’ll zip here and there on the canvas almost at random and tackle whatever comes to mind. It’s really up to you, as the artist, to do what suits you best.

For detail work I use my Artists Oils brush again, occasionally with some subtle blending, applied with another Artists Oils brush that has an Amount setting of 0%, so it doesn’t lay down any paint. For very fine detail I’ll work with a circular brush, very similar to the Pencil brush, except with some degree of blending to avoid hard edges (Fig.08).

Odd Anatomy
Most creatures tend to have their mouths confined to their heads, so trying to find reference for mouths in any other location, is an exercise in futility. The main thing I want to avoid is making the mouths appear flat, as they could do if I just paint a mouth shape onto a shoulder or an elbow. I imagine that each mouth is actually attached to a head, portraying the skin around the mouth being drawn back to display the gums and teeth, and the central portion receding as if into a throat. Lighting plays an important part in ensuring elements in a painting look solid and in this piece I make sure the light direction conforms to my primary light source. I also add small, bright specula highlights to simulate moisture (Fig.09).

Skin
When painting monster skin, it’s good to get some texture in there – grooves, blotches, creases and bumps are all part of a good beast complexion. I vary the color often by picking new colors from the Color Set palette, or from the canvas itself. At every stage I bear in mind the location of my light sources, so that I’m not presented with any inconsistencies later in the process. Here I add some specula highlights to the fish eye that’s protruding from Cipactli’s head (Fig.10).

Using References
Don’t be afraid of using references. When done right they are an invaluable aid to the drawing and painting process. In this instance I search
out a selection of images from Google showing fish, toads and coastal environments. I choose four images to work from and have these lurking around my Painter workspace, so I can call them up when needed (Fig.11).

It’s important to remember not to slavishly copy the references and instead to focus on the essence of the imaged. For example, I reference the mottled, slightly wrinkled skin texture from the photograph of a toad for my creature’s belly, whilst maintaining the key features of my own creature — stance, position, lighting and coloration.

Keeping track of your lighting is also essential when referencing. As your reference is unlikely to be lit in the same manner as the elements in your image, you need to adjust this as you paint. If you fail to do this the element will stand out in all the wrong ways.

Cipactli’s Eye

I’ve already decided to give my creature a fish eye, referenced in part from a photo of a seriously vicious fish, but now I want to make Cipactli’s eye appear slightly translucent. To achieve this, I add some higher contrast color to the side opposite the one that our light source strikes directly. This gives an effect called subsurface scattering, in which the light passes through the skin or flesh and emerges on the other side.

A good way to see how this works is to put your hand over a torch in the dark and see how the edges of your fingers glow a saturated red color, as the light from the torch permeates your skin.

In addition I add some specular highlights where the light source strikes the top of the eye and surrounding skin. This gives the impression of fishy wetness (Fig.12).

Rendering Bulk

My version of Cipactli has a large, round chest and belly, much like myself, with the exception that his are mottled with a nice pattern. I’m careful to compress the pattern, as it curves out of sight around the edge of his bulk, as this helps to convey the illusion of three dimensions. Occasionally you’ll see an artist apply a pattern as an overlay and in some cases this can flatten the image, where the pattern does not conform to the elements of the image’s contours (Fig.14).

Selective Smoothing

Often it’s a good idea to smooth out the rough edges that Painter’s Artists Oils brushes deliver, e.g., on the gums of the creature’s extra mouths. I use my brush with the Amount 0% setting and tease the areas that need smoothing (Fig.13).
Flipping the Image
I regularly flip the image horizontally during my work process. This gives the eye a fresh perspective on the piece and lets you see things you otherwise might have missed. One thing that is obvious right now is that Cipactli’s dorsal fin is a bit lost against the background, so I’ll need to fix that (Fig. 15).

