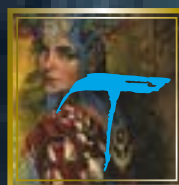




THE ART OF TERESE NIELSEN

From rural dreaming to trading-card queen, Terese's rich, textured work is unmistakable. **Jem Roberts** follows the artist through her fantastical adventures



Terese Nielsen is an immediately recognisable name in fantasy art. She's a painter and mixed-media experimenter at the top of her fields – notably, trading card artwork for the likes of Magic: The Gathering, Harry Potter, and of course, Star Wars. Given the star-skipping theme of this issue, it's

irresistible to draw comparisons between young Terese, and another ambitious young farmhand on a planet far, far away...

"I'm from Aurora," Terese says, "a teeny-tiny farming town. We didn't have computers or cell phones, and video games were barely beginning to happen, so there wasn't anything to do! I would stay home and draw. I wasn't ever bored, but had a lot of time to learn how to do stuff without being distracted by a million things, like

today. Growing up on a farm, you see the seasons turning."

Sharing an upbringing with a twin and older brother (fellow fantasy artist Ron Spencer), creativity ran in the family. "We have a strain of it going on there – my mom took art classes in college early on, but then got married and did the stay-at-home mom thing. But she was a cultured lady. ➔



DESCENDANTS' PATH

A 2012 Magic: The Gathering illustration from the set Avacyn Restored. "Probably one of my most personal and meaningful M:TG pieces. It features portraits of my own family history."

BLAST OF GENIUS

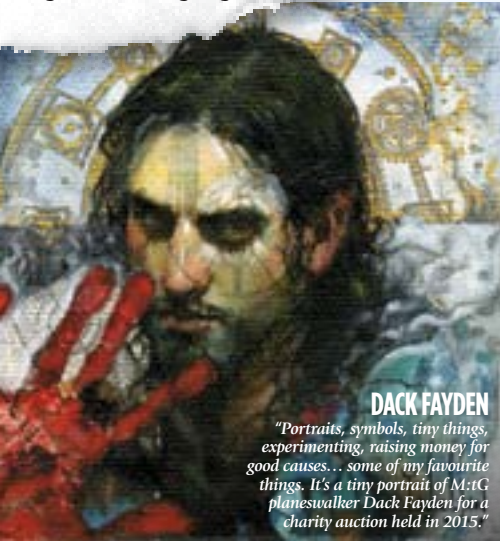
"I like Ral Zarek's confident, cocky smirk and hair. But I don't think he's trustworthy dating material."

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ARTIST TIP

BE INSPIRED

"I have this nook in my studio, my little library, and I like to sit there and pull out different books and be inspired. I like to just let a lot of influences seep in to what I do. And then I'll go, 'All right, let's try this!' I'm excited and I've got a little fire going."



DACK FAYDEN

"Portraits, symbols, tiny things, experimenting, raising money for good causes... some of my favourite things. It's a tiny portrait of M:TG planeswalker Dack Fayden for a charity auction held in 2015."

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➡ "My parents were both cool about supporting any kind of passion we had. Out on the farm, we didn't have art classes to go to, or even that many books, but all of us – me and my brothers – all three of us would sit around and draw."

Studying art at college in Idaho, and then Pasadena, where she graduated with distinction, gave her a crucial escape from the farm, setting her on the right track. "Once qualified, you have the basics to springboard into any direction you want, with a solid grounding in all the core principals that matter," she says.

But Terese was, above all, inspired by the artists whose work she hungrily consumed from the early days. "My first art crush was

totally Boris Vallejo," she reveals. "I just loved the way he painted, and still do – the musculature and the vibrant colour, his skin tones – I just couldn't imagine that was possible to do with a paintbrush. I like Frank Frazetta, but some of the ways he depicted women stuck in my craw. I remember even as a young girl, feeling

“I love the way Vallejo painted – the musculature, the vibrant colour, the skin tones”

SWORDS TO PLOWSHARES

"The challenge to symbolically, in an Escher-like tessellation, depict the transformation of war and death to new life and growing things, was an honour and a tremendous challenge."

Boris' work was much more empowering with the type of women he painted. I wanted to relate to those women."

Her gender made breaking into any industry an extra challenge, but in the fantasy field where unrealistic depictions of the female form are infamous, there was a particular desire to break through and make some changes.

