

Henning Ludvigsen

Natascha

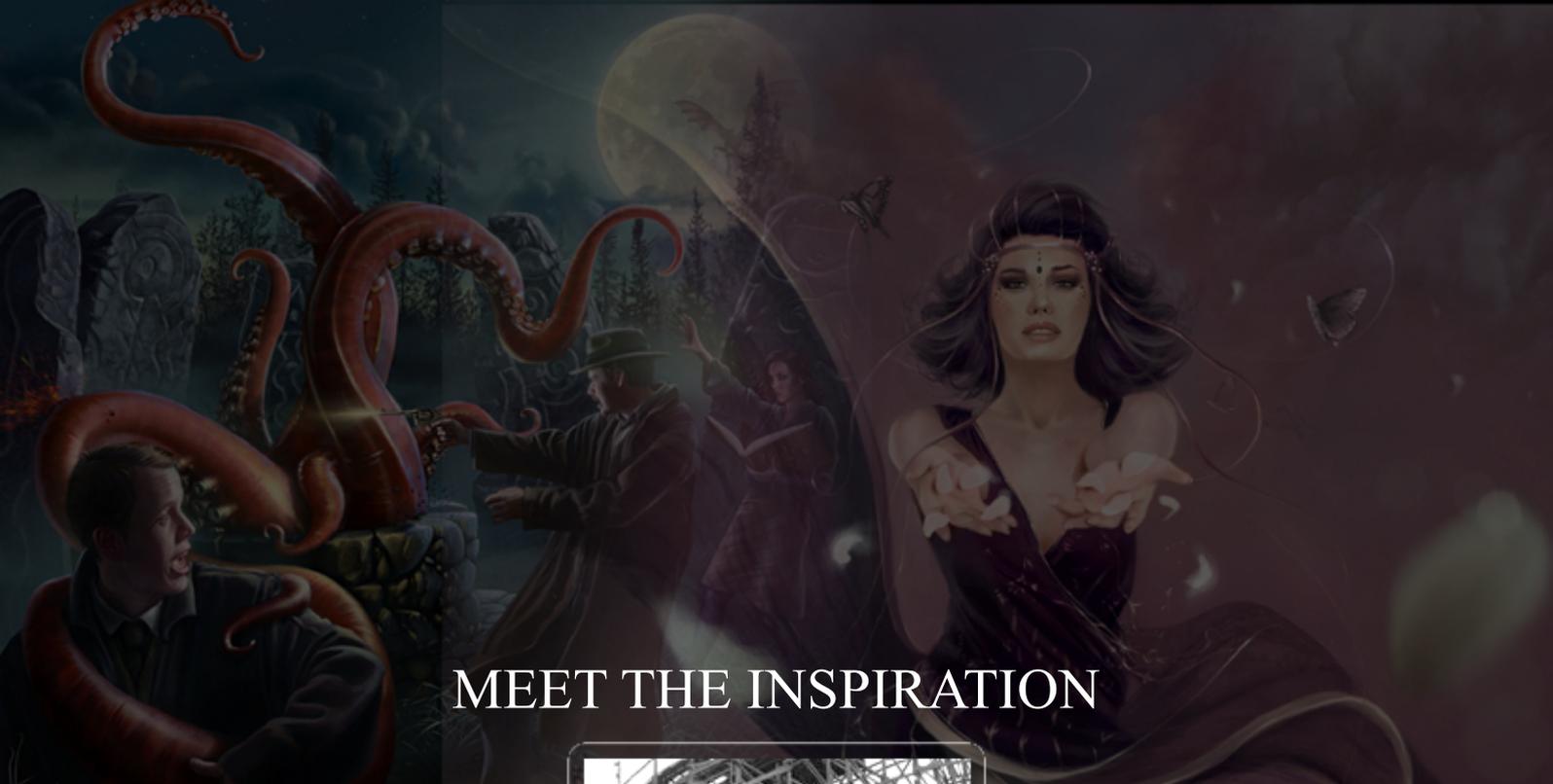


MEET THE INSPIRATION

AN INDEPENDENT INTERVIEW SERIES WITH LEADING ARTISTS OF TODAY'S ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

Henning Ludvigsen

Natascha Rössli



MEET THE INSPIRATION



HENNING & LUDVIGSEN
NATASCHA RÖÖSLI

ILLUSTRATION AND CONCEPT ART

HENNING & LUDVIGSEN NATASCHA RÖÖSLI

Lets kick off this Episode of 'Meet The Inspiration' with a rather simple question. How did you both come to Digital Art and for how long are you two doing the art, we love so much, now? How did it all start for you and how did your style of painting evolve over the time? Did you learn it via Art School or completely on your own?



