SCI-FI & FANTASY ARTIST IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Digital Art
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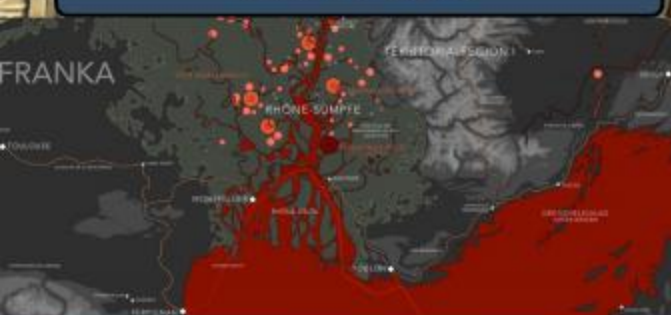
MAPS

HERWIN WEILINK

GLYNN SEAL

STEFFEN BRAND

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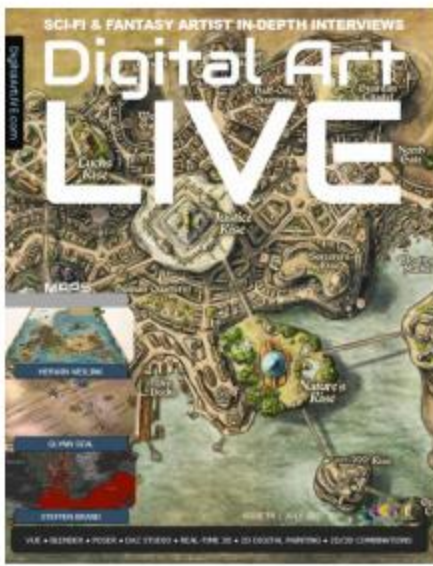
Front Cover:
Detail from the "The Capital City of Theogonia" by Herwin Weilink, a fantasy map we show in full later in this issue.

CONTENTS

INTERVIEWS

HERWIN WEILINK

We interview a leading freelance maker of quality fantasy maps, who has worked on a variety of RPG games and books.

MAPS | RPG GAMES | 2D

"After the first commission, to my surprise, the requests came flowing in! I gave myself a goal that, within five years, I would create something for a large publisher. This meant taking on many projects and, with a job as an IT Engineer, I spent at least 40 hours a week on maps."

GLYNN SEAL

Glynn was winner of the Gold ENnie award for Best Cartography in 2018, and makes the old-school indie RPG *The Midderlands*.

MAPS | RPG GAMES | 2D

"The D&D 5e *Midderlands* Kickstarter launched, but it became clear it might not do as well as expected because of the timing. It did relaunch and got funded. It has now gone out to backers — in full glorious colour and stunning. My best combined work to date."
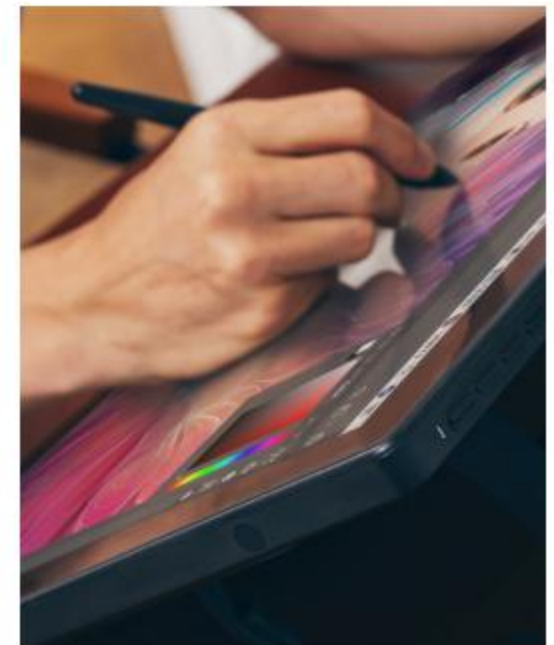
XP-PEN ARTIST 22

We review the new second generation of XP-Pen's popular and affordable Artist 22 'draw on the screen' pen monitor.

HARDWARE FOR ARTISTS

"XP-Pen were kind enough to ship us a free in-depth review unit for their new 21.5-inch LCD pen-monitor, twice and fast and with a battery-free stylus pen. We give our honest opinion, working from experience gained with an earlier self-purchased model."

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Credits for pictures, from top left: Detail from "Map Concept Art ii" by <u>D-FaulTx</u>; detail from "Treasure Map 2" by <u>The Stock Warehouse</u>; detail from a map of "Kamantou" by Herwin Weilink — interviewed in this issue.

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Please support Dave at <u>Patreon</u>.

WELCOME...

Welcome to the bumper 'Maps' issue of your regular free magazine.

The author Lewis Carroll *(Alice in Wonderland)* once depicted a whimsical character who had made the perfect map. This would have covered the landscape with an exact 1:1 mile-to-a-mile representation, and there was a plan to lay it across the entire land like a gigantic tablecloth. But before the map could be spread out the farmers objected to having their sunlight blocked, and the grand project was abandoned. The inventor comments to his child-visitors: "So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well." Carroll's serious point, cloaked in humour, was that no map can be a perfect representation of the territory it represents. At best a map is an occasionally useful abstraction, and at worst a nuisance — because it clouds one's view of what is actually in the real landscape at any given moment.

J.R.R. Tolkien worked the other way around. He began with a map and ended up with the magnificently detailed territory of Middle-earth and *The Lord of the Rings*. Which of course demonstrates the value of 'the map' for high fantasy... if one keeps at it. His own map-based invention process took some thirty years.

Such creatives were working in a world where maps were rare and infrequently updated. But now we have a wealth of map-based tools, from Google Maps to the various devices that hook us into GPS navigation with ease. Street View helps us to 'mentally map' a place before we arrive there, and thus enjoy the space all the more because we seem to 'know' it already.

Various budget-priced digital tools are also at hand for the creation of fantasy maps, from FlowScape to Wonderdraft on the desktop PC. There are even subscription-based services online. Fantasy map-making is thus increasingly easy to do and learn, especially when pen-monitor makers such as XP-Pen make it affordable to draw on the screen.

What is not so easy to learn from digital tools is how real old-school maps worked. Learning real maps could give you, as a budding fantasy map-maker, an edge over others in the field. For instance, study the best British OS or U.S. USGS maps at 1:25,000 or 1:30,000 scale, to gain a wealth of insights into how such things are meant to work. The older of these maps are now free online in the UK and USA. One of the best ways to learn might be to make a fresh translation of such a map showing your local place. Craft it into a more personalised and artistic form — by building on the underlying spatial data and symbols-'key' on that old and painstakingly-created official map.

The other difficult thing is to people your base map with races and trade-routes and nations that make sense, and which are also fresh and appealing enough to make people take notice. Of course there may in time be non-random 'map populating' AI assistants, so we don't need to spend thirty years logically working it all out. Until then, it's probably still going to be down to sheer imagination... and fun.

DAVID HADEN
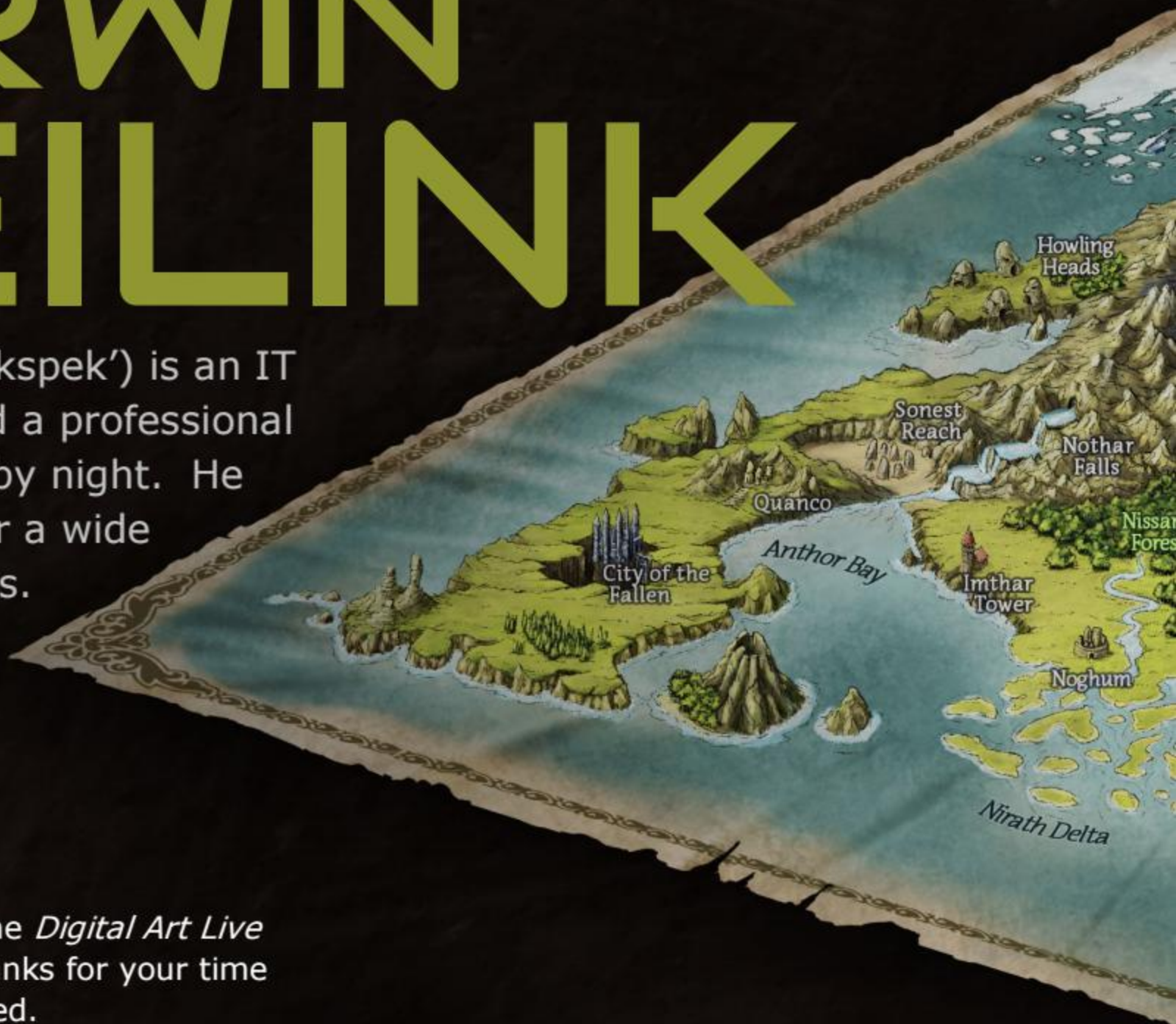Editor of *Digital Art Live* magazine
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HERWIN WEILINK

Herwin Weilink ('Djekspek') is an IT Engineer by day, and a professional fantasy map maker by night. He has created maps for a wide range of game clients.

DAL: Herwin, welcome to the *Digital Art Live* indepth interview. Many thanks for your time on this, it's much appreciated.

HW: Thank you, the pleasure is all mine.

DAL: Super. OK, before we dive into your map-making and projects and you many commercial works, let's step back in time… and ask when you first became aware of your creative streak? How did that emerge for you, and was there anyone special who helped you out in the early years?

HW: That was a long time ago… As a little kid I was always busy drawing, but once I had my first PC I then switched to programming. Drawing and programming might seem to be the opposite of each other, but much later I found out that creating software is not so far away from creating art. I did have doubts whether to pursue an artistic career and go to art school, or follow my other passion about becoming a programmer. I ended up going for my Masters degree in Computer Science and I became an IT Engineer. And my love for drawing was pushed to the back for quite a while…

DAL: I see. Did you have any sort of half-way house at that time? For instance, did you have an early interest in maps and map-making?

HW: I do remember that, as a little kid, I once created a fantasy atlas with made-belief countries and cultures. While growing older I became fascinated by old atlases and historical maps. Loving the mix of technical and artistic skills used by the cartographers. But it wasn't until much later, when I ran my own RPG D&D campaign and when I was creating a world for my players that I got into cartography. I needed maps to visualize this world I was creating.

DAL: I see. What was your early route into commercial work from there?

HW: I started making maps for my own D&D campaign and while learning this I stumbled upon an online community, the Cartographers' Guild at www.cartographersguild.com.

HERWIN WEILINK

NETHERLANDS

PHOTOSHOP |
SKETCHUP |
BLENDER

WEB

This was and is an awesome community of friendly people interested in cartography and making maps. They help and give advice on drawing, tooling, and also many tutorials can be found there. This community really was my biggest inspiration to get into drawing maps.

DAL: Yes, while getting this issue reading I've had the feeling that the online cartography community is quite friendly and welcoming, and willing to share tutorials and the like.

HW: They also run monthly challenges and I decided to participate in those. This turned out to be a great way to start and also to get great feedback. I started enjoying making worlds come alive creating illustrated maps, and decided to take on my first commercial project.

This first job was also acquired via the online community via its mapmaking request forums.

DAL: I see. How did that go?

HW: In the beginning it was a struggle. I felt I couldn't live up to creating the expected result and it caused me a lot of stress. It was hard work, but bit-by-bit my skills improved. And I learned how to deal with requirements, clients, and I was able develop my own style.

I also set-up my own website and I kept on participating in challenges like the 'One-page Dungeon Contest'. I also started writing simple tutorials to give something back to the online community that gave me so much.

DAL: Yes, I see you have many short clear tutorials on your DeviantArt Gallery. And so your career took off.

HW: Yes, after the first commissioned work it really set off. And, to my surprise, the requests came flowing in! It was clear that people liked my work in this — rather niche — form of art. I started creating maps for online and offline games, and books.

DAL: Great. Was it then your aim to become a map-maker, or did that emerge later? If so, what was 'the key opportunity' there, for you, in the form of a later big client?

HW: To be honest it wasn't really my goal to become a professional artist. I just enjoyed participating in challenges and creating my own maps. But I found out people liked my work, so I decided to see if I could make some money-creating maps. But once I started doing commercial projects, I set myself a goal that, within five years, I wanted to create something for a large publisher. This ambition meant taking on many projects and, besides my regular job as an IT Engineer, I spend at least 40 hours a week making maps. It is all about practice, practice.

It was a crazy period… but after about three years of drawing every single evening and weekend, I was totally in awe when I saw an e-mail from *WotC* in my e-mail box requesting a map for their D&D series.

DAL: Excellent. So that was the standout early client for you, where your work got you a lot of attention?

HW: The first bigger commercial assignment was actually for the company 13Mann, that was in developing the RPG *Aborea*. For them I created a huge detailed A0 size map, and some 3D views of buildings and villages. This first 'bigger project' was stressful, but they were super friendly, and I learned a lot about the professional creative delivery process.

And then… seeing the physical box with my art inside was really a milestone for me personally.

DAL: Wonderful.

HW: Besides that, I think the tile-sets I created for ProFantasy's *Campaign Cartographer* gave me the most exposure. Now other artists were using 'djekspek style' art-pieces to create maps themselves! It was really satisfying to see others being inspired by the art I created.

DAL: Super. Do you have a map your are most proud of from that early breakthrough period?

HW: As for the art I was proud of, I think it was for the online game called *Pit of War* by Outcast Games. I loved the amazing dark art-style, and tried to get that look into the regional, and 3D dungeon maps, I created for them. During this project I got some feedback from an art director from Blizzard, which really helped me improve in my work.