The Dorsal Fin
To make the dorsal fin stand out, first I paint over it with some dark tones, which have the effect of bringing it into the foreground. A subtle pattern would look good, I think, so I create an Overlay layer and set its opacity to 50%. Then, using both high and low saturation colors, I paint a few swirls before dropping the layer to the canvas. I tidy up the loose ends and also add some ragged edges. Some small highlights to these edges give the fin a bit of solidity (Fig. 16).

Painting the Cliffs
For the background, as well as the Artists Oils brush, I use a basic circular brush with grain. I set the Color Variability controls to H: 12%, S: 1% and V: 1%. That means with each dab of my brush puts, the hue (color) will vary randomly up to 12% from my current color, the saturation will vary by up to 1% and the value will vary by up to 1% too. This gives a nice, subtle mottling effect ideal for stone or vegetation. Unfortunately it doesn’t work with Artist Oils variants (Fig. 17).

Crocodile Scales
My Cipactli has the tail of a crocodile so I add some chunky scales. I refer to my reference photo of a crocodile in order to get the general scale shape right, but after I’ve painted a few I find that the shapes come naturally so I don’t need the reference any more. As I mentioned earlier, it’s a good idea to use references frequently, but sparingly (Fig. 18).

Giving Rock Form
I vary my colors regularly when painting detailed rock texture. Where the light strikes the rock, I tend to go for more saturated colors and in
the shadows I use liberal blobs of gray or very desaturated red and orange. The foreground rocks are lit from above by our primary light source – the sun – whilst a stronger, but more localized, light source is present off-canvas to the left. This bright light produces sharp rim lighting, which strengthens the overall form of the rock.

I’ve made the rocks appear slightly wet, as they would be on the sea shore. I do this by painting subtle reflections on the upper surfaces of the rock. These reflections are nowhere near as defined as you’d see in a mirror, but instead relate more to light and dark. On the far right, the rock reflects a little of the bright sky, whereas directly beneath Cipactli the rock is darker because it’s reflecting the body of the beast (Fig.19).

**Reflections in Still Water**

The foreground water is a rockpool and is undisturbed by the ocean waves rolling in further along the beach. Simulating still water is actually quite easy. I pick the colors of the rock that will be reflected and with a light pen pressure, sketch short lines, mostly vertical but occasionally horizontal, taking care to ensure the reflected forms mirror their real-world counterparts (literally).

In other words, if there is a bright highlight on the rock six inches above the water line, I will suggest the same highlight six inches below the waterline for my reflection. These sketchy lines form the generic color of the water because in small quantities, water has no color and either appears transparent, reflective or somewhere in between. Once I’ve got the desired effect I use the same brush to blend any rough edges (Fig.20).

**Transparency in Still Water**

There are some submerged rocks in our rockpool. When I’ve finished the vertical reflective strokes, I dab some paint in there to represent the forms of the rocks. As the rocks get further from the viewer, they merge with the coloration of the water, as they are obscured by surface reflection.

If you’ve ever looked directly down into a clean, calm pond you’ll notice that there is very little reflection and you can see right down into the water. But as you direct your gaze further and further away, the surface reflection gets stronger and you can see less of what is under the surface. Quickly the surface will become so reflective that you can’t see what’s underneath at all. That’s what’s happening here: our rocks become clearer the closer they are to the viewer (Fig.21).

**Contrasting Detail**

I keep the rocks in the background low-key, so that they don’t compete with the foreground in terms of detail and color. They are in shadow, so their value range will be narrower and the color saturation less than the foreground. Because the value range is lower, they will have less detail, and what detail there is can be suggested with broader brush strokes and reliance on the paper texture showing through (Fig.22).
Boosting the Focus
The focus of the piece is Cipactli’s head, so I decide to add some extra patterning around his eye to further attract the viewer’s attention. I keep the pattern understated and make it resemble the pattern on his dorsal fin (Fig.23).

Time Out
I’m almost done now, so I leave the piece for a couple of days, then come back to it and see if anything needs tweaking. If everything has gone as planned, then only minor matters should be apparent, and in this instance – happily – that appears to be the case.