Henning: Thanks for getting invited; we both appreciate this very much!

Well, I have been fascinated with drawing and art for as long as I can remember. My mother told me stories about me from when I could barely speak, drawing the Norwegian flag on pieces of paper whilst yelling "Hurrah".

Tascha: Hehe, I never yelled hurrah while drawing but I loved drawing and designing dresses for ice-skating, I think that is almost as weird. I can picture Henning's mom looking over his shoulder though! Funny enough, even as a kid I always drew girls. Not quite sure what it is exactly with female artists and female character illustrations *laughs*

Henning: I started out experimenting with art on the Commodore 64 back in the days, but logically, the limitation of that computer did put a break on inspiration. It was some years later when I started working on the Amiga-platform that creativity got a productive outlet. Since then I have been working on most platforms. 16 years old, I went a couple of years to art school, where I learned the basics of traditional art and had a great time, and then I started working 18 years old in the advertisement agency industry. Here, I worked with lay-out, design, illustration and I also made some personal paintings every now and then for fun even though I was heavily over-worked and didn't have too much spare time.

Tascha: I really envy Henning for his art education, as I decided to not attend art school in Lucerne even though I was accepted into the preparation course. I was always a believer of autodidacting and I still think that art education can sometimes hinder ones creativity. The actual basics you learn, you can also read in books. The most important part of an art education is development and I think that some teachers don't let you develop the style you want. Sadly enough I didn't paint or draw once I went to a higher education in Switzerland and pursued sports which didn't really leave time for any art on top. It was only about 4 years ago when I first discovered some art on the Internet and an old Aiptek tablet, which was laying around at my current job at that time.



„My mother told me stories from when I could barely speak, drawing the Norwegian flag on paper whilst yelling “Hurrah”.“

„...evolve away from a comfort zone“



Henning: It was when I moved from Norway to Greece to work as AD for a Norwegian/Greek computer game development company I realized that I had been working for about 10 years without doing what I really wanted to do; painting. So, the past 3-4 years, I have been painting as much as possible to try to establish a confident style. I only paint for myself, even when it comes to commissioned work; I pick the ones that appeals to me. If I don't find the concept or idea interesting, there's no point for me to do it. Still this doesn't mean I don't try to be versatile, I am quite flexible, I believe.

Tascha: I painted next to my full time job, more as a hobby then anything else, until I started submitting my work to online communities and galleries. Winning my first CGTalk choice Award kicked off my "career" incredibly. I honestly got a bit overwhelmed at the interest and exposure I got. Since then I learn something every day. I love educating myself but the hardest part is to evolve away from a comfort zone. For the past years I have been painting pretty girls and I got better at it (at least I tend to think so). I could go on painting the same in the same realistic style but that would mean to limit myself and I want to widen my horizons. I started doing daily sketches again, I just wish I had more time but there are just too many other interests (and every day chores to be taken care of) sometimes.

02 - what is your current occupation? Do you do the digital art stuff in your spare time or is it part of your actual job?

Henning: I am so lucky to be able to work on fantasy-related art during my fulltime job as Art-Director for Aventurine. We're currently working on Darkfall, an upcoming MMORPG game. During my spare time, I work as a freelance artist with clients like Fantasy Flight Games, Future Publishing (ImagineFX magazine), Spiral Direct, plus others, and on my personal pieces. Tascha thinks I work too much, which is probably true. I rarely get to bed before 2-3am every day. I will get better some day, I promise... ;-)

Tascha: So true, he is a total workaholic but the situation right now is a bit complicated and I am sure it will get better soon. As for myself, like Henning I do work for Aventurine pretty much full time now. During evenings I also work as freelance illustrator for the same or other companies like Henning does. I used to work as freelancer full time and I still could but some health issues make painting a bit hard at times. I am mostly accepting work from companies/clients I have been working with before or projects I really want to get involved with. Unfortunately I get a lot of requests for long term projects which I can't really commit myself to right now, for the reasons mentioned above.