DAL: And it looks like since then you've worked for many clients in the indie games sector. Could you give readers a quick resume or tour?
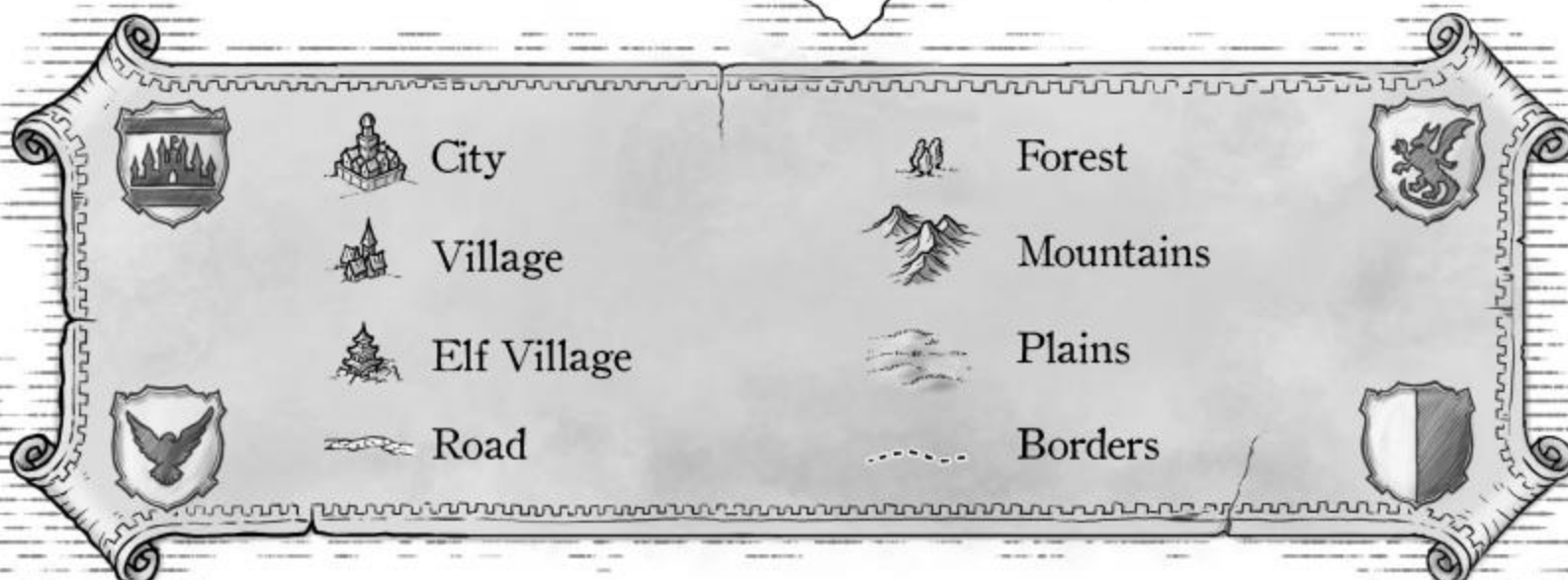
HW: Sure. I have done a lot of work, for over 100 publishers, by now. From small to large projects and from board and online games to novels. I already mentioned some of them, but below are some other projects I really enjoyed working on. I created a set of maps for the *Draconspire* world, and RPG setting by Jered McMillan. It was great to work on a set of maps for a complete world.

I also started doing work for fantasy novels, and I was very pleased with the worldmap for the novel *Soulborn* by Kevin Breaux. Sometimes it's nice to make just a single black-and-white map.

One of the bigger boards I created was the board of the world of *Storm Hollow* by GameSalute. This is a really nice storytelling roleplaying game. I loved creating this large detailed colorful map where all kind of fairy tales are combined together into a single world.

I also really enjoyed the ISO dungeon maps for *13th Age / Eye of the Stone Thief* by Pellgrane Press. I loved looking into detailed descriptions of these dungeons and try bring them alive.

the lands of illyia

N

Jackalwere Caves

High Council Ruins

Spire Anguish

new maejika

tri-towns

Binopp

kel tora

port of kel tora

maulen

BAY OF ILLYIA

Island of Velencia

Burning dawn

Joa'ta

Werr'nax

Weiden's Rise

	City		Forest
	Village		Mountains
	Elf Village		Plains
	Road		Borders

THE CAPITAL CITY OF
THEOGONIA

Guardan
Citadel

West
Gate

Guardan
Citadel

10

Darkness
Rise

Lucks
Rise

12

9

11

Human Qua

City Guard
Headquarters

Darkness
Rise

E

Guardian
Citadel

Central
Market

E

South
Gate

Red Light
District

E

Guardan
Citadel

E

Harbour

Guardan Citadel

Guardan Citadel

Half-Orc Quarters

1

E

Half Orc Quarters

North Gate

Guardan Citadel

E

3

2

Justice Rise

4

E

Sorcerers Rise

Floating Market

Chaos Rise

6

5

arters

8

Nature's Rise

Chaos Rise

7

Dwarven Quarters

??? Rise

N

Guardan Citadel

Sunken Temple

DAL: Do you have a personal-favorite map you've made for clients, so far?

DM: Hard to say but I really like how my citymap of Theogonia turned out. I created this for the *Erevos* game project and wanted to show how this fantasy city with many elevations was shaped. To achieve this, I created small side-view illustrations to accompany the top-down view of the city.

DAL: Thanks. Congratulations of making a career in a market that so many are clamoring to enter, or offering to work for free in. Let's turn now to your tools, please. What are 'the tools of the trade' for you, when it comes to map-making.

HW: My toolset is rather limited. Most of my work is fully drawn and colored just in Photoshop. But sometimes I use terrain generators or 3D tools like SketchUp and Blender to generate some reference and perspective images to use as a base.

DAL: I see, interesting. Have you looked at any of the specialist map-making tools out there, I mean the ones for fantasy map-makers, rather than GIS specialists? Things like Wonderdraft, perhaps? If so, what's your opinion of them?

HW: There are indeed a great set of tools available for (fantasy) cartographers these days. In my early days I looked into tools like Dundjinni and Campaign Cartographer. I tried them out and they are really great tools. And over the years more and more tools have become available. Even tools that generate complete maps with climates, cultures, and cities.

DAL: Ah, that's interesting. My editorial for this issue suggested that was still a very human skill. Maybe I was wrong, and there are already AI's that can do more than just the map-making, if one feeds them a fantasy map!

HW: Although I should say that, while these are all great for quickly creating good looking maps, I personally enjoy the creation of something new and unique, and give it my personal touch. Also publishers like their art to be unique and not showing it was made in a specific tool. The great thing about these tools is that they are non-destructive, so you can move things around. So they are perfect for prototyping, but as with hand-drawn and painted maps each change requires effort to incorporate. But I guess it's a personal choice to use these tools or to manually draw them like the cartographers did in the past...

DAL: I see. Thanks. What's your general studio and PC setup like?

HW: The most important is memory and SSD drive space when working with Photoshop files of multiple gigabytes. So I work with 16GB ram and a 1 Terabyte SSD, and I use a Wacom Cintiq to draw on the screen. The Cintiq pen-monitors are not cheap, but as a professional artist you really can't live without.

DAL: Yes, although I must say that XP-Pen are doing their best to provide far more affordable substitutes, at around £350-400.

You mentioned Photoshop, but what's the general workflow you tend to use when making a map? For instance, is there a lot of planning with pencil and paper, rulers and compass, lots of research? Or do you just go straight to the PC and load Photoshop?

1 draw rough shape
SMALL
THIN LINES
ZIGZAG LINES
FAT LINES
WIDE

2 mountain peaks
OVERLAP COAST
FURTHER PEAKS: STEEP
ADD SOME FOOT HILLS
CLOSER PEAKS MORE FLAT

3 connect mountains
JUST CONNECT THE PEAKS

4 add details
SMALL WIGGLY LINES GOING DOWN

5 forest edge #1
OVERLAP

6 forest edge #2
MAKE IRREGULAR

7 trunks
ONLY DRAW WHERE VISIBLE

8 forest details
ALSO ADD OVERLAP LINES FOR DEPTH

9 coastline
FAR AWAY, CLOSER SHORE
ALSO USE HERE
CLOSE: FURTHER SHORE

10 waves
SHORT WAVES
LONGER WAVES

11 base value
ADD BASE VALUE

12 shadows
LIGHT DIRECTION
SHADE
SHADE

13 high-lights
HI-LITE PEAKS
SMALL HI-LITES TREES

SMALL ISLAND
Step-By-Step Tutorial

Small tutorial to create a 3D map of an island. It shows the tricks I use to make things pop-out to give the map depth. Note that all lines are created with perspective in mind. I hope you enjoy it!

created by djekspek for
fantasy-maps.com

HW: My workflow really depends on the type of project. Sometimes there is a complete detailed reference available, and the client just wants to have a pretty map made.

DAL: I see.

HW: Since I draw everything using my tablet, I only use my PC and no pen and paper is used. I usually start off with high-level sketches and some style examples, like a 'mood board'. From there I create detailed line drawings and once these are accepted, I start coloring. And at the end of the process I add the ornaments and illustrations if required.

Sometimes there's just some rough ideas and I help shape the continents, climates, scale, and even game content itself. This requires knowledge of geography and weather systems. And I also did a lot of research in maritime navigation and cartography, historical architecture, mythology, landscapes, and even city-planning.

DAL: Thanks, fascinating. Yes, there must be a lot of sub-topics to learn about, anot inly individually but then they all need to be integrated together. I guess it's really city-planning and ethnography and geology and hydrology and more…

OK, let's turn now to your longer-term personal projects. How are they progressing, and what finished forms will they take?

HW: At this moment I don't do *a lot* of personal projects. But I'm in the process of setting up a game studio to create an online game called *Rulers of the Sea*. It's a historical role-playing game set in the 18th century. Seafaring and cartography will play an important part in the game, so research on historical cartography is currently one of my personal projects when it comes to mapmaking.

DAL: Interesting, the great age of exploration and risk. Talking of great adventure, if someone turned up one day with an open check-book and wanted you to 'do your dream project, no expense spared' — what would it be? I get the feeling from your Gallery that it could it be something in the 'gothic/horror' line?

HW: Well… I once started a project to create an interactive 3D map of a fantasy world set in Scandinavia. Unfortunately, the project was never completed, but creating a 3D interactive map that can be navigated and interacted with using a VR set would be really awesome.

DAL: Wonderful. Talking of VR, where do you see your sectors of the games industry in ten or fifteen years from now? Do you see a firm place for AR or other technologies, for instance? Or do you think we'll see a growth in old-school 'no-tech' gaming? Do you see growth areas overseas, perhaps — such as the billions of new African youths, for instance?

HW: In the computer games industry a lot has happened in just the past few years. With AI and procedural content generation becoming more and more mature and available, I think the artistic process will move to 'generated art' as well. Especially now that AI is used to create new art based on existing art-styles. For example, there are some interesting projects going on where AI is used to mimic art-styles of famous painters.

DAL: Yes, I hear that G'MIC has more up their sleeve on style-transfer, for the next version or perhaps one or two after that. For readers who don't know G'MIC, everyone should have it, and it's wholly free. It's a powerful filter-suite that's already built into Krita and recently became a free old-school .8BF plugin for Photoshop, Paint.NET, PhotoLine etc. I say filter set, but it goes way beyond the ancient Filter Forge. Yes, it would certainly be interesting to see the possibilities of style-transfer become more mature and usable. But I haven't looked at it for a few years now, so perhaps it's advanced.

GM: I wouldn't be surprised to see a future where a concept artist creates a 'basic style', and other art elements are generated via AI based on that style. But it's hard to say how fast this will go and I expect the coming years more then sufficient creative work for creative cartographers. As in the end nothing beats a really detailed hand-drawn map that brings a world alive, and shows off the skill of the cartographer.

"I love looking into detailed descriptions of dungeons and try bring them alive."

Pictures: *Pit of War* Dungeons and Sewers. Overleaf: *Pit of War* worldmap.

DAL: Indeed. What would be the best way, today, for a new map-interested artist to move toward being a professional?

HW: First of all, you need to invest a lot of time in getting to a level of mastery when it comes to drawing and painting. Many people say they 'don't have the required artistic qualities', but in my opinion it's mainly hard work. The 10,000 hours needed to become a master in something also holds for cartographers. Also, I tried out many different styles and techniques of artists who inspired me, before my own personal style emerged. I tried to copy the people I admired and tried all kinds of tools. Your tools need to fit like gloves to get the most out of it.

DAL: That seems a good tip. 'Don't be flightly', find a good tool and stick with it. Perhaps especially relevant with 20+ possible fantasy mapping software packages or websites.

GM: And you have to do research and get to know things like how rivers flow naturally, how mountains are shaped by erosion and subsidence, what factors determine climate, and how cities are build-up. This will help give credibility to a map of a fantasy world which also has fantasy elements like floating islands, magical volcanoes, etc. Also note that you don't have to be the greatest artist to become a professional. Publishers look (besides creative skills) for consistency and reliability. Usually, they have many people creating art combined with a complicated planning with set deadlines. They need to be able to rely on you delivering what you promised.

And for me personally joining the cartograhersguild.com was maybe the most important step in becoming a cartographer. There are many resources and examples available as well as friendly enthusiastic people willing to help-out any starter. When learning something new, nothing beats feedback and advice from others.

DAL: I see. All good advice, thanks. Herwin, many thanks for your time today.
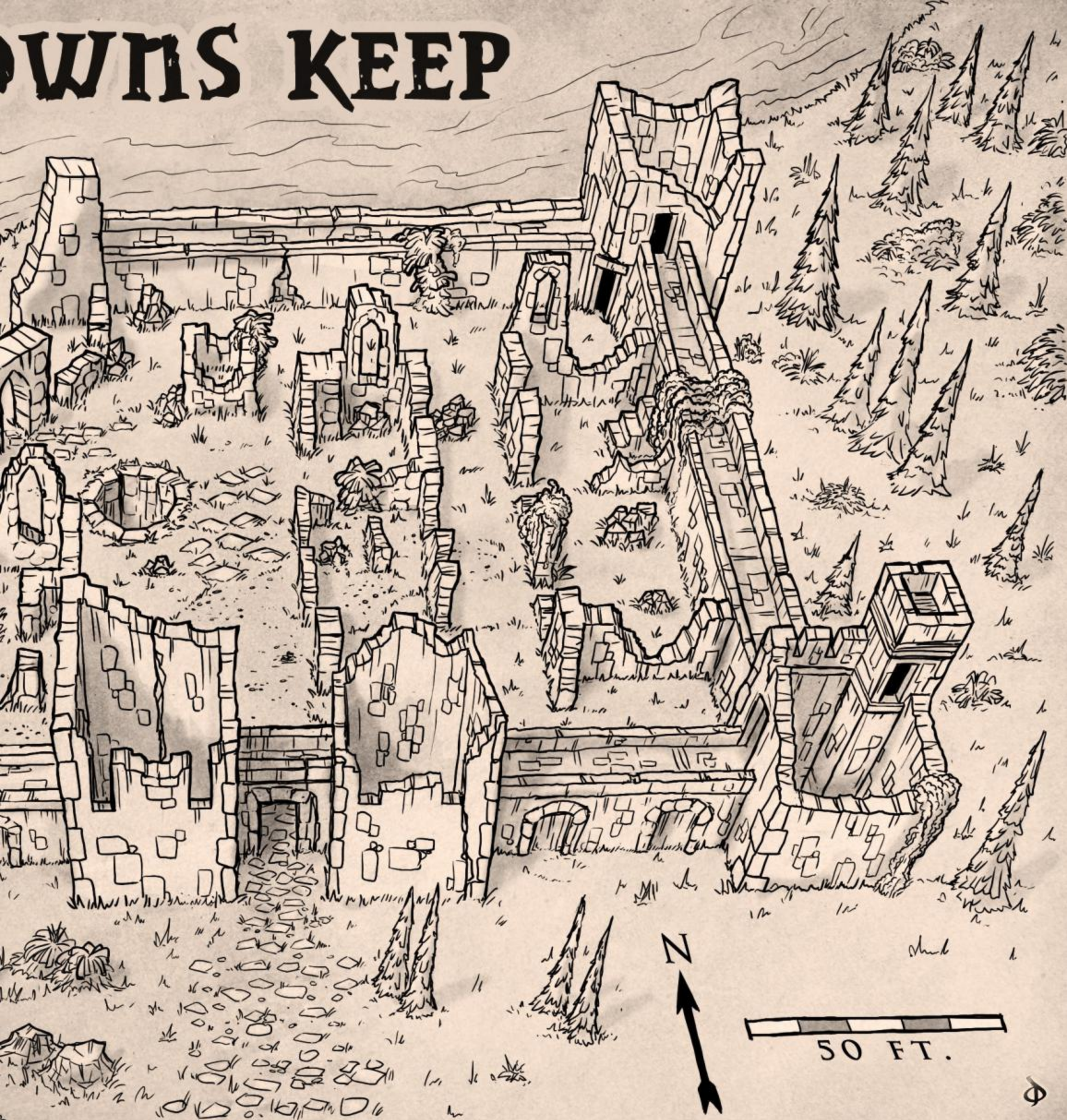
HW: Thanks, and as I said, the pleasure was all mine.