I decide to make some slight alterations to the shape of Cipactli’s head, to get rid of the apparent rubbery flexibility of his upper jaw. I also add a tiny bit of white foam to the rightmost edge of the piece, in order to give the impression that the waves are rushing up the beach behind him.

That done, I resize my final image down to 2480 x 3425 pixels and save it as a TIF.

Thanks for reading and I hope you enjoyed the tutorial.

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Chapter 07: Muma Pădurii
Software Used: Painter

In Romanian folklore, Muma Pădurii is a mean, ugly old woman who lives in the forest. Some say she is the spirit of the forest in human form, others that she can change her shape at will. She lives in a small, dreadful house that nestles amongst the trees and has a reputation for kidnapping children and making slaves of them. One story has her boiling a young girl alive, in order to make what I assume would be a chunky and unpalatable soup.

Recently I’ve been exploring Painter 12’s Real Watercolor brushes and it’s these I’ll be using for part of this workshop, as a departure from my standard Artists’ Oils approach. By playing with the Real Watercolor settings, and using a strong canvas Paper setting, some good textures can be obtained early on and carried through to the final image. The only other brush I’ll make use of is a standard grainy circular brush with pressure-dependent opacity, 20% Resaturation and 40% Bleed.

Creating an Outline Sketch
Sometimes I’ll begin by sketching out some color concepts, especially if I’m working on an unusual specification for a client. However, as soon as I read the description of Muma Pădurii I had a mental image of what she would look like. This is likely the result of me having known a lot of ugly women.

The first step is to create a small canvas of 900 pixels high. I begin to sketch onto a new layer rather than the canvas, for reasons that will soon become clear. I use my circular brush, set at around 8 pixels, and sketch roughly in black (H: 0, S: 0, V: 0). Being a very old woman, Muma Pădurii has a hunched frame and spindly limbs, plus the elongated nature of her alarmingly large head hints at her shape-changing abilities.

In terms of the remaining content of my sketch, I want to include the main elements present in the description, so alongside Muma Pădurii I want to show a forest environment, her dark little hut, the cooking pot and the little girl she is rumored to have kidnapped. I would imagine that painting an actual girl being boiled alive would be off-putting, so I suggest her presence by draping her pig-tail over the edge of the cooking pot (Fig.01).
Refining the Sketch

I resize my canvas to 1500 pixels high. This is not full working size, but it’s fine for detailed sketching. I reduce the opacity of my layer to around 20% and create a second layer. Using my first layer as a guide I create another, more refined, sketch on this second layer.

When I’m finished I delete the first layer so that I’m left with a clean, detailed sketch on a separate layer above a blank canvas. In this instance I’ve only used two layers to get to my final sketch, but in reality you can use as many layers as needed, removing redundant sketch layers as you go (Fig.02).

Flip the Canvas

It’s always a good idea to flip the canvas regularly as it helps you spot areas that you might otherwise overlook. In this case everything seems OK, with the exception of Muma Pădurii’s left leg (the one nearest the cooking pot) which I might increase in size a touch (Fig.03).

Real Watercolor Brush Configuration

The Real Watercolor brush variants have a number of new configuration attributes that have not been seen in earlier versions of Painter. These include Concentration, Evaporation Rate, Pickup, Wind Angle and more.

There are also checkboxes to control how the paint flows and dries in real time. For this tutorial I’ve ticked the box for Accurate Diffusion and left the other two – Delay Diffusion and Pause Diffusion – blank. Deselecting Accurate Diffusion and ticking Delay Diffusion would be a good move if you find your computer is slowing down under the CPU-intensive processing needed for Real Watercolor.