I do enjoy writing tutorials though! I used to teach web-design during evening classes and writing tutorials or explaining things is just something I really love doing



„...learn from each other“

03 - since you both are aces in doing character paintings does it happen that you catch up influences from each other? Suggestions, hints etc. do you both talk about the art you're doing or is it the way that you let each other do whatever he/she wants to do?

Henning: Since both Tascha and I share all our interests from music taste, role-playing, movies, computer games, we talk a lot about art and related things. We ask each other for comments on our work all the time, and do our best to help each other out, but we still do our own separate things, except when helping each other out when needed. I think it's REALLY great to have a partner that helps you evolve and get better, as I have already tried the opposite, which didn't work out. Life is just too short to not do what you are made to do. I think we do get influenced by each other, but it's not obvious. We do have different styles, but I do believe we do get somewhat influenced even if we notice ourselves or not.

Tascha: Ah oih, Aces? Giving us a lot of credit there :)

Henning's knowledge about theory and 3D really helps me out a lot. I do try to understand what I am painting on my own but sometimes I end up asking him about theory, since most of the time he has learned it in art school. We do have totally different ways of working and funny enough we are not influenced by each other's art but inspired maybe :)

I noticed however that we don't comment or critique our own work as much as we would do with others. I am not sure why that is but I think it is mostly because we have so different styles and like I mentioned, ways of working.

I get asked a lot of the time if I learned this and that from Henning, or people assume that I am like Henning's pupil. I can honestly say though that we both learned about the same amount from each other. Or what do you think Henning.

Henning: Yes, none of us are anybody's pupil, but we both learn from each other. Tascha was the one getting me to use hard edged brushes, and she always inspire me to do more freestyle work.



„God, I hate hot pants!

What is it with Guys and hot pants?“



05 - did the publicity, which naturally comes with publications of your artworks in books and magazines, affect the way you work? Or did it even affect your life in certain things?

Henning: I am used to getting my work published from the advertisement industry. Even though publishing personal artwork is different and more personal, it's always nice and appreciative to see your work amongst other great artists that you admire. I try to not get affected much from what happens to my work, I paint for myself, no matter if this is what the audience like to see or not. The day I create a piece of art to impress others, will probably be during the end of me as an artist. This is why I go for simple, often cheesy themes, because this is what I enjoy painting. As simple as that! Many times I've gotten negative criticism for my themes and the themes of my paintings, which I always have and will continue to ignore, unless the critique is constructive, of course. People's opinions on personal taste are something I think should be respected and not questioned.

Never the less, I would never have the options to do the projects I am working on if I didn't get the exposure I've had so far. Even if it feels wrong, you have to "sell yourself", but you can still do this with your own style and principals.

Tascha: As a matter of fact I am slowly starting to feel a bit overwhelmed. You notice that much more people know you then you think and that scares me a bit. I am the kind of person who hates walking through a restaurant or be in the centre of attention, believe it or not. I like to watch from a distance most of the time. I also tend to take things way too personal, that doesn't involve critique though. Critique is always good if it is constructive. Did it affect the way I work? I think yes. At least it is hard to actually branch out and away from a style that I know is much more "accepted" or liked by a wide audience. You kind of start to get afraid to let people down in a way, if you all of a sudden change your style to something completely different.

04 - are there any hobbies, you both like, beside the digital art?

Henning: As mentioned in the previous answer, we luckily share most of our interests, apart from my fascination for hot pants on girls ;-). We both attend pen and paper role-playing sessions every week with friends and colleagues of ours, which is great fun. We like the same kinds of movies (which is great), along with music taste. Having very different taste and opinions on minor things like this CAN be an annoyance, especially as I need to listen to my music when painting. Sometimes I even have to ask Tascha to put on calmer music, which I think is in fact pretty neat, considering the contrary, hehe.