RAVEN DO

Herwin Weilink is online at:

https://www.deviantart.com/djekspek/

https://fantasy-maps.com/

OWNS KEEP

50 FT.

N

Picture: "Raven Downs Keep", created for *Torn World*. We like this fantasy map, not only in its approachable hand-drawn style. Just look at the wealth of evocative spaces and crannies and levels that have been packed into this relatively small space. Tipsy old stones leading to its entrance, past two mysteriously felled stumps. Water features such as the well and the shelved shoreline on the left.

The ruined chapel with what might the remains of a stained-glass window with a hand. The crack in the wall on the far wall. The lurking menace of the towers with their dark windows and the one door. This is the kind of map we like — although fantasy it immediately feels like a 'real place' that you want to dive into, and start populating with all sorts of challenges, creatures, mysteries and adventures.

CONTESTS

We present the details of some current contests and funding of interest, for your consideration.

Picture: still from NVIDIA's real-time 3D 'Marbles' RTX demo.

NVIDIA OMNIVERSE BETA

NVIDIA has a new Omniverse contest, based on its popular real-time 3D Marbles RTX demo (seen above). Download their free Omniverse Create beta and then use your imagination and ingenuity to create a new Rube Goldberg / Heath Robinson type 'epic contraption' in 3D, with marbles, lighting and physics. Requires a good RTX capable NVIDIA graphics-card.

Deadline: 30th July 2021.

https://www.nvidia.com/en-us/omniverse/

XP-PEN ART STAR GRANTS

XP-Pen, makers of popular and affordable graphics tablets and pen-monitors, have launched a new grants program. 'Art Star' invites creative students, professionals, hobbyists and studios in the CG industry to apply for support. To apply, submit your portfolio and your 'dream plan'. Dream plans should be specific and achievable and will be evaluated by a team of industry professionals.

If accepted, the programme will offer you funds and XP-Pen pen monitors or tablets. Art Star and partners will help to boost traffic to your portfolio and social media. There is also a one-year annual ArtStation Pro subscription and a full copy of the Moho Pro 2D professional animation software.

Applications are open until 15th September 2021, for a November 2021 distribution of funds and kit.

https://www.xp-pen.com/

RENDEROSITY CONTESTS

The new owners and developers of Poser 12 often have community contests in which you can win a copy of Poser 12 and more. Recent contests were 'Charcoal' and 'Watercolour', taking advantage of Poser's unique Sketch features. Watch the site for more.

https://www.renderosity.com/

2000 AD ART CONTEST

Britain's venerable and well-known 2000 AD comic has a new themed competition. Illustrate a pin-up poster-insert for the comic, featuring the horrid Angel Gang from Judge Dredd's Cursed Earth. Winners will have their work printed in this widely-read science-fiction comic. Entry deadline is free and the deadline is 30th September 2021.

https://2000ad.com/news/

TAKE A ROADTRIP WITH ADOBE

Adobe invites young creatives to pitch a short film competition about "a road trip across America". Submit your story idea in the form of a movie trailer, and you could have your idea "produced in your hometown" with the help of film experts. We got told off, and a blank screen, for visiting from the UK... so we guess it's for U.S. students only.

http://www.whatsyourgreatuntold.com

GLYNN SEAL

We're pleased to have an interview with **Glynn Seal**, winner of the Gold ENnie award for Best Cartography in 2018, and maker of the old-school RPG *The Midderlands*.

DAL: Glynn, welcome to *Digital Art Live* magazine, and the long awaited "Maps" themed issue. Our readers may recall the 50th edition, where you had two pages in advance of a longer interview. Sorry it's taken so long for the full interview.

GS: No problem at all. It's always a pleasure to talk to you and thanks for having me back.

DAL: Super. OK, let's start at the beginning. How did you first become aware of your design and writing talents, and was there someone back then — perhaps at school — who helped you along the way?

GS: I have always enjoyed art and creating things as a child. My favourite subjects were Art, Design (technical drawings) and Realisation (woodworking/metalwork). I had a teacher at school called Mr. Sellars and I think he saw I really enjoyed it and encouraged me. My best exam-result was in Design & Realisation. After school, I applied for a course in Graphic Design at the 16-18 college, and also started working on a training scheme as a draughtsman on the drawing boards. I was accepted for the college course, but ultimately enjoyed doing the draughting in a work setting, so I stayed there doing various roles... for almost 30 years.

DAL: Wow. Straight into a good job. And congratulations on the 30 years. And then... how did you start in on digital productivity? Was it a slow start and a long learning experience, wrangling the software tools and testing different ones, or did you find ways to skill up more quickly?

GS: The business I was working for did switch to CAD eventually, in the early 1990s, running Bentley Microstation on Apple Macs. It was exciting moving from traditional to digital platforms and I embraced it.

DAL: Ah, I see. Digital wasn't recent for you.

GLYNN SEAL
(MONKEYBLOOD
DESIGN)

UK

MAP MAKER | GAME
DESIGNER | RPG
PUBLISHER

WEB

GS: Right. I love figuring out software and the things you can do with it. So back then I picked things up quickly, and I'm a fast learner when involved in creative endeavors.

DAL: Great. Ok, now turning to games, how did you get into it, and what is your background?

GS: I lived and breathed roleplaying in the mid 1980s as a 15-year-old and haven't stopped playing since, although there have been quieter periods where I've not played. During that time, I've played most RPGs: D&D, AD&D, 2nd Edition AD&D, 3rd Edition D&D, 4th Edition D&D, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*...

Later came *Pathfinder*, *Tales From The Loop*, 5th Edition D&D, and my moving back to some of the older games being retro-cloned such as *Swords & Wizardry*, which hark back to the halcyon days of simpler gaming.

DAL: I see. What was your favorite game or games in the early years?

GS: For fondness, I'd say *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, because I played that the most growing up. The red D&D Basic box has a special place in my heart too as the first game I ever played.

DAL: What is your favorite fantasy setting?

GS: Aside from my own *The Midderlands*, obviously, I'd say the *Forgotten Realms* of the mid-90s. Again, it's where I played most of my gaming as a player and gamemaster.

DAL: Thanks. And now your fave is obviously… your own! For readers not aware of the game, could you give an outline of what it is, and then what its key offshoots are? Some descriptions have been: "A gritty fantasy-comedy horror late-medieval West Midlands" (*Spyders*); "the horror infused, green tinged interpretation of the medieval British Isles flavoured with Pythonesque [*Monty Python*] humour and an Old School White Dwarf sensibility" (*Rlyeh Reviews*) .

GS: So, *The Midderlands* is a setting (like the *Forgotten Realms* is) rather than a self-contained game. It's designed to be played using the *Swords & Wizardry* system, which is a restated version of the 1974 version of D&D (known as 0E, or zero edition). You can grab that for free at the Frog God Games webstore.

The Midderlands is dark-fantasy, a late-Middle Ages, early Renaissance view, seen through grime-smeared spectacles. The setting is based on an area in the middle of England called the Midlands. Many of the locations are loosely based on reality, but others are pure fantasy from an addled mind. The setting part of the book contains something called "game-juice". Not heavy of history and monotonous detail, but enough to get the game-juices flowing and let the game master twist and tweak as they need to in order to fit their campaign.
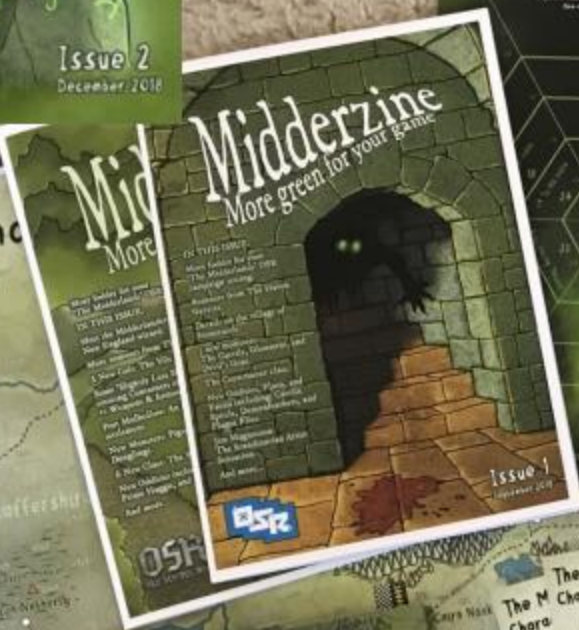
DAL: Thanks. Yes, I should add that the real Midlands is often assumed not to exist. To those in the South of England anything north of the Watford Gap is all too often considered 'The North'. But the Midlands is not 'the North', which starts more or less at Crewe / Chester / Macclesfield, as we keep having to tell people from outside. 'Not existing' in many people's eyes gives us a curiously detached feeling at times, which has probably fed into the wry sensibility of West Midlands people and perhaps aided the many fantasy writers we have produced. I can't speak for the East Midlands, which was the 'Danelaw' bit the Vikings colonized — thus the stark West/East division.

Now, I should add that there's a specific vibe to the *Midderlands* world… green and mildewed and a bit slimy in a faintly Lovecraftian sort of way. But with the sort of wry self-depreciating Midlands humour you only get when you've left the North going south and are below what Jonathan Meades calls… "the Irony Curtain that stretches across England from roughly Lincoln to round about Chester". Can you say a bit more, please, about the 'gritty' and the 'humour' vibe in the game? And about the West Midlands background it comes from?

GS: "The Irony Curtain", ha! I've not heard that before, but it's brilliant. The humour and grimness within it based on my love of the British TV comedy *Blackadder* at about the same time I was deep into RPGs. The best description I've heard is that it is a 'green and unpleasant land'. Also, if you look back through history to the present time, some people are absolutely horrible to each other for all manner of reasons. Nothing starts an adventure like the negative emotions. UK-based RPGs, back in the 80s, had this grim aesthetic that stuck with me and formed my own inner perceptions about 'how a fantasy game is', dark and grim. The art of John Blanche and early Games Workshop stuff. My cartography hero is actually Geoff Wingate (aka Paul Ruiz) who did a ton of maps/art for TSR UK back in the day. I chat to him occasionally on Facebook. Terrific bloke. I did an interview with him on my website which is definitely worth a read.

The Midderlands

Midderzine
More green for your game

More fodder for your
The Midderlands OSR campaign setting
IN THIS ISSUE:

Issue 2
December 2018

OSR

Midderzine
More green for your game

Issue 1

OSR

The Midderlands
(also known as The Midlands)

The Midderlands Expanded
Setting Expansion

The Midderlands Character Tracker
Character Name

Map labels
Energy Slopes
Rudgley
Stone Ring
Triplestone Cottages
Leechfield
Burnwood
Norton Wood
Whorle
Shalestone
Cairnwater
Cairn Nook
Burial Ground
Leyswood
The Fingerpost
Fingerpost Copse
The Atlas
Alderwych
Middlemoor Gaol
Shelfold
The Sharpe Inn
Fetterstone
Windmill
Walshale
Blacken Rock
Isles
The Midderlands

DAL: Thanks. *Blackadder*, yes… but if readers also want a taste of the regional West Midlands type of humour, I'd say the early classic Jasper Carrott recorded live on-stage is probably as good a place to start as any. Is there anyone else with a strong local flavour you'd recommend?

GS: Jasper Carrott is good reference. I'd also say *Blackadder*, especially *Blackadder 2*.

DAL: The second season. Thanks. The band Slade too, perhaps. Who is the target audience for *The Midderlands*, would you say?

GS: Gamers who like the old-school way of playing games, where you aren't flipping around in a rulebook looking up each rule's minutia. The rulebook is free, and less than 140 pages, and most of that is monsters and spells.

DAL: I see. How has the market for old school RPGs developed in the last decade? Is making a living now possible there?

GS: With the advent of crowdfunding, print-on-demand, and the resurgence of older game's rules being allowed to be used by the Open Gaming License, 'the stars have aligned' for hobbyists to emerge and do their own things. It's not easy to make a living, though. No one is going to come along and throw money at your house rules or fantasy heartbreaker unless you have a following, are good at what you are doing, and have a proven track record of doing what you say you are going to do. No-one makes money hand-over-fist in RPGs that I know of. It takes had work, lots of hours, and passion to make it a living.

DAL: Interesting. But it seems that *The Midderlands* is proving very popular in the market, especially as it grows. For instance, congratulations on the '*Midderzine* Issues #6 and #7 Kickstarter'. £4k for a £1k 'ask', and with five days still to go, at present. You must be very pleased with that.

GS: I am always humbled by the fans that continue to support what I am doing. They drive me to do the next project and the one after that.

DAL: What's been your biggest success with *Midderlands*, so far?

GS: Winning a Gold ENnie award for Best Cartography in 2018. I was gob-smacked and super proud of the achievement. I pipped Paizo and Green Ronin to the post, both very well-established gaming companies I never expected to compete against.

DAL: Congratulations. Although not all your projects make it big, at least the first time around. The *Midderlands* D&D 5e [conversion] edition was initially cancelled, for instance?

GS: Yes, that was a collaboration with Necromancer Games. The initial campaign started right back when the U.S. was starting to understand the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and lockdowns, and there was a lot of uncertainty over jobs. The D&D 5e project launched, but it became clear it might not do as well as expected because of the timing. It was decided to err on the side of caution and wait it out for a while.

It did relaunch and got funded. So that has gone out to backers and I have to say that it is *The Midderlands* in full glorious colour and it is stunning. My best combined work to date as a cartographer, artist, writer, and layout/designer.

DAL: Great news. Where can people get that?

GS: You can grab it at Frog God Games website. Other than that, I cannot say I've been disappointed at all with how things have been going. I also did a lot of project management in my previous career, so I am adaptable to changing situations and usually have a 'Plan C'.