Another useful performance setting is Animation Setup. Setting this to a high value decreases the number of animation steps for drying/flowing paint and therefore economizes on CPU cycles. The only value I alter during this workshop is the Evaporation Rate. Generally speaking, a low value creates a lot of fringing and texture, which is ideal for this particular piece (Fig.04).
Rough Color
I click on the canvas layer, and then add rough color using my watercolor brush. This automatically creates a new Real Watercolor layer between the canvas and my existing sketch layer. In this way I can be guided by the sketch outline without obscuring it with new paint.

The great thing about Real Watercolor brushes is that they dry realistically, creating textured areas of varying saturation for a single dab. Because this is the rough color stage, I can experiment in terms of the actual colors I use and simply paint over them if needed.

I decide to go for a selection of natural colors to emphasize the forest setting, choosing primarily oranges and yellows direct from the Temporal Color panel (Fig.05).

Assessing the Color
In order to see the color more clearly I’ve lowered the opacity of the outline layer to about 20%. Overall the color is coming along nicely, but it lacks deep darks in the shadow areas. I won’t be increasing the intensity of the highlights a great deal, asug’ve decided I’m going with a more diffuse lighting setup, such as on a bright but overcast day. This means there will be few sharp boundaries between shadowed and exposed areas (Fig.06).

Deepen the Shadows
I switch to my circular brush and choose a dark purple color – not fully black, but almost. I use this brush to emphasize the deep shadows where necessary, for example, the creases between the materials of Muma Pădurii’s clothing and beneath her lank hair (Fig.07).

Starting on the Detail
I merge my layer with the canvas so all I’m left with now is the canvas itself. I then resize the image to full working dimensions, which are actually larger than in the brief, to allow for easier detail work.

I zoom in to 100% and begin adding detail to the face with the circular brush. The key thing to remember at this stage is that the watercolor brush has laid down a lot of great texture that we don’t want to erase. For this reason, detail work is a balance between refining the basic forms and retaining the painterly watercolor look.

There is no hard and fast rule here concerning what to paint over, what to enhance and what to blend; it’s simply a case of observing what works and what doesn’t.

As there is already a lot of color on the canvas, I tend to color-pick regularly rather than use the Color Wheel or the Color Set panel. The only thing to bear in mind when color-picking is that you need to occasionally increase the saturation of your picked color to prevent your image becoming muddy (Fig.08).
Painting Material

Painting clothing and material can be a tricky business. However, in this case it's not too bad because our character's clothes are comprised of nothing more than layers of loose, hanging material. There is no particular structure to her garments and the material can be as thick or as thin as we like.

Because the scene is lit diffusely there are few sharp shadows. When considering a cloudy day, a good rule is that the further an object is from the surface onto which it casts a shadow, the more blurred the shadow. This is true of direct sunlight too, but far more evident on a cloudy day, or any situation with a diffuse light source. So a shadow cast by a hanging piece of cloth onto another piece of cloth ½ an inch distant will be sharper than the shadow it casts on the ground. I use that basic rule to color the shadowed areas of Muma Pădurii's ragged cloak, in what is hopefully a realistic manner (Fig.09).

Dirty Clothing

Often, the fringed dabs left by the watercolor brush can be turned into stains and blemishes, helping make the old woman’s clothing look suitably gross. As I continue to add detail I accentuate the shadows, blending them a little where necessary. I do the blending using the same circular brush as I use for the detail; I simply use less pressure.

In Painter 12 you can calibrate brush pressure for each individual brush variant, using the Brush Calibration panel, and it's well worth spending the time experimenting to see which setting suits you best. Ideally, with the grainy circular brush, you should be able to lay down a solid line with a firm pressure and no paint at all with a light pressure, which effectively results in blending of the existing paint (Fig.10).

Subtle Color Differences

In order to make a color-based distinction between Muma Pădurii, her clothes and her walking stick, I make some minor variations in the color hue and saturation. The word to stress here is "minor", as making the differences too pronounced would result in a loss of that natural look I'm striving for. So, for the skin I add a little saturation to my basic oranges, yellows and reds, whilst for her cane I push the yellow hue slightly towards green (Fig.11).