Tascha: God, I hate hot pants! What is it with Guys and hot pants? Besides that issue I can only think of Henning's involvement in the Amiga Demo Scene, which I don't share with him. Ah no, jumping around in front of the TV looking like an idiot to a silly workout DVD, that is something I couldn't convince him to join me at yet. We are big movie fans, be it going to the movies with friends or watching DVD's at home. Once we actually settle down I am sure we are going to also workout a bit more again. Henning keeps mentioning that he wants to learn how to play tennis ;).



„As an artist, it’s VERY important to listen to other artists.
This is what makes you grow and develop as an artist.“

06 - do you still listen to advices from other artists or do you think your technique is good and proven enough to say that it's cool to have feedback but you won't change a lot of things, art wise, anymore.

Henning: As an artist, it’s VERY important to listen to other artists. This is what makes you grow and develop as an artist. I have learned SO MUCH from different art communities, and I can thank them all for all that I have learned. I do have one quirk, though; once I put my signature on my painting, I rarely touch it again unless there are grave errors that should be fixed, but I always listen to critique to implement this in my next piece. If I keep looking backwards on my old paintings, I would never be done with anything and just keep tinkering about on old habits. This way I can see how I progress from piece to piece. We recently started our own art-forum, pixelbrush, just because we love working together with other artists and getting/giving feedback so that we can all learn from each other.

Tascha: I can only agree with Henning here. On top I would like to mention that I am sometimes a bit annoyed at people who post paintings on a forum (instead of just an online gallery) and always have an excuse for everything someone else would point out. If you post it in a forum you should be looking for critique in my opinion. I tend to over-render and over-detail my work a lot of times.

Having one or more people watch over your shoulder while working on something can be very helpful. Besides, after working on a painting for long you lose the eye for mistakes. A fresh unbiased eye by someone else can often easily get you back on track if you are stuck.

„Like Henning I get frustrated if I don't see improvement...“

07 - do you still learn something new about painting or other techniques when working on a pic? Maybe a new approach on painting surfaces etc...? Are you still looking out for new ways to create this or that?

Henning: I learn a lot from every painting I do, and this is one of the reasons I like to paint; to see (hopefully) my skills grow. If I don't see things I would like to change or do differently on a painting I did some months ago, I feel like I'm standing still. The feeling of developing fuels my inspiration to go on and create something more.