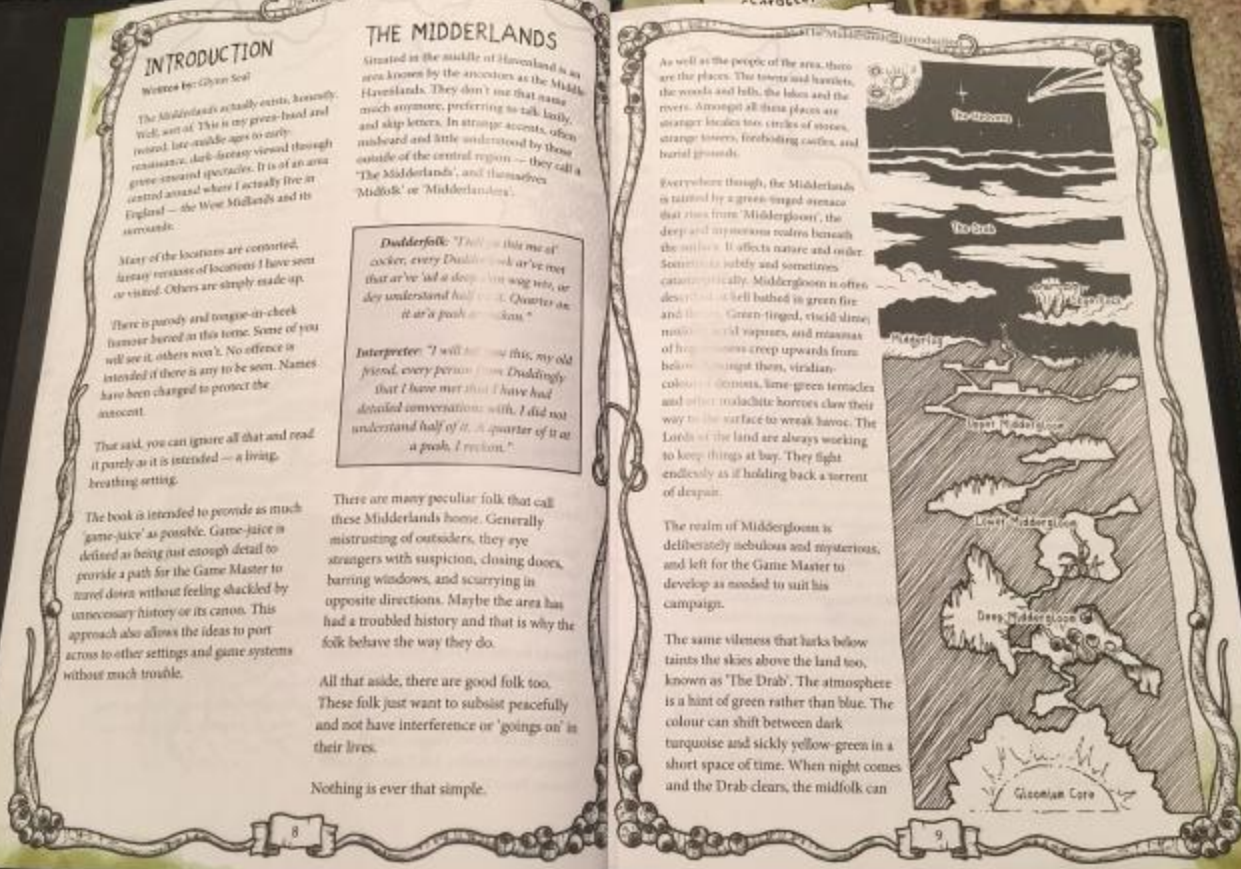Now we just need to get Netflix or Amazon to commission a TV series based on it!

DAL: Indeed. Well, I can imagine a ribald British TV sitcom series, in the *Monty Python* / *Blackadder* mould, if such a thing is still possible in these sour days. Have you had any reaction locally, from places? I'm mean, as you know I've written an unofficial Stoke-on-Trent / Potteries expansion starter and I occasionally add a new idea to it. But I wonder if others locally have picked up their bit of the British Isles and started contributing?

GS: Richard Marpole has written two projects for me, after contributing to the *Midderzines*. The *Midderzines* are our regular fanzines.

The Haven Isles
...and the surrounding lands

Scale bar increments: small at 18 miles, Large at 90 miles
Hex centre to hex centre: 18 miles

Legend
- ◎ Capital
- ○ Settlement (detailed)
- ◇ Settlement (not detailed)
- ▲ Point of Interest
- ✕ Ship Wreck
- ▬ ▬ ▬ Country Border
- ——— County Border
- ——— Main Trade Route

Serpentlands
Dog Sea
Strotland
Emeraude
Emeraude Sea
Greenswold
Brackenwold
Havenland
Oldenwold
Havenland Channel
Gaulandia

Highland
Grampshire
Angrus
South Argengyle
North Argengyle
Eden Burg
Lothern
Borderlands
Dumfreshire
Northumberland
Northumbershire
Kelderburn Forest
Torhamshire
Scar Burg
Snakescale Island
Lankershire
Great Mersea
Chesternhire
Yorkshire & Humbershire
Darbyshire
Linkernshire
Staffershire
Lestershire
Western Middlerlands
Worchfordshire
North Powys
South Powys
Gwynned
Clewed
Tealfordshire
Dyffud
Glammargan
Cairndyff
Cernwall
Devern
Dorsomset
Wilting & Avenshire
Barkshire
Oxenshire
Buckshire
Hampshire
Wessex
Surrshire
Kentshire
Essexshire
Hertshire
Suffolkshire
Nortolkshire
Rushire
Cameshire
Belshire
Warrenkshire
Northamtonshire
Great Lundea
Windsour
Portland Isle
Wight Isle
Lizard Point
Loom
Lundy
Holm
Haven's End

After three successfully funded Kickstarter campaigns, *The Midderlands*, The *Midderlands Expanded* and The *City of Great Lunden* (London expansion) are live and available.

There is also the regular *Midderzine* fanzine, with good content and high production values. The most recent issues of this 'zine were 400%+ funded on Kickstarter by May 2021.

Other official additions include *The Bats of Saint Abbans* adventure, a guide to the *Folk Magic of the Haven Isles*, a set of *HandyMaps of the Towns & Villages*, and also storage boxes and dice-bags.

A variety of bundles are available, and one can also still get *The Midderlands Special Edition Muckulus Cover* (see right).

Pictures: Early book pages (left); and the initial drawing and finished real-world game product for the game's *Book of the Muckulus*.
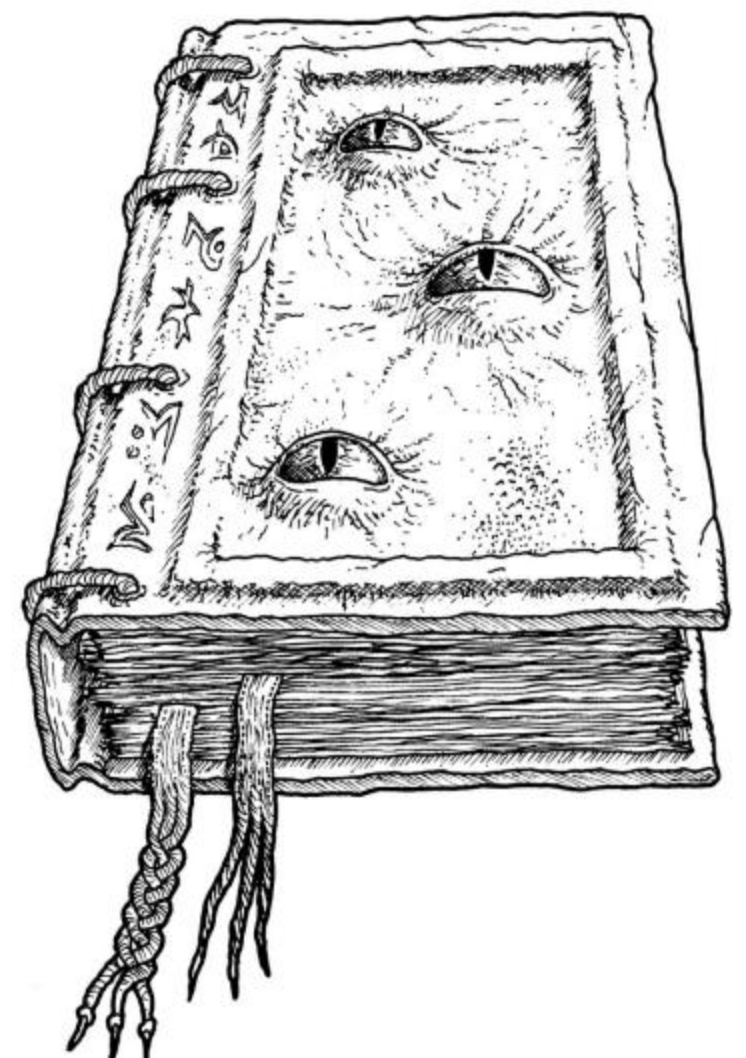
One of his is about folk magic of the Haven Isles and the other is an adventure in Saint Albans called "The Bats of Saint Abbans". I've had numerous chats to other people about them writing about their bits of the wider Haven Isles [British Isles], although nothing officially in the pipes yet. Small contributions to the *Midderzines* are always an option to get noticed and to work on larger project content.

DAL: Super. You're now based in Walsall, I believe? Was there an emotional 'spur' there, or in an earlier home-place, to create the *Midderlands* as a dark and grungy place?

GS: I actually grew up in nearby Aldridge ('Alderwych' in *The Midderlands*) and had a great childhood running around in the fields and climbing trees with friends, and then gaming in my teens. I'd imagine that the source of the gritty, dark beneath the surface comes from watching the news as an adult. Childhood was a time of naivety.

DAL: I see. Yes, I'm somewhat familiar with Aldridge which, for the benefit of our readers, is where the suburbs in the north of the big second-city of Birmingham edge out into the mid-Staffordshire green-belt countryside. One of those interestingly 'liminal' places in the West Midlands where you have a big gritty city and green countryside alongside each other, but interpenetrated by off-road public footpaths and canals. Tolkien came from much the same sort of landscape, though on the other side of the city.

OK, turning now to maps and mapping. What tools do you use? Do you use standard tools with a specialist workflow or plugin, or do you use one of the growing range of fantasy mapping tools? Wonderdraft, for instance?

GS: I actually draw all my maps by hand, either traditionally or digitally on my Wacom Cintiq. I don't use mapping software, preferring to do everything bespoke. I've worked with the folks at ProFantasy who provide icon-sets for their map software products, such as Campaign Cartographer. You can also grab some map symbols from my webstore too. I even have a pile of 3D components for use with SketchUp to make 3D dungeons, called Neath.

DAL: Great. What tends to be the overall workflow when making a map, from the initial sketch to the final result?

GS: I draw a lot of stuff by hand, using ink pens on graph paper. These are scanned, cleaned and labelled up digitally. I also worked exclusively digitally too, for making colour pieces. Usually, I work in the Artrage 6 software, do some post processing in Photoshop, and I often label and refine in Affinity Designer.

DAL: Thanks, that's very clear. Do you also have a wider interest in map-making?

GS: I love making maps for fantasy worlds, but have recently completed projects for an historical book based on the real-world Qing Empire of China, and one for the Solar Energy landscape of the world. Really interesting stuff.

DAL: Fascinating. So, going back a moment to something you said earlier... you make most of the art yourself? But... not all?

GS: Yes, I do a lot of my own art, but sometimes, I need a piece that I am not skilled enough to achieve. Then I get others on board to help. Sometimes it can be about doing a 'costing exercise'. Is there a budget for a production, and is it cheaper to commission than the time-cost it will take me to create it.

"Winning a Gold ENnie award for Best Cartography in 2018... I was gob-smacked and super proud of the achievement. I pipped Paizo and Green Ronin to the post, both very well-established gaming companies I never expected to compete against."

I have a great team of artists I go to, who create pieces in the styles fitting my projects.

DAL: I see. How does the material then go to print? Are you able to run things off locally on a laser printer, or do you do print-on-demand?

GS: I always prefer to get an offset print run, but they do tend to be expensive. Smaller print runs result in higher cost per unit, so there is less profit margin once all costs are factored in. Print-on-demand is great for the consumer, but less beneficial for the creator. You are paying for the convenience of not having to self-fulfill your stock. This is where crowdfunding can help to fund the print runs and even improve the product quality. So no, I don't print my own stuff here, just relying on a simple inkjet printer. I *should* get myself an A3 colour laser printer… but have you seen the cost of a set of toner cartridges? Shocking!

DAL: Yes, it's always a disincentive. I looked at some sheet-feed scanners for book-pages recently, briefly, and nowadays they all seem to be integrated into a printer. My digital SLR and a copy of the $33 Booksorber software seems to be the way to go, instead. Talking of books… you recently moved from Serif PagePlus and Affinity Publisher layout tools, to Adobe InDesign. Which for those not aware of such things is the leading desktop publishing software, after Microsoft Publisher. Was that a big leap for you, and how did you find it?

GS: Page Plus and Affinity Publisher are wonderful tools for those wanting to get into self-publishing. No monthly subscription, and they do almost everything you will need. I'd been paying for InDesign for a couple of years (now part of the Adobe Creative Cloud) but had never used it… as the learning curve was likely to need some time set aside. When Necromancer Games and I were discussing *The Midderlands* 5E, part of the agreement was that the layout files would be in InDesign .INDD format. That was the catalyst I needed. A baptism of fire! To be honest, I'm so used to InDesign now, I'm not sure I could switch back, but it's very useful to keep the skills of PagePlus and Affinity Designer as I've helped out other creators who use them.

DAL: Yes, it's great software when you learn it and are coming from the similar Photoshop. I used it for many years for magazine production. But actually I now use Microsoft Publisher and (*whisper it*) find that Publisher can do just about everything InDesign can, bar things like the print-preflight plugins and proofing and suchlike. Publisher just hides all the fiddly stuff that InDesign puts front-and-centre in a zillion panels. That said, I would he happy move to Affinity Designer if only it could at least import a Microsoft Publisher .PUB file. But it can't. At least not until someone makes an unofficial converter utility. OK, moving on… what projects are you working on at present? Perhaps a mass-market boardgame conversion for the *Midderlands*?

GS: I'm planning another HandyMaps Kickstarter for *Dungeons and Caves*, and I've just finished a new adventure for *Swords & Wizardry* called "Rancid Canyons of the Floating Death Sheep". That just needs play-testing and finalizing.

DAL: Sounds yummy. We have something like that here in Stoke-on-Trent at present. In the occasional wafting scent of the local landfill dump, which has got out of control in terms of fermenting. Talking of delightful wafting… if someone came to you with an open cheque-book and wafted it and said 'do your dream project', what would it be?

GS: I have no idea… although I'd love to see *The Midderlands* realized on a screen somehow.

DAL: Brilliant. Ok, thanks very much. Expect a call soon from Jasper Carrott. I think he's still an occasional TV Producer nowadays…

GS: /*Laughter*/ Thank you for having me. It's been a pleasure.

Glynn Seal is online at at:

https://monkeyblooddesign.co.uk/store; https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/monkeyblooddesign/; http://glynnseal.redbubble.com; and https://monkeyblooddesign.itch.io/

Brignorth

To Ironbridge

D

5

North

River Sixx

Brig Tor

4

3

6

1

6

2

To Ludderlow

30   60
feet

To Killminster

CHRIS HUNTER
FLOWSCAPE

Chris Hunter talks about how his popular real-time FlowScape software is used by RPG map-makers, and reveals details of his forthcoming mega-scape software!

DAL: Chris, welcome back to *Digital Art Live* magazine. We last featured you and your real-time FlowScape software back in our Real-time issue (#43, October 2019). Which was, of course, just six months before the lockdowns began. How has the experience of the last 14 months of virus / lockdown been for you, and where has it left you?

CH: Great to be chatting with you again! And wow… hasn't the last year been quite the ride! Initially it didn't impact me much as I work from home. But as the schools closed, I had a lot less time on my hands — having kids about the house. Thankfully we got it under control pretty quickly here in Australia, although we have still cases, it's a bad day if its 10 people. So all in all, I think we're in a good spot.

David Foxx

DAL: Great. The UK is also looking fairly good. Now, when we interviewed you back in 2019 it was only a month after the software had launched. You've added quite a roster of features and content since then. To name a few: castles and fantasy houses; new skies; rainbows and drifting pollen; lava and ice; ships and oceans; coloured lights with falloff; a resizable Moon; deserts and scrubland; dead trees for horror scenes; mountains that can be wreathed in volumetric fog and atmosphere; terrain sculpting.

Also on the back end .OBJ import, 8k panorama export and high-res screenshots. Any new features we've missed there, other than the map aspects… which I'll ask you about in a moment?

CH: Initially with FlowScape I wanted to make a small scenic diorama-maker software with just natural elements, but then there was a ton of great suggestions coming from the community. So I spent the next eight months after launch with about a dozen free updates from content to usability. It is common for gamedevs to 'live inside their own bubble' of what they want to create, but I think a strong community is important — as they have made suggestions that I would have never thought of and have made FlowScape so much better.

One of the most underrated features I've added is the ability to quickly filter out and hide specific elements such as plants trees or rocks. This allows you to create much more detailed worlds — without the frame rate dropping — until you unhide it all for the final screenshot.