Careful Where Your Shadows Fall

Working at 100%, it's sometimes easy to lose track of where your shadows should be falling. To combat this problem I occasionally zoom out to get an overview of where I am in the overall image.

For example, take the pink material hanging from Muma Pădurii's wrist. It's tempting to just paint a shadowed area directly around and beneath it, on the lighter colored robe. However, by zooming out we remind ourselves that this pink material is actually hanging some way in front of the main robe and therefore won't cast such a shadow. If I'd have painted a tight shadow it would have flattened the image and made it look "off" (Fig.12).
Textures Become Muscle and Bone

When it comes to painting the character’s legs I find that hardly any work needs to be done on the textures. It’s true they don’t match up precisely to classic human anatomy, but that’s OK because Muma Pădurii is old and deformed and not entirely human.

I do blend the paint in some areas, but all the while maintain as much of the original texture pattern as possible. I darken the peripheries of the legs in order to suggest a cylindrical shape and thereby avoid the cardboard cut-out look (Fig.13).

The Cooking Pot

Because the cooking pot is metallic I could do with reducing the texture laid down by the watercolor brush. For blending I still make use of the circular brush, color-picking frequently from the canvas, but with a very light touch. Broadly speaking I work outwards in an elliptical pattern from the highlighted area and this accentuates the spherical characteristics of the cooking pot.

Occasionally I’ll increase the saturation of a color-picked hue using the Temporal Color palette and apply more pressure to lay down fresh paint, which I then blend into the existing paint. Towards the base of the pot I deviate from the gray/blue hue, and add some warmer oranges and yellows. These represent vague reflections of the forest floor in the dull metal of the pot (Fig.14).

Too Shiny!

When I zoom out to take stock (no pun intended) of the entire image, I see that the cooking pot is too bright. I know this because it’s the first thing I look at, when in fact the character’s face should be the focus. There’s a quick, effective way to remedy this without overpainting the entire area. I create a layer and set it to Darken with around 50% opacity. I choose a very dark color, almost black, and overpaint the entire pot. This has the effect of darkening all colors that are lighter than the paint color, whilst leaving untouched those areas that are already darker. When I’m finished I drop the layer to the canvas (Fig.15).

The Wooden Hut

Again, I try to leave the bulk of the texture intact whilst refining the shapes of the wooden planks. I very slightly vary the size of the dark spaces between the planks, so that they look like real slats of wood rather than a wooden surface with a pattern on (Fig.16).
Painting the Ground

Some of the watercolor textures, especially those with strong fringing, remind me of stones and pebbles so I develop these areas further. The key thing to remember when painting the ground is to fade in the shadows and darken them the closer they get to the object causing them (Fig. 17).

Layering Leaves

Next I define the leaf shapes more clearly, in the foliage to the top right of the piece. I bunch the leaves together in small, irregular groups and pay attention to how the shadows are cast. If one leaf is above another then it will cast a shadow. Seeing as the light is diffused in this instance, every shadow will be blurred to some extent, but even in a brightly sunlit scene there will be diffuse shadows in those areas sheltered from the direct light of the sun.

Every object casts a shadow, even if it is shadowed by another object itself, and portraying this can lend a picture added realism. There’s no need to fully define every single leaf, so towards the top right corner I make few refinements and instead allow the raw texture to show through (Fig. 18).

The Finishing Touches

It’s at this time that I take a short break for a couple of days or so, then come back and finish up. The soup – or whatever sloppy foodstuff lurks in the cooking pot – looks a bit like mud right now so I add a green hue with a Colorize layer, which I then drop to the canvas (Fig. 19). In a few areas the original line drawing is still visible, so I make sure all my original sketch lines are painted over.

Last of all I resize the image down to the specified A4 300ppi size and save it as a TIF file.

And that concludes this workshop – hope you enjoyed it!