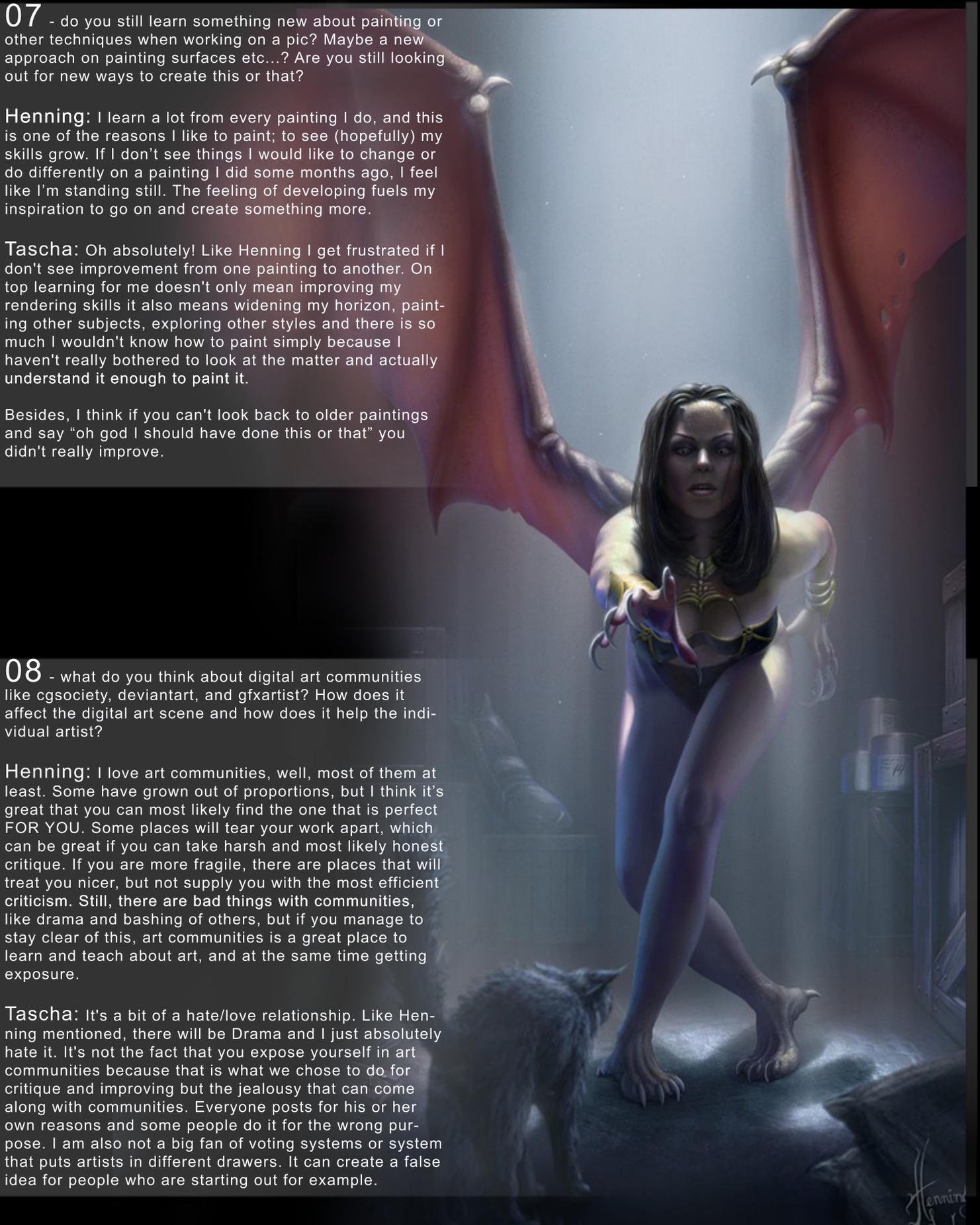
Tascha: Oh absolutely! Like Henning I get frustrated if I don't see improvement from one painting to another. On top learning for me doesn't only mean improving my rendering skills it also means widening my horizon, painting other subjects, exploring other styles and there is so much I wouldn't know how to paint simply because I haven't really bothered to look at the matter and actually understand it enough to paint it.

Besides, I think if you can't look back to older paintings and say "oh god I should have done this or that" you didn't really improve.

08 - what do you think about digital art communities like cgsociety, deviantart, and gfxartist? How does it affect the digital art scene and how does it help the individual artist?

Henning: I love art communities, well, most of them at least. Some have grown out of proportions, but I think it's great that you can most likely find the one that is perfect FOR YOU. Some places will tear your work apart, which can be great if you can take harsh and most likely honest critique. If you are more fragile, there are places that will treat you nicer, but not supply you with the most efficient criticism. Still, there are bad things with communities, like drama and bashing of others, but if you manage to stay clear of this, art communities is a great place to learn and teach about art, and at the same time getting exposure.

Tascha: It's a bit of a hate/love relationship. Like Henning mentioned, there will be Drama and I just absolutely hate it. It's not the fact that you expose yourself in art communities because that is what we chose to do for critique and improving but the jealousy that can come along with communities. Everyone posts for his or her own reasons and some people do it for the wrong purpose. I am also not a big fan of voting systems or system that puts artists in different drawers. It can create a false idea for people who are starting out for example.



„...she has this “freak magnet” skill that keeps putting us in strange situations“

09 - where does your inspiration come from and... If you need to do something but you have no inspiration going on, what do you do in those situations? Or you get stuck while working on something. Are there any advices you can give us?

Henning: This is the place struggle the most. Even though it's not a bottleneck or a huge problem, my desire to paint is usually stronger than my ideas, but this is something I feel is getting better and better. I get inspiration from everything from music, movies, or things I see in real life. Sometimes I also get inspired by our role-playing sessions as we have 2 brilliant game masters with great stories and concepts. Luckily I can settle for simple ideas; chick on giant bat... Yes...

Tascha: I tend to think now that sketching can inspire you. Especially if you break out of your comfort zone and start doing poses and crazy designs. Also, closing your eyes and scribble, then looking at it and try to find forms and a story helps if you are having a bad time with your muse.