DAL: Useful. Now, turning to maps. Firstly, had you had any experience with maps and mapping previously? Perhaps as an RPG player? Or where you new to the needs of the tabletop RPG gamers?

CH: I honestly haven't played *DnD* since I was in school, where we just drew our maps with pen and paper and we were looked down to as 'the kids into that weird satanic roleplaying thing'. /*Laughter*/ Things have changed since then and *DnD* is more mainstream and popular than ever! Virtual Table Tops (VTT) have also made remote online gaming much more accessible.

DAL: Yes, that's a whole scene in itself, that I haven't had time to look into for this issue. Just trying to get a grasp of the key map-making software and similar cloud services was enough. What map making elements have been added to make the map-making experience viable for RPG-ers using FlowScape?

CH: I have added some tools that let you do an orthographic 'top down' picture that is up to 8k in resolution, and then add a grid or hex overlay to it. Then adjust the transparency of that, as well as grid spacing. If the maker is using Arkenforge, then I've had some collaboration with the dev for that and I have added a button that automatically calculates the grid resolution and outputs a map for it.

It's nothing fancy, but just some simple tools to get a map made and ready to be used in a very short amount of time, with the added bonus of being able to do perspective shots of the scene to show the other players.

DAL: What challenges did you overcome to implement these map features?

CH: The initial map-making features were pretty easy to add, but I am working on an update that adds a lot of dungeon assets with a grid-and-snap system, I honestly wasn't prepared at how difficult it would be to make sure that everything snaps together perfectly, and I wasted a lot of time remodelling everything a few times over. A 2D 'snap system' isn't so hard, but when you try to do one in 3D space it becomes quite challenging.

DAL: I see. What is the most ambitious of successful map you have seen made with FlowScape, so far?

CH: There's this one guy who has been building a small town for months, i love how much thought has been put into it. Another user to mention is making quite a lot of professionally looking maps and selling them via his Patreon, which is quite enterprising.

DAL: What is the most unusual map, or the one that raised your eyebrows the most?

CH: Not a map *per se*, but I saw someone post a picture of their gaming setup, and it was a table with a large TV built into it, so that they could play with their friends on an animated map. The geek in me really wants to build something like that! But I fear my woodworking skills will not be up to the task.

DAL: Ah yes, I'm not an RPG gamer but I've seen such things around, at exhibitions. They usually break down and are 'out of order'. But no doubt they'll become more robust and affordable over time, to meet the demands of gamers. That's if several manufacturers are not already on the ball. Are there any new map features coming for FlowScape? I see that gamers ask about looping GIF export from a top down view, so the maps can be animated when being played on digitally via special software that can do that? Things like that?
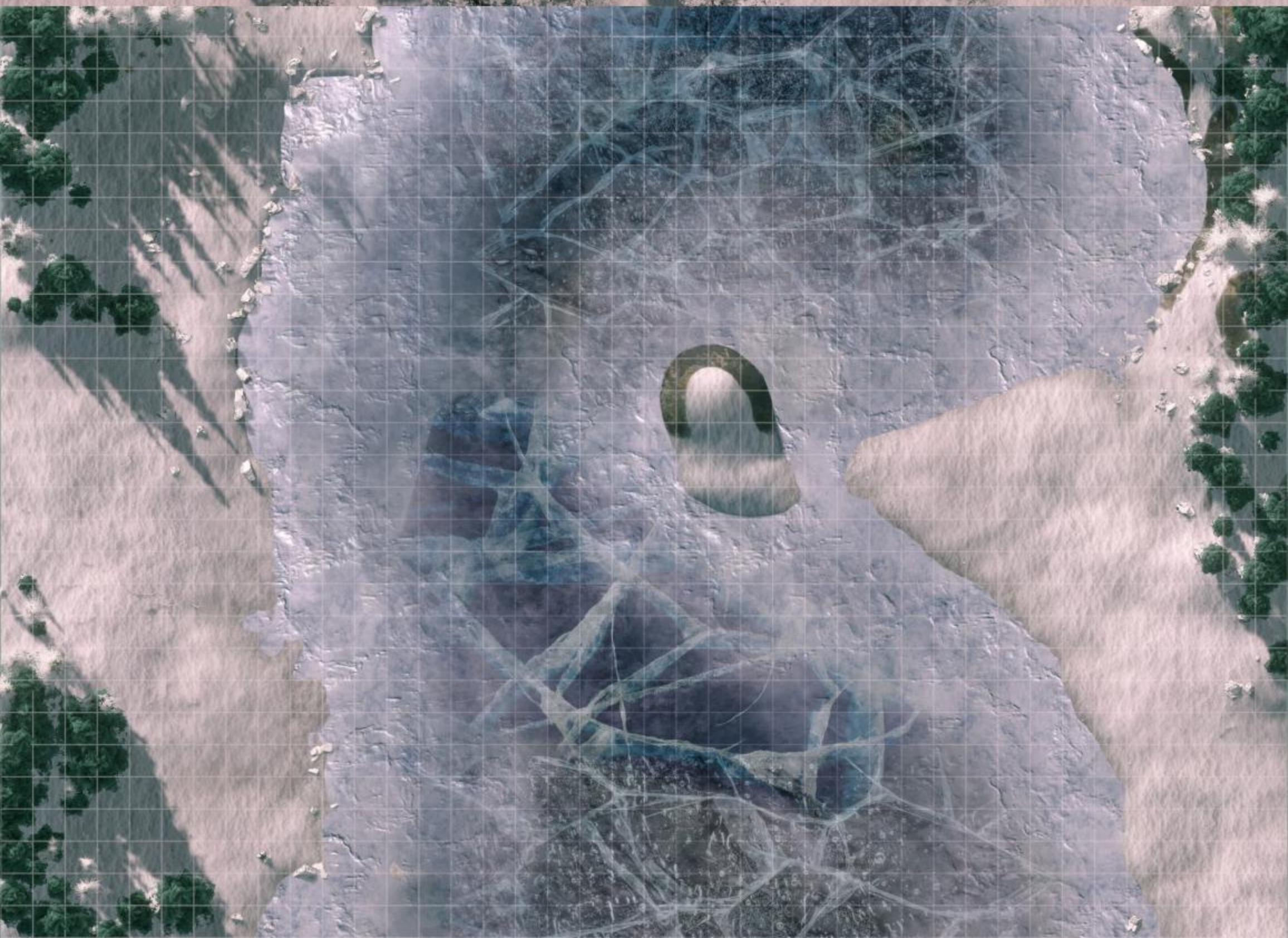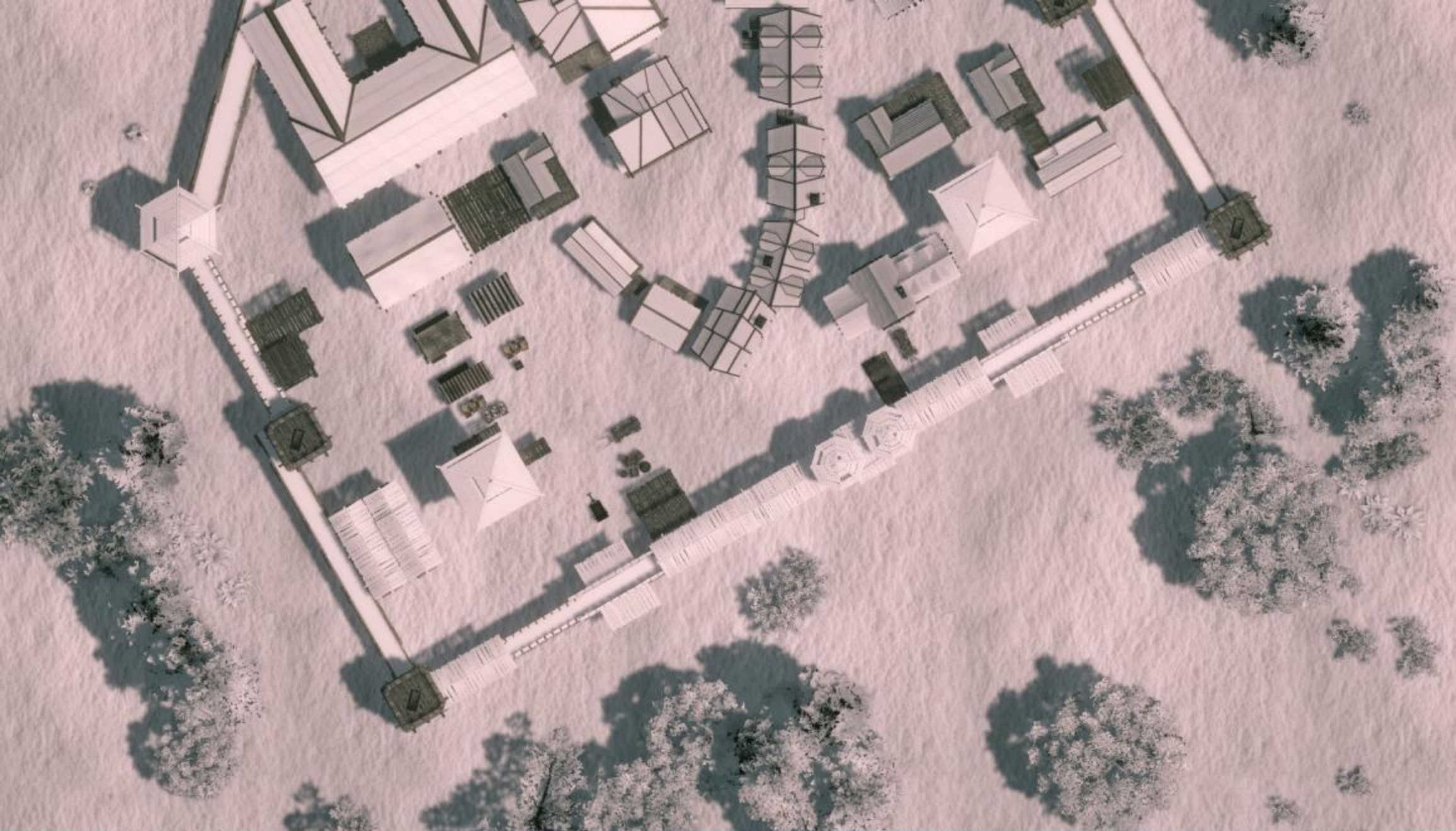
Pictures: Zenjihad uses FlowScape to make battle maps for the Roll20 online tabeltop game system and for his (OSR) campaign for Greg Gillespie's mega-dungeon *Barrowmaze*. Zenjihad makes the 'bird's eye' encounter map seen from overhead, and he then makers eye-level renders of various scenes from this same map, to aid his players in imagining their situation.

He has also used the Perchance Random Generator, to create some useful generators for *Barrowmaze*, mostly based on tables from *Labyrinth Lord* revised, *Advanced Labyrinth Lord* and *Barrowmaze*, and has often tweaked or extended them a bit.

CH: Currently you can take a screenshot at 8k or record a video using something like OBS, but then you are limited to your screen's resolution. In the next update, you should be able to record it in full 8k as an image sequence that you can make a movie from with some basic editing software.

DAL: Right. I see you have contests for users?

CH: Yes, we actually now have a competition

every week on our Discord channel, with different themes, where I give away $100 to the winner, our last winning map by David Foxx was exceptionally good. [*See the opening picture for this interview*].

DAL: Excellent. What has been the most successful aspect or part of making FlowScape, for you?

CH: Oh that's easy... the images the community creates have been truly mindblowing.

"Someone posted a picture of their gaming table, built so they could play with their friends on an animated map. The geek in me really wants to build something like that!"
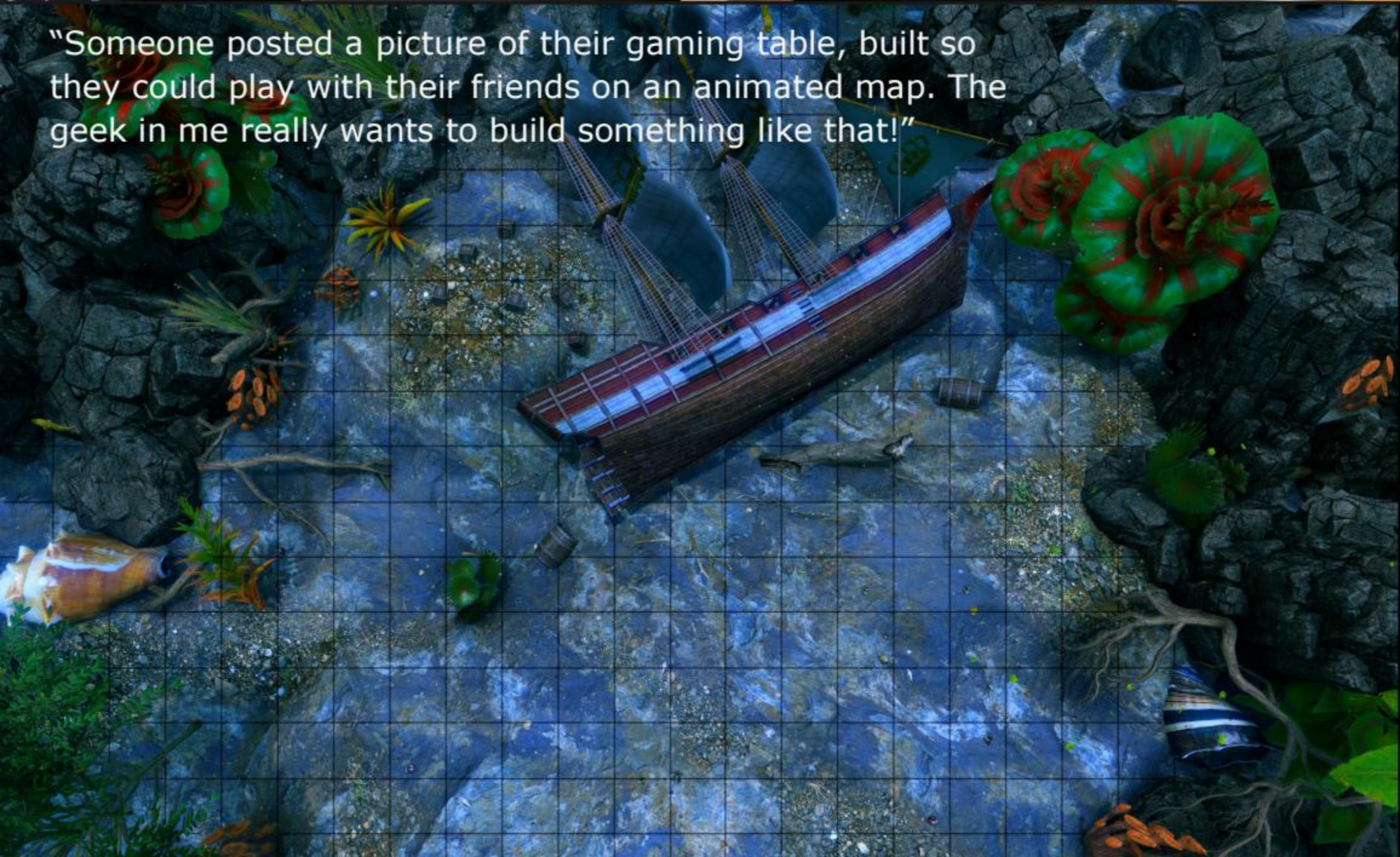
FlowScape works in real-time and easily allows even beginners to the quickly build videogame concept art for worlds and levels, which can clearly convey your creative ideas to potential project partners or funders. The screenshots can also be used as base for layered compositing in Photoshop, bringing in 3D renders.

CH: I'm often left wondering how the FlowScape users made some scenes. If you want to check out what users have created with FlowScape, check out the Flickr Gallery at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/189735127@N05/.

DAL: Brilliant. Have you noticed or played any other similar games that you rate, since we interviewed you last? For instance I see there's something new called *SuperBuild* with a bright toony vibe, and another with a more rustic old-school RPG *Midderlands* art-style called *HomeWind*?

CH: Yes, there have been a few and its great to see more people in this space with different art styles. My favourite so far has been *TownScaper*.