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The final mythological creature in the series is called the Ittan-momen, something I'd never heard of before I received the brief! Ittan-momen is a product of Japanese folklore, specifically the Kagoshima Prefecture, and apparently it can be translated to mean “one tenth of a hectare of cotton”. The Ittan-momen is described as a ghostly phenomenon, which flies through the air at night and attacks humans by wrapping itself around their heads and smothering them.

Before I start, I collect some reference images of Japanese people in traditional dress, and typical Japanese landscapes. I won’t be copying any of these images exactly, but instead I’ll be referencing elements from a selection of images and fitting them together – a clothing pattern from one image, a garment from another, a partial pose from another. As for the Ittan-momen, that of course will come solely from my imagination. Browsing through my references I decide to take a little artistic license with this piece.

Whilst the brief says the creature attacks at night, I’m going to set the scene in the daylight. The reason for this is that many of the Japanese garments and landscapes are so colorful it would be a shame to plunge it all into darkness.

Set up the Canvas

I’ll be painting this piece using two types of brushes – a Real Watercolor variant, followed by a standard, Circular Grainy variant. When painting with Real Watercolors I find it best to start with a pure white canvas, something I don’t normally do when using other brush variants. The reason for this is because of how Real Watercolor paints interact with existing layers. A Watercolor layer is essentially a type of Gel layer and consequently the colors on it cannot be applied opaquely with respect to other layers, and will not show up at all if lighter than the background. Therefore, a white background is the only one that will be true to the applied Watercolor paints.

I start with a small canvas, 700 pixels wide, in the same aspect ratio as my specified full-size dimensions. I choose a canvas-type Paper, which provides texture for my brushes. There is no hard-and-fast rule for choosing the Paper settings of Scale, Contrast and Brightness; I just arrive at my preferences by experimenting with grainy brushes and seeing which settings gave the best effect. I also tweak the settings occasionally during the painting process, to account for different surfaces, such as tree bark and skin (Fig.01).

The Rough Sketch

If you’re one of those whose sketches look great first time then at this point you’ll just create a new layer and draw your sketch, ready for the color phase. On the other hand, if you’re like me, you may need to refine your sketches using an iterative process.

To achieve this, I create a new layer and onto this layer I create my first rough sketch using the basic Circular Grainy brush. I concentrate on the composition and getting the general appearance of the characters correct. You could almost call the characters placeholders at this stage, undefined rough shapes ready for the addition of proper form and detail.

In terms of content I decide to have our human subjects – three Japanese ladies taking a walk in the garden – unaware of the beast that’s looming behind them. The Ittan-momen is described both as ghostly and reminiscent of material, or cotton, so I intend to paint it as a part-ethereal and part-physical creature. I sketch a head in the background, and a partly-formed claw, poised to grab the right-most character (Fig.02).
Refining the Sketch

I lower the opacity of Layer 1 to around 30% and create another layer, Layer 2, on top. Using Layer 1 as a guide I render a clearer version of my sketch onto Layer 2. This can be looked on as the intermediate stage, between the chaos of the initial sketch and the more refined lines of the final. When I complete this stage I delete Layer 1, as I no longer need it (Fig. 03).

The Final Sketch

I resize the whole image to 1500 pixels in height and decrease the opacity of Layer 2 to 30%. I create a third layer and repeat the process in Step 3, the difference being that I use a small brush and pay attention to the detail of the piece. Of course, the amount of final detail in a sketch is a matter for your own judgment and will vary depending on the subject matter. In this case I am satisfied with clean outlines. There is no tonal information and I’ll explain the reason for that in the next step. I delete Layer 2 so that I’m left with the canvas and Layer 3, my final sketch (Fig. 04).

Starting with Watercolor

When using Watercolor I want to paint directly onto a white background, as I mentioned earlier. For this reason I keep my sketch outline only and don’t include any tonal information. I choose a Real Watercolor brush and configure it so that most attributes are at or close to 100%, with the exception of the Wind settings (which I leave at 270 and 0) and Evaporation Rate, which I vary from 0% to around 50%. The lower the Evaporation Rate, the more texture and fringing is apparent in the paint dabs.