On top, I always get very inspired to brows through forums or online communities (like DA, Conceptart.org or CGtalk).

10 - now tell us something funny. I kept asking this question in the last two parts of my series and will continue with you. When you had a commission or anything art related... was there ever something crap that happened and made you angry back then but makes you laugh about it now?

Henning: I don't really have any episodes that are worth mentioning. At least nothing funny, as some of them I am still angry when thinking back at them, hehe. I do have the odd requests like “I can has big warrior for my room, PLZ? lolKbye!!!1one!” I believe Tascha has more stories than me as I she has this “freak magnet” skill that keeps putting us in strange situations.

Tascha: Quite a while ago I actually got an e-mail from a gaming company that was asking for commission work. After I answered back, asking for more information they sent me one of my own paintings with the comment, that they liked to have a similar style like “this artist” has. After informing them this was actually a painting done by me I never heard back from them.



„...it is of course a bit weird to see your boyfriend paint half nude chicks“

11 - all your character works are very fantasy based. Can you tell us why? I personally am a big sci-fi fan and would love to see some futuristic looking characters in the future.

Henning: Well, I am a fan of both fantasy and sci-fi, but when it comes to painting, I enjoy the more organic look of fantasy more than sci-fi. I also think that I prefer fantasy to sci-fi because I am not too confident yet with mechanical things and futuristic architecture and design, but this is something I am slowly improving as I do get to work on more sci-fi related things for my clients every now and then. Still, I will probably always prefer fantasy to sci-fi, but combining the two, or going a bit back and forth will probably occur from time to time.



12 - do you paint everything from scratch or do you use other materials for reference like... photos or 3d renders? I also noticed that some of your paintings seem to have the same lady on them?

Henning: I paint everything from scratch. I rely heavily on references (in the sense of looking at them, and using the grid technique to get proportions decent). Before starting a piece, I always do quite a bit of research, where I collect a bunch of photos from the internet for ideas, and then I usually shoot a pile of photographs myself to aid me during the creation process. As I am a sucker for realism, and enjoy studying this, and I think that it's very important to look at references to understand better how things work. For example; light and shadows is complex stuff, and even if you might be able to get close without any reference, I just don't believe anyone can create photo-realism without looking at the real thing. For some commissioned projects, like board games, I have combined techniques like 3D models I've made to meet the client's acquisitions. At work, I naturally work a lot with 3D software as we're making a computer game, heh.

Tascha: I paint everything from scratch, meaning I don't use photo textures on my paintings otherwise I would call them photo manipulations or mixed media I guess. I am also using reference, most of the time pictures of me or Henning depending on the project. I use those mostly to get interesting light situations right but lately I catch myself painting concept or speeds without much reference anymore. Still, there is only so much you can know without referencing and you can easily tell if something has been done with or without reference. I have no clue about 3D though. Honestly, I wish I would know how to use it since almost everyone I know uses 3D to do compositions and get perspective right. I slowly think pure 2D is starting to die out.

Henning: And yes, you are right about that lady that keeps showing up in my paintings. Since Tascha would most probably beat me with a +2 morning-star if I took pictures of other girls in minimal clothing, I find it safest to ask her to help me out. ;-) To me, this is very handy even though I guess it can be a bit annoying for her in the long run. I am thankful that she keeps up with me and helping me out. Besides, I do love to paint her, as she is a wonderful person and the most important thing in my life.

Tascha: Ah, I am a bit speechless now :) I just would like to add that I wouldn't mind other models at all but it is of course a bit weird to see your boyfriend paint half nude chicks. As far as I know he gets more than enough offers from pretty girls. ;)

„...I LOVE looking at art from other artists“

13 - what is the current system you are working on? Does your work require the most up to date software and hardware?

Henning: My work requires a decent computer, nothing too crazy, just something that can handle high-resolution files in Photoshop well. I bought a cheap kit a couple of years ago, and it's still pulling things off quite well. As long as you have a decent processor, having enough RAM is the major issue. I use Photoshop CS2 exclusively for my personal work. At my fulltime job, I use many others amongst 3D Studio Max.