Even today, she feels, negative depictions of women remain rife. "You still see it. Maybe it's just always gonna be there, in fantasy, because some people enjoy seeing that, but it doesn't appeal to me, and probably a lot of other women. Definitely there's far more options now."

FROM THE RUINS

Marvel provided the first entry into paying jobs. "My older brother was a huge comic book guy, and I was a pretty big Marvel fan – X-Men, Spider-Man. We got a trading card gig early on, and then moved into comic books and collectibles and it all snowballed from there." But working alongside her then-husband Cliff Nielsen, Terese's ➡

SYDRI, GALVANIC GENIUS

"When I grow up, I want Sydri's powers and her workshop. I bribed my daughter Kristi to model for the photo shoot for this piece. It was great fun rendering her and all the magical elements."



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TERESE NIELSEN

VITAL STATISTICS

"Frazetta's female depictions stuck in my craw"

Date of Birth

March 1966

Place of Birth

Aurora, Nebraska

Current location

Nevada, US

Favourite artists

Gustav Klimt, Alphonse Mucha, Mark English, Thomas Blackshear, Julie Bell, Brad Kunkle,

Yoann Lossel,

Tran Nguyen

What's your favourite fantasy franchise?

Magic: The Gathering

Career highlight?

Becoming a

part of Magic! They have amazing room for creativity.

LUKE: LEGACY OF THE FORCE

Mean, moody and magnificent: Mark Hamill's cornball hero reveals a darker side under the influence of Terese's paintbrush...



PHOTO REFERENCE

"Here I am, in all my 'Force-d' glory. I had the Hamill face reference, so all I needed was basic pose/lighting/costuming."

"This was created for Star Wars Miniatures: Legacy of the Force packaging in 2007. They wanted Luke in his black, battle-rebel-commando stealth suit: lightsaber in hand, no helmet, eye contact and an aggressive stance. Frazetta's Tanar of Pellucidar bubbled up in my mind."

I shot photos of a model (in this case me) for basic anatomy, lighting and costuming. From there, a sketch was worked up and approved by the Lucas team. The final art was painted, starting with gouache washes in the background as an underlayer of colour and texture. Acrylic washes were laid in on the figure. After all the white of the paper was covered with general colours, values and texture, and the rest was built up and rendered out in oil. The background was revisited with more glazes of oil and an airbrush was used for the lightsaber glow."



LUKE SKETCH

"I was more than thrilled at the opportunity to depict Luke with a more badass feel."

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LUKE FINAL

"The sketch was printed and wet-stretched, with textural gouache washes added immediately after to cover the 'white' of the paper. After sealing the paper, oil was used to render out all of the lighter values and details."

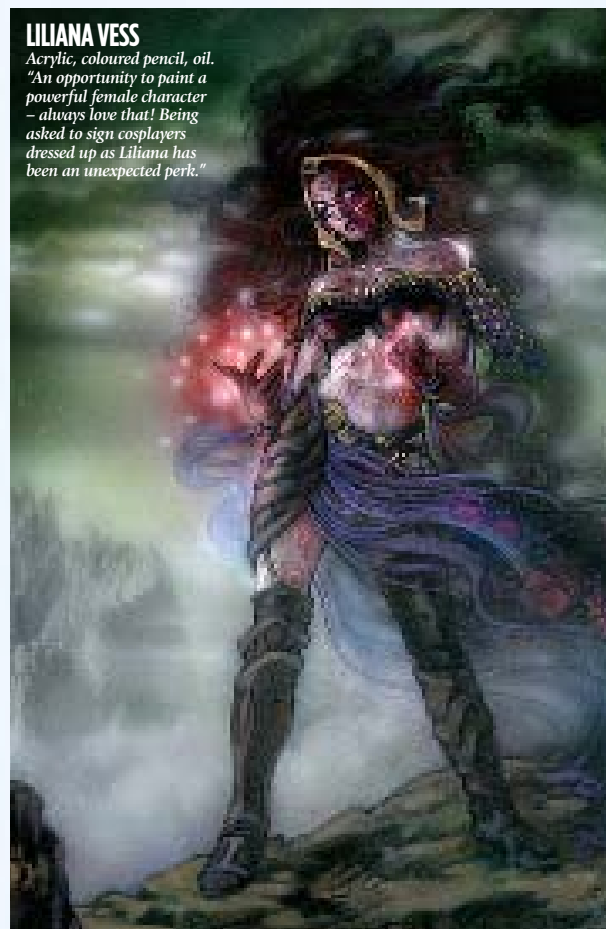




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LILIANA VESS

Acrylic, coloured pencil, oil.
"An opportunity to paint a powerful female character – always love that! Being asked to sign cosplayers dressed up as Liliana has been an unexpected perk."