> "One of the most underrated features I've added is the ability to quickly filter out and hide specific elements such as plants trees or rocks. This allows you to create much more detailed worlds — without the frame rate dropping — until you unhide it all for the final screenshot."

DAL: Thanks, I had not spotted that one. Your own FlowScape software is now at 1.5.3, and it's coming up on one year since the last "Sneak Peak of Upcoming Features" update on Itch.io. Are there any further updates coming soon-ish? Is it possible you can give us a little peek at these?

CH: There won't be much more coming for the current version. I am however spending most of my time on v.2 — which has much larger landscapes and more procedural tools to help cover that enormous landscape.

DAL: Sounds great, and especially so for people now increasingly able to get their hands on new graphics cards, I would imagine. Any ETA on that, at present?

CH: If I've learned anything from AAA developers recently, it's to not make an announcement for a release date and then deliver something buggy. *|Laughter|*

DAL: Right. And is Unity still your development platform? If so, are you pleased with how Unity has developed over the last two years? What would you like to see improved there?

CH: Yes it is, and I'm mainly interested in the path-tracing features that are slowly being added. As some of you with rendering experience know, having a non-biased GI solution really makes for an amazingly photoreal image and I'm looking forward to implementing this as a final rendering step. It is still a bit buggy, but with every release it gets better.

DAL: I see. Any wholly new projects lined up for 2021/22?

CH: I'm staring at half a dozen projects that I started years ago that need finishing, so… who knows? Maybe I'll find a few hours spare!

DAL: We wish you well with finding those. Ok Chris, we realise you're a busy guy so many thanks and we'll leave it there.

CH: Awesome, thank you! Best of luck with your magazine and webinars.

FlowScape is online at:

https://pixelforest.itch.io/flowscape

https://pixelforest.itch.io/flowscape/community

https://discord.com/channels/558690971894939668/55869097246 9428224

"I am spending most of my time on v.2 — which has much larger landscapes and more procedural tools to help cover that enormous landscape. ... and I'm interested in the [real-time] path-tracing features that are slowly being added.

As some of you with rendering experience know, having a non-biased GI solution really makes for an amazingly photoreal image, and I'm looking forward to implementing this as a final rendering step [in v.2]."

INDEX

HAVE you missed out on an issue of our free magazine? Please enjoy this new handy double-page index of our past issues, and check if any are missing from your collection. Our 15,000 readers are also able to access back-issues of our previous title *3D Art Direct.*

Every new issue can be sent to your email address, simply by subscribing to our mailing-list...

https://digitalartlive.com/

Inset: Issue 28 ('Future Oceans' issue) cover art by Artur Rosa.

SOME OF OUR IN-DEPTH REVIEWS:

Poser Pro 11

#4 | January 2016

Vue 2016 R2

#18 | April 2017

Crossdresser

#44 | November 2019
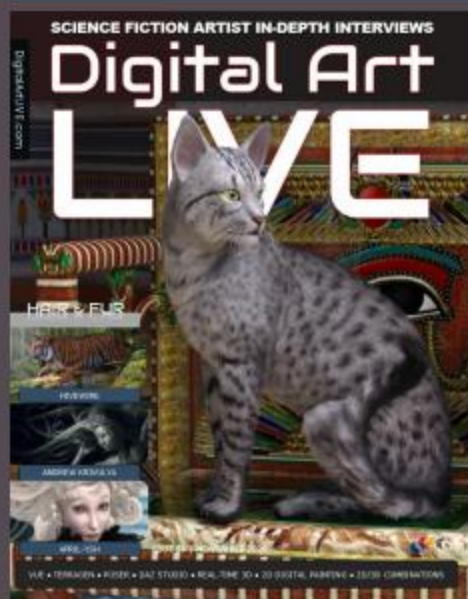
Issue 53 Nov 2020
Hair and fur

- The HiveWire team
- Andrew Krivulya
- AprilYSH
- Survey of fur-making tools in 3D and 2D
- Contests
- Gallery: Hair
- Imaginarium
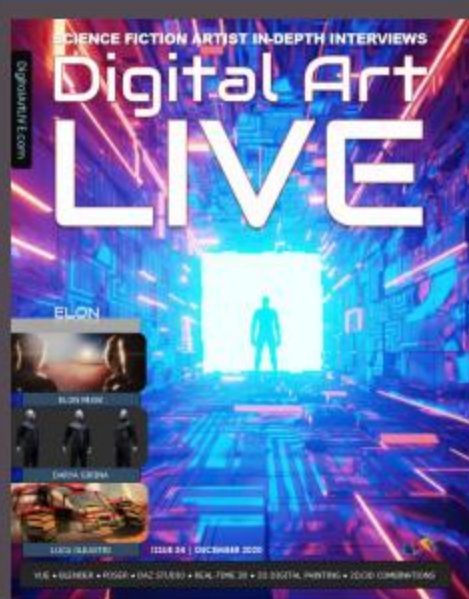
Issue 54 Dec 2020
Elon

- Elon Musk
- Darya Girina
- Ulises Siriczman
- Luca Oleastri
- Mars habitats
- Contests
- Gallery
- Imaginarium

Issue 55 January 2021
Battlesuits

- Hasraf Dulull
- Pascal Blanche
- Lucas Savelli
- Survey of the best recent graphic novels
- Group gallery
- Main gallery
- Imaginarium

Issue 56 March 2021
Atmospherics

- 'Kibosh 1'
- John Harris
- 'Hangmoon'
- Review of Realistic Paint Studio 1.2
- Python editing
- Main gallery
- Imaginarium

Issue 57 April 2021
Future Transport

- Fred Gambino
- 'KuzMich'
- Carter Sheppard
- Robo Racers
- Solar Sails
- Go Fly
- Gallery: Transport
- Imaginarium

Issue 58 May 2021
Fairytale

- 'Sir Tancrede'
- 'Strangefate' and 'Roguey'
- David Revoy
- Contests
- Cover art
- Gallery: Fairytale
- Imaginarium
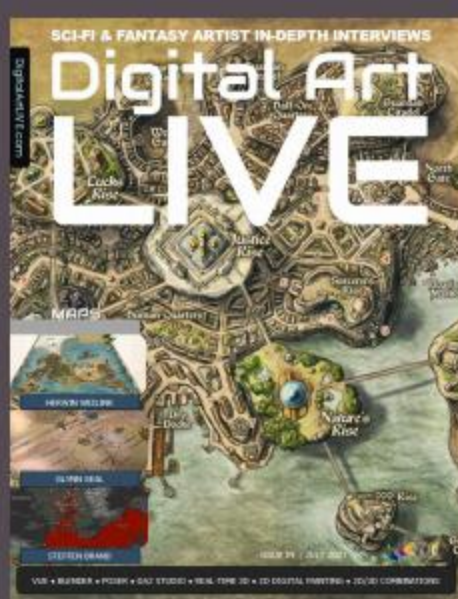
Issue 59 July 2021
Maps

- Herman Weilink ('Djekspek')
- Glynn Seal
- Chris Hunter
- Steffen Brand
- XP-Pen review
- Gallery
- Imaginarium

Issue 59 August 2021
Ocean

Are you interested in being interviewed in a future issue? Or presenting a new webinar? Please send the address of your gallery or store, and we'll visit!

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YOUR

ART

HERE?

HP Z600 Workstation

#47 | March 2020

Realistic Paint Studio 1.2

#56 | March 2021

XP-Pen Artist 22 (2nd Gen)

#59 | July 2021

REVIEW:
XP-PEN

We review the **XP-Pen Artist 22** (2nd Gen), covering all the angles. We find the new monitor to be a worthy £500 choice for artists and freelance home studios.

The Artist 22 (2nd Gen) was launched in January 2021. The retail price in America is $469 U.S. The UK Amazon currently offers it un-discounted at £499.

XP-Pen kindly shipped *Digital Art Live* a review unit of their new 21.5-inch LCD pen-monitor, which comes complete with a new type of pen offering 8,192 levels of pen pressure and also tilt detection — and the new pen needs no battery! Here is our in-depth review, based on our honest opinion and experience with an earlier self-purchased model.

You have probably heard of XP-Pen, a leading maker of affordable hardware for digital artists. They make drawing tablets and pen monitors, but also offer an increasing range of supporting accessories. The model under review is the most recent Artist 22 Second Generation, a popular mass-market model for creatives who prefer to use a PC rather than a tablet.

Launched in January 2021, the retail price in America is $469 U.S. Here in the UK Amazon offers the new Artist 22 un-discounted at £499. But our readers can expect to see discounts on such prices, as 2021 moves toward the 'Back to School' week, then Black Friday and the busy pre-Christmas season.

We've been a fan of the brand in the past, when they had a different name, and while tracking their newer models and prices we've never seen 'out of stock' notices on these pen monitors . Despite some current shortages in other types of PC hardware, there appears to be an ample supply from XP-Pen. Note that the Artist 22 sits in the middle of a wider range, with the top-of-the-range being the 24" Artist 24 Pro at £899.

XP-Pen also has its own dedicated national online stores, and those should also be checked for good prices. The UK store appears to offer 'Amazon comparable' prices and an official UK store coupon can also give you a nice additional discount. For instance, we believe coupon code XPPEN15 will give you a 15% discount there until the 31st July 2021, saving enough to pay for a second pen and an HDMI adapter. There may be other coupons you can discover online, valid for your national store. In Japan the Artist 22 '2nd Gen' is said to sell for about 50,000 Yen. Basically, wherever you buy you're looking at about half the price of a standalone such as a Surface or iPad (before accessories), and thus the Artist 22 is really good value. If you have a PC to run it. It is not a standalone.

As the name suggests, this is an upgrade from the first-generation Artist 22 (aka Artist22) of a few years ago. A key difference is that the Second Generation is *twice as fast* to respond to your pen strokes. If you are a fast digital artist who habitually makes very rapid marks, dabs, dots and strokes, then such speed may matter to you. The other great advantage for the Second Generation is that the pen has no battery, and thus never needs charging.

Inside the shipping box is a beautiful presentation box, which makes this monitor very suitable for giving as a birthday or graduation or Christmas present. One side has a child-friendly 'lambkin' graphic in a David Revoy style, the other side has a semi-abstract flower-flame-eagle that is more adult, and thus this inner box can turned to the appropriate side when given as a gift. Be sure not to cut into this inner box when opening the outer packing with a knife, if the monitor is intended to be a surprise gift.

The presentation box contains all you need, such as: the monitor, a robust integrated back-stand, various cables, one battery-free stylus pen (model PA6) that detects 8,192 levels of pen pressure and has tilt-angle detection at up to 60 degrees. The pen is inside a special 'barrel' container for safe storage. I know how easy it is to drop such a stylus pen and thus forever damage it, and it was thus more than a little disappointing to have only one pen.

The first Artist 22 and Ugee used to supply two. The new pen itself was fine, but I felt the need of a backup... and it was thus worrying that I could not then find replacement PA6 pens on sale except at the official USA site at $26. So, until the pens become more widely available you should treat your pen with great care and do not drop it or chew it.

> "… all other tablet drivers and older XP-Pen drivers must be fully uninstalled before the new drivers are installed. You must also remember to restart the PC after uninstall and then again after installation. There also appears to be an ideal sequence for cable, monitor connection and first driver installation..."

There are initially multiple layers of thin-film screen protector on the monitor, some that you are meant to remove and some your not. There is a paper instruction label pasted at the topmost layer, to indicate the removal order. You should certainly peel off the first 'dust-catcher' film, but I would be wary about simply tearing off the second layer as suggested. Because it may well be that you prefer drawing on this surface for a more 'papery' feel, rather than on the layer below. I suggest you leave the second layer on for a while, and just try it and see. Once the pen-nip fines down a bit, you may like this upper surface. If not, just remove the second layer as suggested.

Also keep the thick transparent plastic bag the monitor was wrapped in, as it serves as a perfectly sized dust-cover for when the monitor is not in use but is not packed away. It may also be useful to keep the presentation box, for taking the monitor to events in the future.

"Key differences are that the Second Generation is *twice as fast* to respond to your pen strokes. And the pen has no battery, and never needs charging."

Pro DIY tip: A standard BIC Crystal biro cap and a thin round bootlace prove to make a perfect lanyard penholder, for your precious PA6 pen!

The Artist 22 (2nd Gen) ships with a battery-free **PA6** stylus pen (seen left with scale).

At the USA XP-Pen store replacements are $26, and this is likely to translate to £30 in the UK.
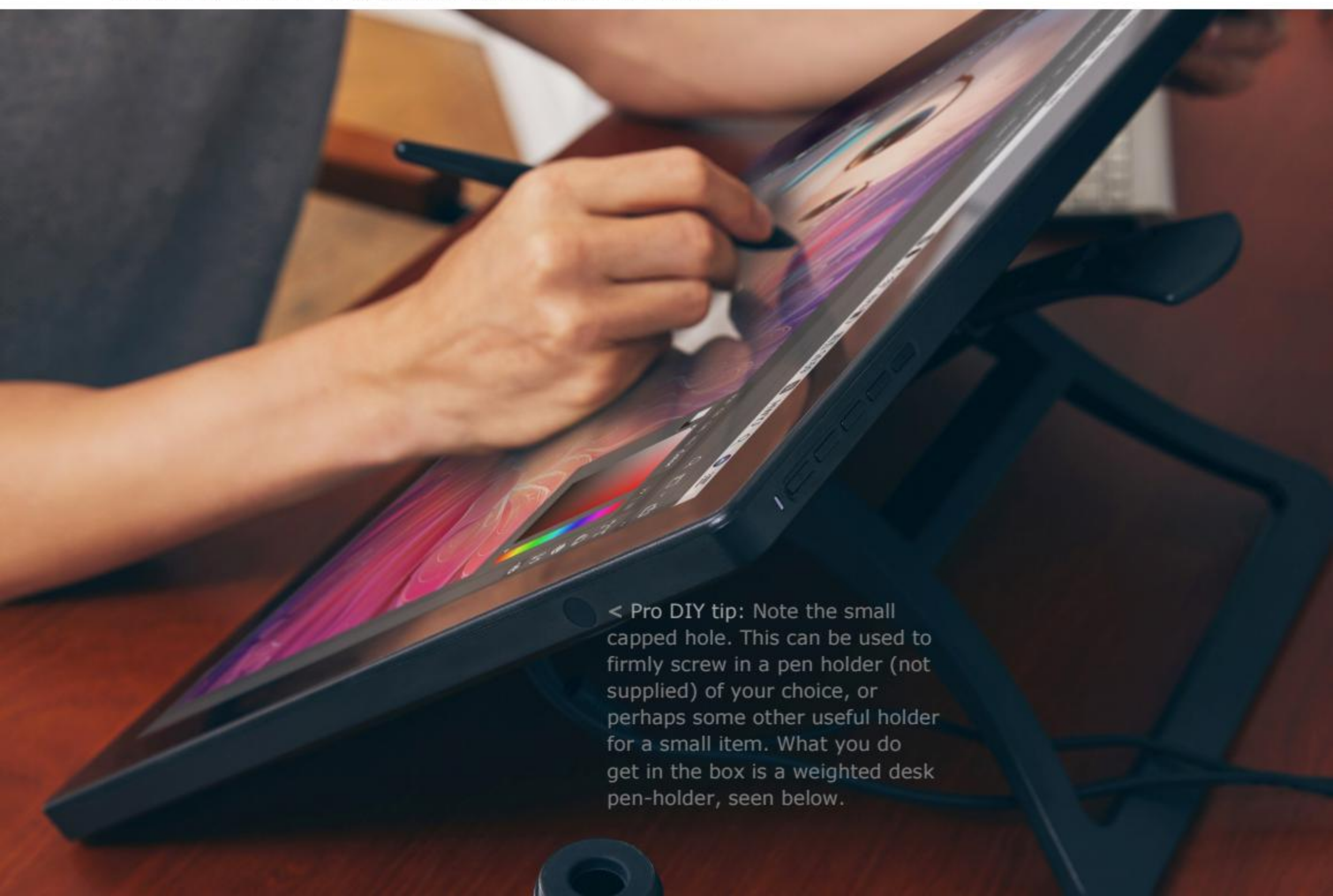
< Pro DIY tip: Note the small capped hole. This can be used to firmly screw in a pen holder (not supplied) of your choice, or perhaps some other useful holder for a small item. What you do get in the box is a weighted desk pen-holder, seen below.