Tascha: Henning is of course right about the RAM. My desk is bigger than Henning's :D (just wanted to mention that.) I really have to admit that I am spoiled, though. Henning buys me that latest things and keeps himself the older hardware. I got a second flat screen for Christmas as where he is still painting with one. I did bring my own computer down to Greece but it died on my a while ago. So I have a pretty new one (which still tends to like to shut itself of every now and then. stupid Greek electricity...)

Even though I keep repeating that I would love to try out painter again, I am also only using Photoshop CS2 right now. We also have a HP Scanner because I still prefer sketching the traditional way most of the time.

14 - do you still appreciate the art you see from other artists, are there still 'wow' moments, like back then when you did not do that kind of work yourself? I know from my own experience that I look differently on artworks now. But if the pic rocks... then it's still a wowzer for me. What is your experience...? (credits for this question go to pebcak.deviantart.com)

Henning: I LOVE looking at art from other artists, and I have "wow-moments" about every day. I might look at things a bit different since I have more experience now, and I know what to appreciate more, and what kind of work that deserves to be honoured.

Tascha: Well, I don't really consider myself a good artist yet so there are tons and tons of others which give me that "wow" feeling. I do agree that some artists which I was really fond of when I started out again, have lost their magic. I guess that has to do with your own "evolution" but mostly with how you conceive and judge other artwork. For example I appreciate interesting line work, characters and storytelling much more than the actual rendering style now. When I started out I was totally in awe of realism but it lost its magic a bit for me. At least it is not a criteria I am looking at as the most interesting

I am very much in awe of the high profile concept artist and their dynamic approach. Or pretty much everything I know I suck at *laughs*



„Haha, my work never turns out as planned. Still, I can get somewhat close...“

15 - when you do a painting does the finished result always look like the planned concept, or does it sometimes happen that your paintings evolve while you're painting/working on it, and in the end look different?

Henning: Haha, my work never turns out as planned. Still, I can get somewhat close, but something odd always happens on the way. I always have a clear idea on what you paint when I start, and perhaps it is a good thing that some of the creation process is left to chance?

Tascha: Paintings tend to lead me not the other way round. Even though I stay true to the general idea I don't like restricting myself. I think that is one of the reasons I like painting better than actual sketching. With a painting I don't really plan out everything beforehand, I let lucky accidents happen and try to see the painting evolve in front of my eyes. With sketching or lines I feel I am restricted somehow.



16 - when I work on a painting, or generally, music helps me to stay in focus. Is it the same with you? If yes, what kind of music helps you to stay focussed and keeps the creative juices fluid?

Henning: I am addicted to music, and I need to listen to my music when working. On my way to work, during work, on my way home, at home, it doesn't matter where; I just need to have some music. I think it's also because Athens is such a noisy city to live in, and that playing music might override all the fuzz around me. I like alternative music, indie, hard rock, metal, etc. Some of the bands I enjoy listening to are: Rammstein, Seigmen, Deathstars, Pixies, Kent, Modest Mouse, Sparklehorse, Motorpsycho, System of a Down, Turbonegro, Placebo, Smashing Pumpkins, and many, many more. Tascha does tend to "zone out" when painting, and doesn't even notice that she has actually been listening to the same repeating song for the 100th time, heh. Still, she also needs background sound when painting.

Tascha: Absolutely :) I couldn't paint without music. I am listening to different music when I paint than what I would normally. Painting music consists of Tori Amos, Loreena McKennitt, Matrix Soundtrack (don't ask), 300 Soundtrack and all kind of other weird songs I have gathered over time.



„It's hard to plan...“

17 - as the concluding question... what do you, art wise, wish yourself in the future?

Henning: It's hard to plan much because of the life we are currently living. We both live in a foreign country, and we don't know for sure when we will be back, or where we will turn out to settle down. Still, all I hope for is to be able to work with what I love, something related to computer games and also do freelance work for my favourite clients. As long as I find creating my art rewarding and as long as I feel that I am developing, I will keep on painting. I hope that this feeling will stay for as long as possible.

Tascha: Loosen up and create more dynamic paintings. Better understanding of light and colours as well. Ah too much to mention I think... do you have a lot of space for this interview? ;)

I still haven't managed to land a job with WotC... I keep dreaming...



With a bit of luck and help... there is a chance for dreams to come true. We wish you all the best!