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PADME AMIDALA: CELEBRATION IV LIMITED PRINT

"A hats-off, deep bow to my greatest inspiration and influence, Alphonse Mucha. His elegant draftsmanship, reasons for making art, rich, symbolic layers will always be part of me."

➡ first real coup came from marshalling the paintbrushes for dystopian offshoot Ruins. Although the darkness of the plot proved a mixed blessing.

"If you're painting something dark and depressing, it's depressing! Ruins was where everything goes wrong for superheroes, an alternate universe where the Hulk gets tumours from the gamma radiation, and they all have psychological breakdowns. Oh my God – it was an awesome story! But super-depressing.

"Despite that, it was a great gig early on in my career – painting pages at breakneck speed, cranking it out and staying on schedule, really intense. Just to make a living, you had to paint real fast, which



© 2007 Wizards of the Coast

ESSENCE WARDEN

"I was asked to reference Randy Gallegos' M:tG Soul Warden illustration, but replace the human cleric with a wise, calm Yavimaya elf. My longtime muse/wife was the perfect model."



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DICTATE OF HELIOD

"I've long had an appreciation for sculpted, muscular bodies, so painting a powerful, godlike, dark-skinned, magical figure is a lot of fun."

Painting at breakneck speed, cranking it out and staying on schedule. It was really intense. You had to paint fast

wasn't so fun. At some points in my career it really felt like a conveyor belt on my art table. No room for experimentation or risking making a mistake, because it has to be done right now."

A KIND OF MAGIC

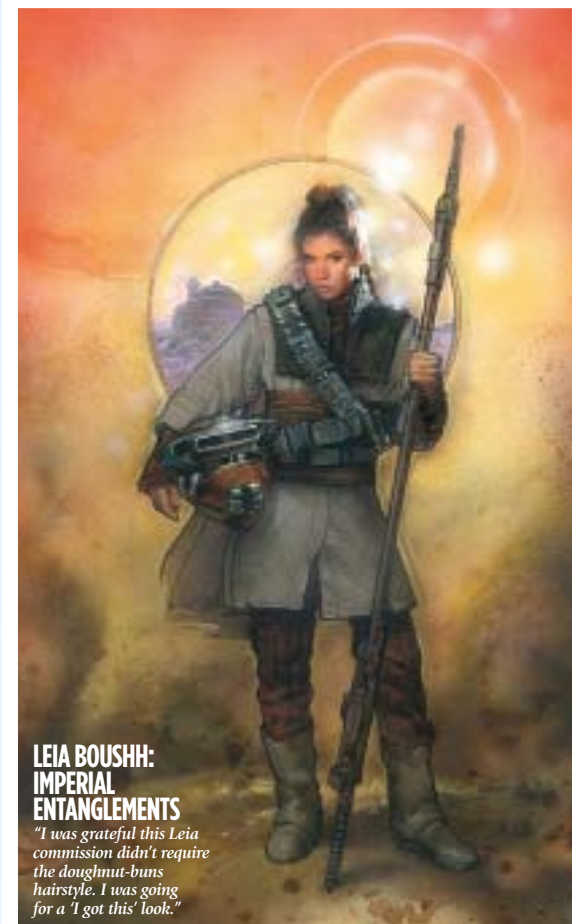
It was Magic: The Gathering that really put Terese on another level, and gave far more scope for her passions: mixed media painting, hiding myriad symbols and odd effects. "Magic has changed a lot over the years," she admits. "It used to be really wide open. It's got more specific with style guides now, but I've never felt restricted by that.

"That's one of the reasons I love Magic – it keeps changing and I never get bored. Also, the fanbase is awesome and huge, and it's done so great with the brand for 20 years. It's a worldwide success and you can do well signing and selling prints and

originals, so just one painting can be maximised a lot of different ways – there are side benefits!"