The large 'landscape' size of the monitor means that it is definitely an item for your desktop, and it will of course need to be near to both a power-socket and the host PC.

The Artist 22 is also compatible with a standard VESA monitor arm, but the weight means that you will likely need a robust arm and a strong wall to fix it to. An Ergotron arm is said to be a good choice. That said, as a freestanding unit the Artist 22 can be quickly unplugged and lugged to another room, and there is even a small audio-out jack socket for entertainment and slideshow purposes. The angles offered by the stand can allow a nearly-upright position without much danger. This small feature adds value and longevity.

After unboxing and the cable connections the new user will of course need to download the very latest drivers. I had no problem in installing them on a Windows 7 workstation, which sometimes requires signed drivers. At time of writing the latest drivers are '3.1.4.210505' and dated '18th June 2021'.

XP-Pen also has Mac drivers, and is well known for having a wide range of Linux drivers available. While at the site you can also download a PDF manual if required, and this has more details than the paper booklet — which only shows the initial hardware setup and configuration.

One very important thing to note with XP-Pen drivers, is that all other tablet drivers and older XP-Pen drivers must be fully uninstalled before the new drivers are installed. You must also remember to restart the PC after uninstall and then again after installation. There also appears to be an ideal sequence for cable, monitor connection and first driver installation, and this order should be followed carefully step-by-step — find the paper guide in the box and read it carefully and note the sequence.

The initial connection of your new monitor will be difficult for some, because earlier and long-standing methods of connecting monitors to PCs are no longer supported. Only USB-C and HDMI are now supported on this model.
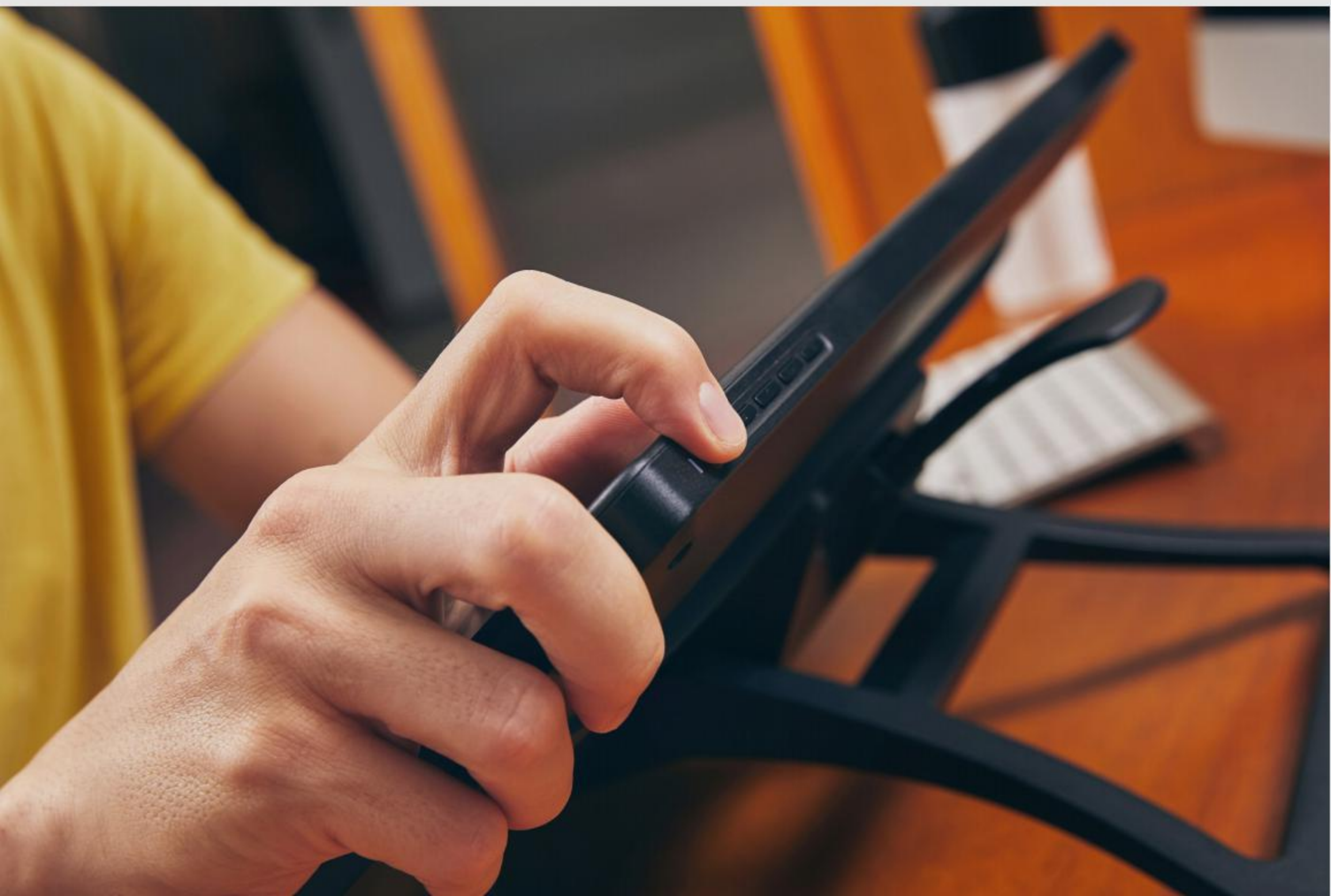
The ideal is simply to use the supplied single small-socket powerless USB-C cable. USB-C, unlike other USB types, can carry video signals. Hurrah. This would be all you need… if you have a USB-C socket on your PC.

If not then the fallback is to use both the HDMI cable and the 'USB-C to standard USB' cable together. The HDMI carries the video output, while the USB carries the streams of pen data. But that is where the Artist 22's monitor connection options stop.

What if you have no HDMI socket either? If you have an older PC without USB-C or HDMI, then the first thing to do is to be absolutely sure that what you may think are HDMI sockets and not actually DisplayPort sockets — these two types of ports look very similar and are easily confused. Those who find they *only* have DisplayPort will then need to also purchase a male DisplayPort to female HDMI adapter (of which, the £6 BENFEI is the best-seller on Amazon), which should work with the HDMI cable supplied with the Artist 22.

Amazon is confident enough about this adapter brand to suggest it be ordered with several XP-Pen monitors. I found it works fine, albiet running very warm after a while. Note that the pass-through limit on this adapter is 1920 x 1080 pixels, which is just enough. Once the monitor is correctly connected and the power turned on, and the drivers are installed and the PC rebooted, you may then have to tell the Windows Control Panel that you want to run dual monitors or an 'extended' desktop. The PC may have decided to send the audio feed to the Artist 22, so that may also need adjusting in Windows Settings.

You may now want to learn the basic monitor control buttons (hardware-controlled brightness, etc), seen being operated in the picture on the opposite page. The monitor is perhaps a touch too bright for long work at the screen. After installation you can also quickly calibrate the pen-position with five taps (see picture below), and can also assign commands to the pen's sensitive rocker-button switch.

Regrettably the XP-Pen's Settings window's setup of multiple extended monitors for mirroring is extemely baffling, and this part of the install will likely defeat even the most experienced Windows user. I read the PDF instruction manual carefully and also watched an official video, and I remained baffled as to how I was supposed to get the Artist 22 to mirror or duplicate my main screen while in Extended display mode. The downloaded PDF manual suggests this is possible...

"If multiple monitors are used in Extended mode, it is necessary to select the working area of the graphics display on the driver [UI panel] to map to the corresponding monitor."

But I just could not get the driver to "map" or duplicate in any way. Nothing new happens on the Artist 22 screen, whatever is tried. "Map" seems not to work at all, at least on Windows 7. Perhaps it is a "Windows 10 only" thing?

There were then two fallback alternatives:

i) Have Windows "Duplicate" my main monitor onto the Artist 22, each time I physically move to the other desk to paint. Then switch back to "Extended" on returning to the main desktop. This worked fine but is not ideal, because "Duplicate" forces my main monitor to run at the lower Artist 22 screen dimensions of 1920 x 1080 — my main monitor display then looks horrible because it is slightly stretched.

ii) Or I need to accept that I am will use "Extended" mode all the time. Again this works fine and will keep your main monitor display unaltered and looking as it should. Most software remembers which extended monitor it last launched on, once they are dragged across to the new monitor and then closed. (Photoshop CC and up will only remember if it is not quite full-screened on the Artist 22, when closed). However I know from past experience that "Extended" has many problems as well as advantages. For instance there is no Taskbar or Start menu over on the Artist 22 in this mode. Some windows will not remember which monitor they are supposed to open on. Some software will act as though both monitors are on, even when the Artist 22 is turned off, and thus 'vanish' when launched.

In the end, I decided that a Windows-based "Duplicate" was the best option. A quick-toggle between "Duplicate" and "Extended" desktops was then required, but the toggle turns out to be built into Windows 7. The *Windows key + P* keyboard command brings up a simple big toggle-bar for switching between multi-display modes, and the switch happens as soon as you make the selection and with no fuss such as "You have ten seconds to confirm the switch!"

Windows key + P is meant for quickly wrangling digital projector connections in conferences and classrooms, but also works fine for this purpose. Very useful.

The Artist 22 then switches to a perfectly proportioned mirror or 'clone' of the main desktop, complete with Taskbar and Start Menu. I was not quite sure how a 1200 pixel desktop was being made to fit onto a 1080 desktop without a slight squishing effect, but it does. Some quick experiments with screenshots and shapes and visual comparisons show that the proportions are correct. I suspect the graphics card output is auto-switched from 1200 to 1080, which is why the main monitor then appears stretched.

When not in this "Duplicate" mode the PC will then be back in "Extended" mode, used when working on the main monitor and with the Artist 22 left switched on. Helper software such as the freeware open-source Dual Monitor Tools is then useful in preventing the mouse slipping from the main monitor over to the Artist 22's Extended desktop. The problem of cursor slipping can even be adjusted via having Dual Monitor Tools make the cursor 'Sticky' and then using a slider to subtly 'Add resistance to moving between screens'.

As you can see, all this wrangling is far from ideal. The ideal would a simple 1:1 mirroring of desktops between a 1920 x 1200 monitor and a 1920 x 1080 monitor, with the first remaining absolutely locked and unchanged.

After learning how to then set the angle of the robust adjustable stand, the monitor is comfortable to use — though you will have to raise your drawing hand more than if you were using a tablet laid flat on a desk or in a lap. That said, the stand's angle will go fairly low — to 16 degrees. Note that if you simply pull the HDMI cable from the Artist 22, but keep the USB then (so it is said) it effectively becomes a normal graphics tablet. Albeit a very big and glossy one, with a foldable stand on the back.

But of course most people will want the 'draw on the screen' they paid for. The new faster response time is immediately noticeable, compared to my old pen-monitor. With the pen reporting at 220 times per second (220 RPS), and with an 8ms response time, you should feel no lag. This speed is about the same as current high-end Cintiq models or an iPad from a few years ago. The first XP-Pen Artist 22 model had a slower 14ms response time. The new speed may be especially important for rapid-sketch artists and speed-painters. Any lag you do see will then likely be to do with using big brushes on big canvases, and the problem will be in the software and not the hardware. Use Paint Tool SAI 2 or Paintstorm for big fast blending brushes on big canvases.

The pen is detected by the screen if it is lifted a little above the surface, but only marks when on the screen. There is only a slight perceptible 'gap' between the stylus nib and your mark-making happening 'under' the screen's surface.

When drawing at the edge of the frame there might be very slight mis-calibration of the nib and the mark. Tilt may also stop working at the edges. But that is normal at this price-range, and the lack of tilt there can be quite useful — as the edges of the screen are usually filled with UI icons and menus that do not need tilt.

The stylus pen itself is a precision instrument, and feels comfortable in the hand. It has a rubberised grip, and past experience suggests this should not become 'gummy' over time (as some rubberised plastics do). Note however that the pen has a warning sticker ("Do not twist or drop") and removing this left a nasty gummy residue very difficult to get rid of.

The pen's size is slimmer that you might expect, and a child in middle-childhood may find it easier than the slightly chunkier Wacom pen. If you need an added 'stop' ridge for your fingers, it might not be too hard to wrap a little rubber-band around the barrel.

The drivers have the nib 'activate' the stroke well and with most software the pen does not miss even very gentle strokes (Zbrush may need more pressure). Nor does it require the sort of heavy handling that will soon tire your hand. The nib presses in very slightly when drawing, helping you to judge pressure better. There are replacement nibs in the storage barrel. The pen's nib sensitivity is easy adjustable in settings, if the out-of-the-box activation state does not suit you. Driver settings have a tick-box to turn off Windows 10's 'Windows Ink', as this can cause conflicts.

However, you must *never ever* drop the pen. If it hits a hard floor 'nib downward', even from a few feet, the pen is likely to be ruined forever. With my last pen monitor I lost two pens that way, until I made a neck lanyard with a boot-string and the top of an old marker-pen (it plugs tightly onto the stylus top, but not too tightly). The thinner and slightly tapered end of the Artist 22 pen now makes such a holder a little more difficult to craft — stationary stores and eBay are going to have to be investigated for ready-made 'old folk' necklace pen-holders.

The pen does not have an 'eraser' at the other end, and this also prevents damage — you are not physically flipping the pen, always with the risk of a fumble that sends it flying across the room to its doom.

Note that the drivers cannot sense the pen's barrel rotation, only pressure and tilt. If you might want barrel-rotation for some 3D work, then you look elsewhere — or at configuring an old USB game-pad for your other hand.

It may take a while for the 'squeakiness' of a new nib to wear off, and you should not judge the long-term feel of such a pen by the first few hours of use. They 'wear in' over time, and in a way that gives them a nicer feel and even smoother flow.

Apparently the Artist 22 2nd Gen should only be used with its PA6 stylus "because of the internal circuits". But when another user then… "tested it with the 24" [Artist 24 Pro] stylus it worked perfectly well". Yet the 24" PA2 stylus in the UK is a hefty £29, and thus a PA2 would be no cost-saving replacement for a PA6. My old pen would not work. It appears XP-Pen users have to get used to paying £30 instead of £15 for a replacement or backup pen.

> "... with an 8ms response time, you should feel no lag or drag at all. The first XP-Pen Artist 22 model had a slower 14ms response time. The new speed may be especially important for rapid-sketch artists and speed-painters."

The screen's IPS viewing-angle range of 178 degrees feels very comfortable, and colours shift very little when you move your head. The monitor's stand can also be adjusted and locked from 16 through to 90 degrees, and the addition of wide rubber grips on the base mean the hold is nice and firm whatever angle you choose. The back of the stand has small rubber rollers, so there is little chance of an ugly scraping sound as you adjust the stand. Whatever your chosen screen angle it does not tug the cables, because they are kept in the neat cable box at the back and are secure.

The cable box has hooks and also a flush closing-flap. Cables connect sideways rather than underneath, meaning you don't have to turn the monitor upside-down to get at the cable sockets and the monitor can drop to an angle as low as 16 degrees. It's all well thought out. But you do have to put up with yet more cables on your desk and to your PC. Still, rather that that wrestling with Bluetooth!

However there are some environmental variables that XP-Pen can do little about, such as light. Especially bright lights and sunlight.

As with all pen-monitors the glare from light is something to be avoided, even while enjoying the mitigating benefits of the screen protector and the matte finish.

The Artist 22 2nd Gen is ideally a monitor for a creative studio or back-bedroom which has subdued and easily adjustable lighting. It is not ideal for a bright everyday office, or for a window desk flooded with lots of variable natural light. This factor should be carefully considered before investing in a pen monitor for daily creative use — strong reflections may be a 'make or break factor' for some types of artists and creative workers.