I select the canvas and as soon as I start to paint, a layer called Watercolor Layer 1 appears between the canvas and Layer 3. I begin with the dresses of the two female characters. I paint the flowery designs at the same time as the rest of the garments’ material, taking advantage of the natural fringing effect that arises from low Evaporation Rate settings. Real Watercolor uses a type of build-up method for paint application, which means that the more you paint over an area, the darker it will get. This is great for applying shadows without altering your basic paint value.

One thing you need to remember when working with watercolors is to save in a RIF format. This preserves the “wetness” of your paint. If you save in PSD or TIF your watercolor layer will “dry” and be converted to a normal layer, meaning that when you resume with your watercolors you will not be able to paint on this layer (Fig. 05).
Fill the Canvas

I work my way across the entire canvas, not paying too much attention to detail and concentrating instead on the overall balance of color. The focus of the piece, as dictated by positioning, color tone and value, is the two characters in the foreground. This might seem a little odd, given that the topic of the painting is the Ittan-momen itself, but because the creature is ghostly and furtive I’m considering it to be a secondary source of focus. In this way, with any luck, I can communicate its stealthy nature to the viewer (Fig.06).

Beginning the Detail

The next step is to drop all layers to the canvas. I’ve finished using watercolors now, so I no longer need to preserve the watercolor layer. Before I drop the layers I modify the opacity of Layer 3 – the sketch layer – to 50%, so it doesn’t appear too dark.

Next, I resample the image to full working size. I choose a height of 4200 pixels, which I judge will be sufficient enough to allow for a decent level of detail. These dimensions are larger than the specification, but that’s fine because I’ll simply resize down when I’m finished. I save my image as a PSD as I no longer need to preserve the watercolor wetness. This is simply my preference and in terms of working with Painter I could continue equally well using a RIF.

Using my circular brush I begin detailing the main characters. I don’t recognize any “right” or “wrong” place to start, so my choice to begin with the faces is pretty arbitrary. My circular brush allows for solid color to be put down with harsh pressure and an almost pure blending of existing paint with a light pressure. This means I don’t need to keep swapping between painting and blending brushes. Painter 12’s Brush Calibration feature is a great help in configuring pressure sensitivity for individual brushes.

In terms of color I’ll mostly pick from the watercolor paint that’s already on the canvas. Real Watercolors have the advantage that they can produce significant hue and saturation variations from a single color choice, so color-picking from the canvas produces flexible results. Even so, I often increase the saturation of a color using the Temporal Color palette directly after picking from the canvas, to avoid any potential muddying of the paint (Fig.07).

Character Interaction

It’s important that the characters in your image are seen to be acting, and interacting, naturally. In this particular piece the two women in the foreground are talking to each other, so I’ve made it so they are making eye contact. The woman on the left is speaking, and the other woman is listening. If you have two characters that are meant to be interacting yet are staring past each other, or otherwise apparently unaware of each other’s presence, this can detract from the painting’s overall atmosphere (Fig.08).

Adding Interest

Earlier I found a photo of a Japanese stone carving, which legend has it bestows good luck on travelers. I thought I’d include such a carving in my image, to strengthen the Japanese ambience and also as an ironic comment on what’s happening in the background (Fig.09).
Bringing Out the Textures

The Real Watercolor brush produces some excellent fringed textures and where possible, I want to retain those textures in the final piece. This is particularly relevant to the rocky ground and vegetation, where a small level of refinement with the Circular brush produces realistic, organic shapes such as leaves and rocks almost without trying. The key here is to see patterns within the textures and “tease” them into recognizable shapes, rather than starting with an outline and filling the area with color (Fig.10).