Trying out different effects in her painting – throwing in leaves, or hidden meanings – is one of Terese's trademarks. But she admits now that, "I'm not really sure I could explain it, I just love it, like old books and symbols and sacred geometries, somehow it all wants to be in there..."

But she's as on board with digital art as any of her contemporaries, despite her love of the visceral nature of old-fashioned paintwork. "To my mind, digital is just another way of painting. To do a great piece you still need to know what you're doing, so I think it's entirely valid in every way. I just like the physicality of all the mediums and trying new things. Plus, selling original art is very hot these days! You can't really compare a print-out to a painting."



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LEIA BOUSHH: IMPERIAL ENTANGLEMENTS

"I was grateful this Leia commission didn't require the doughnut-buns hairstyle. I was going for a 'I got this' look."



CREATURES OF SPIRIT

"The journey to authentic self-expression can be long and meandering. I've surrendered to my own dreams, where animal totems have engaged my soul for decades."

BASANDRA, BATTLE SERAPH

"If I had to pick an image to represent my brand, Basandra would be it! Dozens of women have told me that it inspires them. There's no higher compliment."



© 2011 Wizards of the Coast

“The fantasy art area is so generous, everyone just loves to share. There’s rarely competitiveness or secrecy”

As fans may sense, there’s one major franchise our chat hasn’t yet touched on... “My very first Star Wars job was early on, like 20 years ago. For Star Wars Galaxy magazine, I was contacted to do a painting of Lando Calrissian. Then Dark Horse Comics asked me to do Star Wars covers for them – comics and books.”

Despite the quality of her work for those mediums, however, a more commercial job took her fancy: “Several years later, I did packaging illustrations for the Star Wars miniatures, which was like 24 different paintings just for those. That was my favourite, because you could just focus on a single character for each design, and get into the mind of that character. That’s the fun part to me.”

Terese can call herself a fantasy art master – she has worked with the best: “I remember Donato and I sitting next to each other in Artists’ Alley at Comic-Con for years, and it’s so awesome to see how he’s moulded his career. Then there’s Rebecca Guay and her work, and how it’s evolved and changed, and she’s started this school that has become a phenomenon.

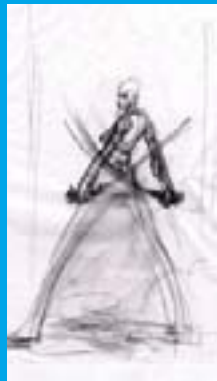
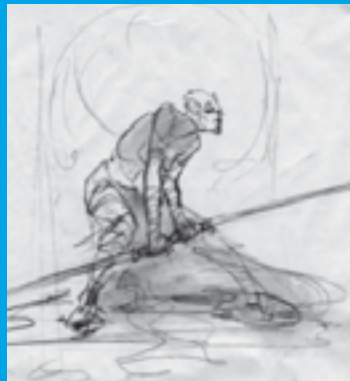
People whose art is amazing, and then they share it, I find inspiring. I feel like the fantasy art area is so generous and thoughtful with young ones coming up and everyone just loves to share. You rarely get a feeling of competitiveness or secrecy.”

But which of her fantasy-art jobs has been her favourite? She laughs: “My favourite fantasy world is probably my life.”

Traditional skills ASAJJ VENTRESS: GALAXY AT WAR

A lesser-known part of the Star Wars universe was a chance to get away from tried stances...

“I’m not up on all of the extended universe Star Wars characters, Asajj Ventress included, but it didn’t take long to figure out she’s a powerful, sinister character. There’s a finite amount of poses for figures with lightsabers, and I’m tired of most of them. A menacing female with two glowing wands provided me with something a little different to play with. I received feedback from the Lucas team that she needed to be more aggressive, with “crossed lightsabers and a sneer”. Reference photos were shot of my wife holding broomsticks, “sneering” in her underwear, but I think I’ll keep those pics to myself!”



1 Sketch poses

“I scrawled out three or four loose gestural poses. I liked several, so in this case (to save time) I ran the loose thumbs by the art director to see which direction he wanted to go in.”