This concludes our Interview with Natascha Röösl and Henning Ludvigsen. I, for my part, had a fun time putting together this Interview and hope that you have had a good and informative read!

I want to thank Natascha and Henning for their patience answering my questions and wish them best of luck for all things that lie up on their horizon! We will keep you in sight and hope to see more fantastic work in the future!

I bet we will...!

Thank You.

Tigaer

Christian 'Tigaer' Hecker





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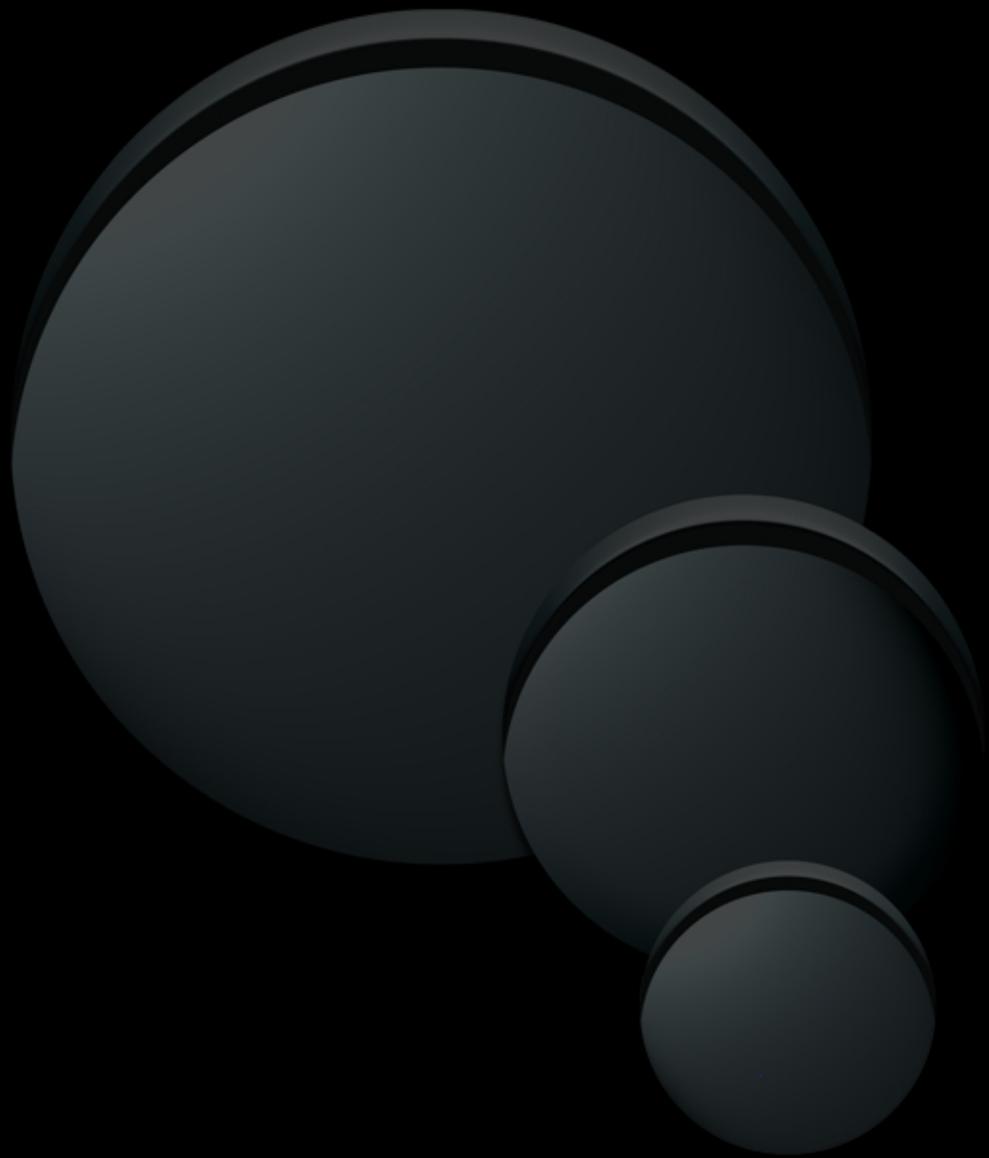
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