Painting Tree Bark

I use the same basic principle that I mentioned in the previous step to paint the tree bark, the main difference being that I paint a subtle spiral pattern in the bark, which helps give the impression that the tree is solid and three dimensional. In the same way, I imagine how the tree might look in three dimensions and apply some shadows where the trunk and branches curve towards and away from the viewer (Fig.11).

Leaves and Foliage

When painting foliage in the distance, or middle distance, it’s a good idea to concentrate on the appearance of groups of leaves and not on individual leaves. Not only does this save time, it avoids that overly fussy appearance that can distract the viewer’s attention. Again, I try to retain as much of the watercolor texture as I can, whilst enhancing it with vague triangular leaf shapes of varying tonal values. In this way I can communicate the impression of a verdant tree without laboriously painting every leaf (Fig.12).

Ittan-momen

Painting our main character, Ittan-momen, is a little tricky and requires me to pay a fair amount of attention to the process. The reason for this is because I’m used to giving my creatures “bulk”, and portraying them as solid objects of flesh and bone. Ittan-momen, however, is a different sort of beast, resembling an expanse of flat or ribbon-like material and being of a ghostly nature. For this reason I need to keep reminding myself to flatten Ittan-momen’s form, especially the parts that trail into the distance. The exception to this is the head, which I do bulk out slightly, as if the creature is forming from vapor and poised to bite down on its unsuspecting victim (Fig.13).

Hinting at the Surreal

In the background I paint ribbons and streamers as if the Ittan-momen’s form is fraying into the atmosphere, or emerging directly from thin air. I use mid-range values for these areas, so that they don’t overpower the creature’s head and draw the viewer’s gaze out of the picture (Fig.14).
Making Use of Layers
The parasols need some regularly spaced spokes coming out from the center. The easiest way to do this is with a layer. I create a new layer and press V to set my brush to Line mode. I manually draw each spoke from the center to the edge, pressing V between each line to reset the cursor position. I then set the layer opacity to 50% and erase the portions obscured by the woman’s head. I drop the layer to the canvas and press B to return the brush to Normal painting mode before working over the lines, to blend them a little more convincingly with the parasol (Fig.15).

Tweaking Values
I notice that the stone carving appears too bright and I think it would balance the composition more to darken the stone. To achieve this I create another layer and set its attribute to Darken. I modify the opacity to around 50% and with a very dark orange brush, I paint over the entire carving. I drop the layer to the canvas and dab some brighter grays and yellows on the sharp stone edges, giving the impression of chipped and worn granite (Fig.17).

Pushing the Shadows
For my penultimate stage I work through the image at 100% zoom in order to add definition and contrast to certain regions. Because my light source is diffuse there are few sharp shadows, but despite this there are areas where the shadows need to be deep, almost black. The earth directly beneath the stones, the women’s hair, and the deep creases of their garments are examples of this. I also take this opportunity to refine any textures I missed earlier, so that fringed blobs of watercolor paint become rounded pebbles or patches of moss (Fig.18).

Tidying Up
As always I leave the image for a few days so that I can come back to it with a fresh perspective. Immediately I spot a couple of things that need attention. The tree branches towards the top left of the frame don’t seem to agree with the bulk of the tree itself, so I remedy that by redrawing them at different angles. I also notice that the forked path is not particularly clear where it recedes into the distance, so I spend a little time defining the boundary between path and garden vegetation (Fig.19).

I tweak the contrast and color balance very slightly in order to fully bring out the varied hues more, and then save a copy of the image at 2480 x 3425 pixels (the specified size at 300PPI). That concludes this workshop and I hope you’ve found it useful!
This eBook series will be split over six separate chapters, all sharing the common theme of a fantasy inspired medieval scene. Each will be undertaken by a different artist and draw upon a wealth of experience and skills perfected over years of industry practice. The authors will discuss their approach to digital /concept painting, the tools and brushes they employ and treat us to a valuable look into their artistic process. The six installments will cover a different environment each chapter based upon the medieval theme and encompass a multitude of professional tips and techniques.

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