2 Photo reference

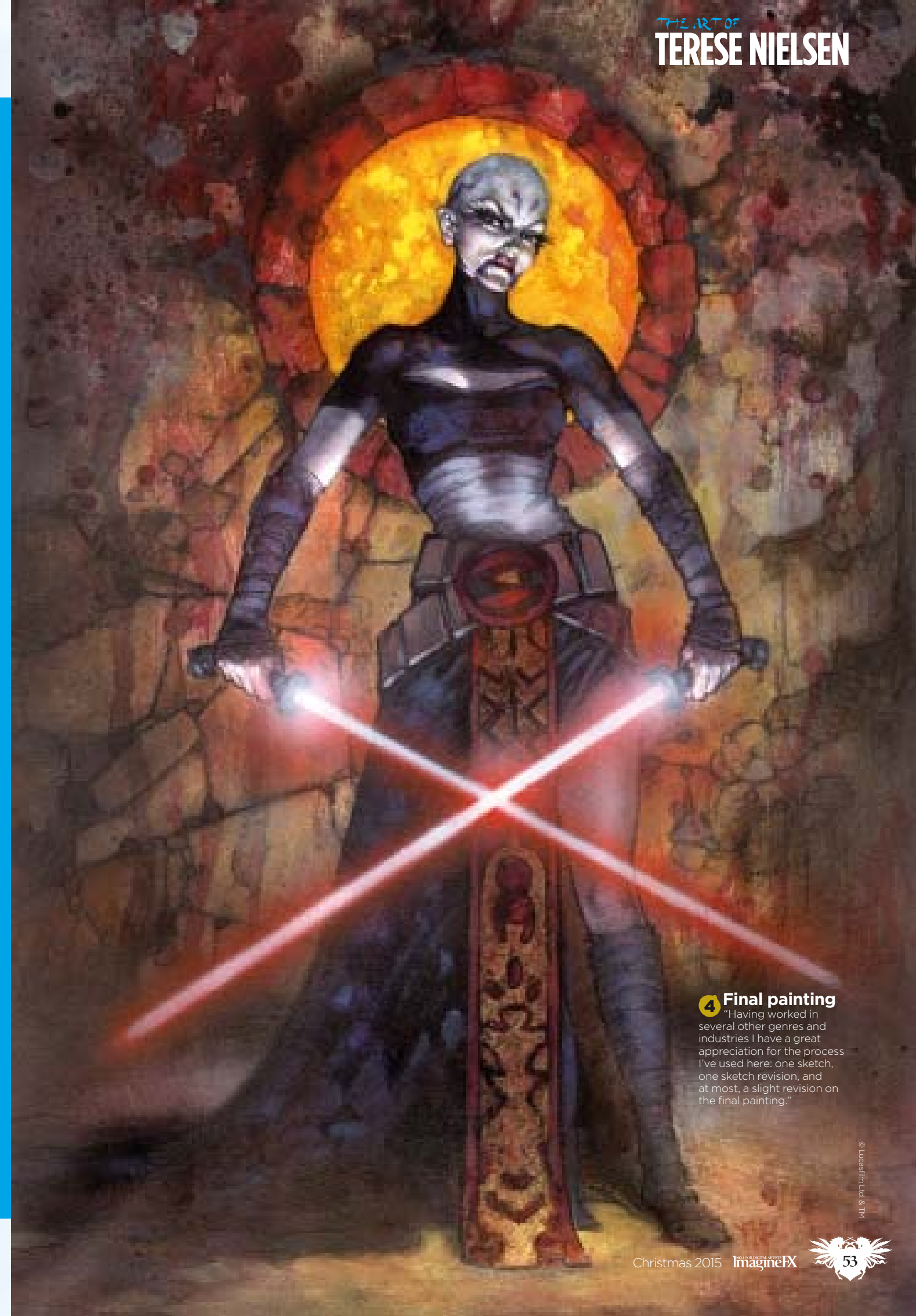
“Photos with dramatic lighting are vital. Fantasy art requires some made-up areas, but let those be the stylistic aspects. Without good reference you end up mucking about in the drawing or painting phase for hours, wondering why it isn’t working and have nothing to check it against.”



3 Time efficient

“From the beginning, RPG and CCG jobs have spoiled me. In general they require far less time when it comes to: reading manuscripts, multiple sketch submissions, colour comps and then final art revisions.”

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TERESE NIELSEN



4 Final painting

“Having worked in several other genres and industries I have a great appreciation for the process I’ve used here: one sketch, one sketch revision, and at most, a slight revision on the final painting.”

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Christmas 2015

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