How close do you need to get to the screen? Most people will view from about 9 inches. Those with older eyes may be used to reading glasses that work well at 12"-14" in an armchair, and thus may find the likely 8"-10" viewing distance of a pen monitor works less well with the same glasses. In that case you might try picking up a £1 pair of generic 3.0X or even 3.5X ('threading a needle' distance) strength plastic reading glasses at the local store, to see of you get a crisper close-up view of such a monitor. It's only a small cost and will cheaply indicate if far more expensive prescription glasses are going to be of use.

Colour range is lovely, offering an impressive 90% of Adobe RGB — which is important to accurately preview artwork. I had no problems with colour faithfulness, compared to a calibrated Dell UltraSharp, and the Artist 22 seems fine for digital work not intended for very fine print and/or which has deep subtle shadows. The slight colour-dulling effect due to a matte screen protector (common to all such monitors) can be easily compensated for via the drivers' Display Settings sliders.

It seems possible that proper device-generated colour calibration profiles (as offered by well-known brands such as Spyder etc) may get you to more than 90% of Adobe RGB, if such is needed — but that's just my guess.

Some potential buyers may have a key worry — that the 1920 x 1080 screen resolution is lacking. Yes, it does means you will see pixels if you 'go in close' — but after a while most people will cease to notice them. Your brain will 'tune them out' if you use the Artist 22 often.

But the resolution is undeniably low compared to a £900-£1,800 equivalent, and this means the Artist22 is not likely to replace your main monitor. It's a fine second-monitor if you have the desk-space, but is not a main monitor. That said, 1920 x 1080 also offers users quite a strong benefit — all menus and icons are easy to see and read. Remember that not all software offers UI scaling for huge resolutions, especially the trusty older non-subscription software that may be your favorite tool.

What of the grayscale or contrast response, at 800:1? This is less than the more standard 1000:1 of the first Artist22 model. Does the difference matter? No. I tested with a standard astro-photography greyscale test and I could distinguish between all the shaded blocks. I'm uncertain why the change was made, but perhaps to double the stroke response speed?

In terms of electricity use, the Artist 22 2nd Gen runs from a standard power-block and draws up to 20 watts in full use and at full brightness. The unit is silent (no fans inside), the frame does not get hot, and the power-block and wall-plug both appear to meet UK standards. I'm told that if you order via an XP-Pen store, you can choose the national plug type you require, but this may not be required — my box contained both a UK and an EU two-prong type plug and lead. I would rather that the British boxes had the money spent on including a small DisplayPort to HDMI adapter, rather than yet another useless EU lead for my collection, but that's how it is at present.

There are no fancy buttons (aka 'programmable shortcuts' or 'express keys' or 'menu keys') on the monitor's front surface, which is just fine with me. All there is is a rather nice futuristic silver XP-Pen logo in the centre of the bottom bevel (seen above). The lack of such side buttons gives the monitor a nice sleek look — albeit only in black and not in Mac-friendly white — and thus you're never afraid that your hand will brush on a button by accident and cause chaos.

JOY2KEY AND XBOX 360 WIRED USB
FOR KRITA PAINTING CONTROL V. 2.0

CTRL + Z
UNDO

E (MAKE CURRENT BRUSH AN ERASER)
PRESS AGAIN TO RETURN TO BRUSH.

TOGGLE BETWEEN BRUSH
AND COLOUR EYE-DROPPER

SHIFT (DRAG BRUSH TO ENLARGE/SHRINK)

PAGEUP / PAGEDOWN

MOVE UP AND DOWN
IN THE LAYERS

KRITA 4

Anyway, such side-buttons don't matter to me. I prefer to use a comfy old USB X-Box 360 game controller and a freeware key-mapper, instead of constantly reaching round to a hardware keyboard or stabbing up to monitor buttons. JoyToKey is the software I use. My suggested Krita 4 config for this is seen above. Note that an old wired USB version of the controller is needed, not wireless. Fancier and far more expensive devices than an XBox controller can also be had, and these days there are even software-specific key-pads. I believe Clip Studio has one now, and there are others available on the XP-Pen stores.

To get rid of a keyboard, if all you do is type in file names, you can use a virtual keyboard. This can also save stretching to reach a keyboard under the main monitor, if the two monitors are close together. Free Virtual Keyboard is good freeware — although note that JoyToKey 6.6 now has text-snippet pasting.

Talking of buttons, you will find a row of five simple control buttons discreetly hidden away on the top bevel, but these are the monitor firmware controls — brightness etc — and are not for everyday operation or software menu selection.

The width and flush-surface of the black bevels mean you can add temporary post-it notes down the sides, useful for doodlers and last-minute client adjustments alike.

The rest of the exterior build quality I found to be fine, and — apart from the Indonesian warehouse stamp on the power-block — the Artist 22 did not feel or look cheap or tacky.

As you would expect on a pen-monitor at this price, there are no touch-screen capabilities, so you can't do fancy pinchy-finger things with it. If you want that, XP-Pen has just launched a new 16" screen with touch.

One thing I did have a great deal of difficulty finding later is the point-by-point pen position calibration screen, after setting my dual monitors to "Duplicated". Where on earth had the calibration gone to? After a while I found that it is only visible when Windows Display is in "Extended" mode. From there it works fine and its calibration settings also continue to work when you switch back in "Duplicated" mode. In such circumstances XP should have the *Calibrate* button be greyed out in "Duplicated" and have an explanatory tooltip on it, rather than simply vanishing like that.

SOFTWARE COMPATABILITY:

With the technical side of the review out of the way, the burning question is… does the Artist 22 play nicely with software?

Firstly, Photoshop was not tested because it's known to work well, along with Corel Painter, Clip Studio, and ZBrush. These are officially tested and endorsed by XP-Pen, though of course some Mac users do need some small workarounds even for software like Photoshop.

For this review the Artist 22 was thus tested under Windows 7 with some less-usual brands of software:

2D:

Photoline 22.x.

All menus and brushes appear to work fine.

Krita 4.2.3.

All menus and brushes appear to work fine on a 3k canvas. Fast. Fine dotting and hatch shading was perfect. Note that this is not the current 4 or beta Krita 5, but is rather the 'last good' version that could run on Windows 7.

Paintstorm Studio 2.4.

All menus and brushes appear to work fine on a 6k canvas, including the dynamic leaf and flower 'taper' brushes. A delight and super-fast even on repeated dots and tiny short strokes. This $20 software is likely to be the perfect companion for the new Artist 22, when the monitor is given as a gift to an aspiring artist.

Paint Tool SAI 2.

Everything worked as expected on a 6k canvas, and running a 800px brush across this was a super-smooth experience. Strokes tapered and blended as expected. Dotting was good. SAI's ancient Windows interface seemed to work fine.

Comic Life 3 (desktop Windows).

Not a drawing software, but as it's for comics layout and lettering, some of our readers may wish to know if it works. Everything appears to work and move around fine.

Inkscape 1.1.

Appears fine, good point responsiveness.

3D:

DAZ Studio 4.12.

It was rather suprising that working with DAZ this way felt better than with a mouse, albeit with some 'reaching up and across for menus' that would probably have been tiring after a while. The menus and drop-downs all work fine. A double-click for content-loading needs to be slightly firmer than I had expected. All rotational functions and scene widgets work fine, as do the scaling functions. The speed at which these respond is also fine. What was slightly sticky were the parameter sliders used for things like adjusting morphs. These sliders moved with slight but noticeable jerks, which I had never seen when using a mouse.

Poser 11.x.

All menu items worked fine and scripted panels were also OK. But, as I had suspected, Poser's many dials and camera controls were far too loose and 'slippy'. Their damping is perfectly balanced for mouse use, but not for a pen. While it is possible to learn to use 'short strokes', or adjust the damping on each dial individually, this is not ideal across thousands of dials. The other problem was that when Poser was loaded from the Artist 22, the UI layout was curiously re-ordered. The secret is to launch it first on the main monitor, switch the monitors to "Duplicated", and then adjust for fit. In that case your preferred UI does not change. I suspect that Poser 12 would have the same problems, but I don't yet have that.

Vue 2016 R6.

Everything seems to work as usual, and the pen felt fun to use with Vue. The movement and rotation controls did feel very slightly slippy, but not dangerously so. In fact, the speed added to the enjoyment of using Vue.

Mandelbulb (latest version).

Appears to have no problems, including the Navigator controls.

I had no problems, on any software, with the driver working well but then abruptly 'dying' after ten minutes or so of use.

CONCLUSION

Overall, XP-Pen's Artist 22 Second Edition is a worthy purchase at a remarkable price-point, and is something that 80% of digital artists could only have dreamed about owning a decade ago. Better, if you shop around for bargains and discounts you may save enough to also order a second 'backup' pen and the adapter cable that you are likely to need.

The Artist 22 looks good and does just about all that a regular artist or designer could ask of it. Under the hood, its pen and well-maintained drivers worked fine with most software that I am likely to use it with. The external build quality suggests it should last many years, and as for the internals — well, we've never heard any compliants about their internal digitizing chips failing.

The only problems you are likely to have with it are: i) in the initial installation and making the required cable connections to older PCs; ii) possible damage to its pen by dropping it; and iii) the simple lack of a large empty desk to actually put a large second monitor on. Some may also frown at the need for having yet more trailing wires on and under their desk, or at having to wrestle with Windows settings for running dual monitors.
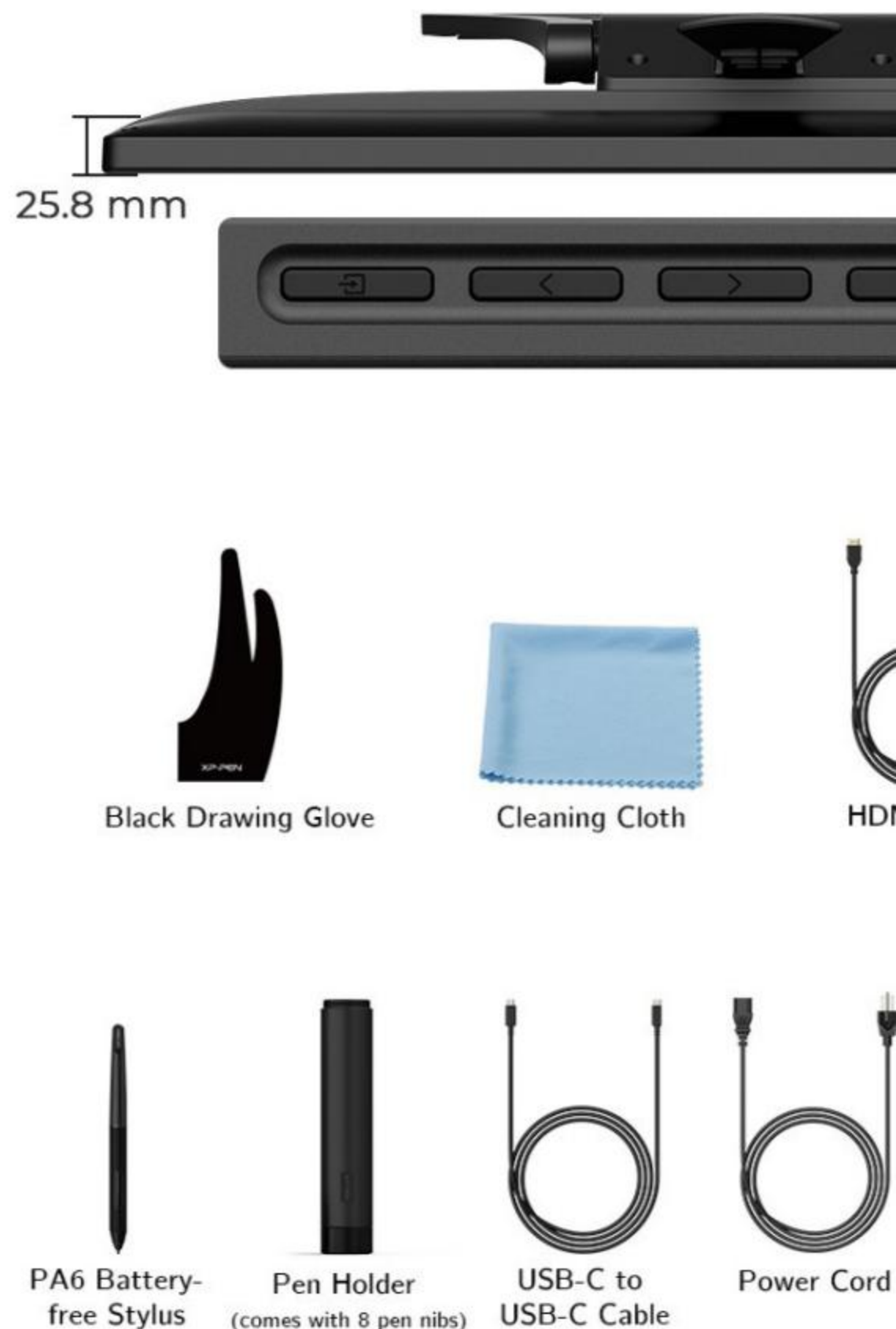
But overall this is a delight for the price, and once up and running the new Artist 22 should serve you well as a daily creative tool. Your alternative might be XP-Pen's Innovator 16, which is a drawing display-tablet with 15.6 inches of drawing space and good colour faithfulness. Such a thing may be especially useful for age 50+ artists, for whom bending over a screen in a chair is no longer the ideal position for long periods of creative work.

XP-Pen is online at:

https://www.storexppen.co.uk/

https://www.storexppen.com/

And many other nations. The Artist 22 2nd Gen is also available via Amazon stores.

25.8 mm

Black Drawing Glove **Cleaning Cloth** HD

PA6 Battery-free Stylus **Pen Holder** (comes with 8 pen nibs) **USB-C to USB-C Cable** **Power Cord**

Above we see the size in terms of depth of the top bevel, from which the total depth can be estimated. We also see the location of the hardware/firmware monitor control button,s usefull out of harm's way on the top of the bevel. This is also where the Power-On switch lives.

Below this we see the full range of the items that are shipped inside the retail box. Not mentioned in the body of the review are: the lycra-type black 'drawing glove', of a special design suited to artists and creatives drawing on this type of screen; the lint-free cleaning cloth for taking off any smears and smudges that do happen; and the stylus pen-holder which has within it eight replacement nibs. Judging by previous experience, the nibs should last a considerable time in regular use.

The back cable-connections box (seen below) has, from the top: an audio-out socket for headphones or other audio, a female HDMI 'in' cable socket, a small USB-C type 'in' socket, and a power-in socket. There are also useful cable-clips and a simple clip-in cable-box cover.

Also seen below are the stand and lever by which it can be easy adjusted for angle. Also visible are the rubber gribs at the bottom-front and the small rubber-rollers on the foot of the stand.

The stand can be removed for fitting a standard VESA arm-mount.

MI Cable

Quick Guide
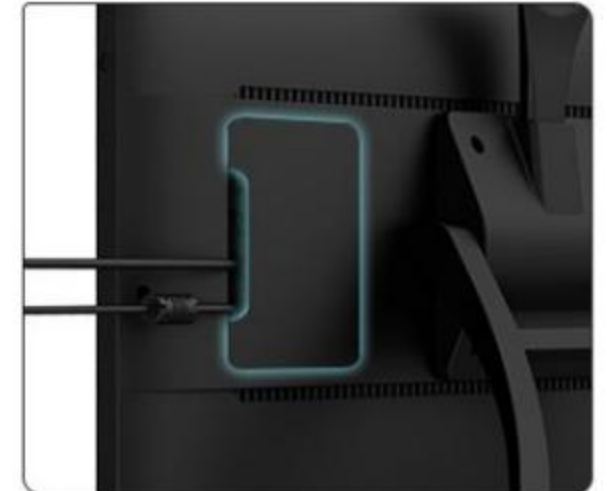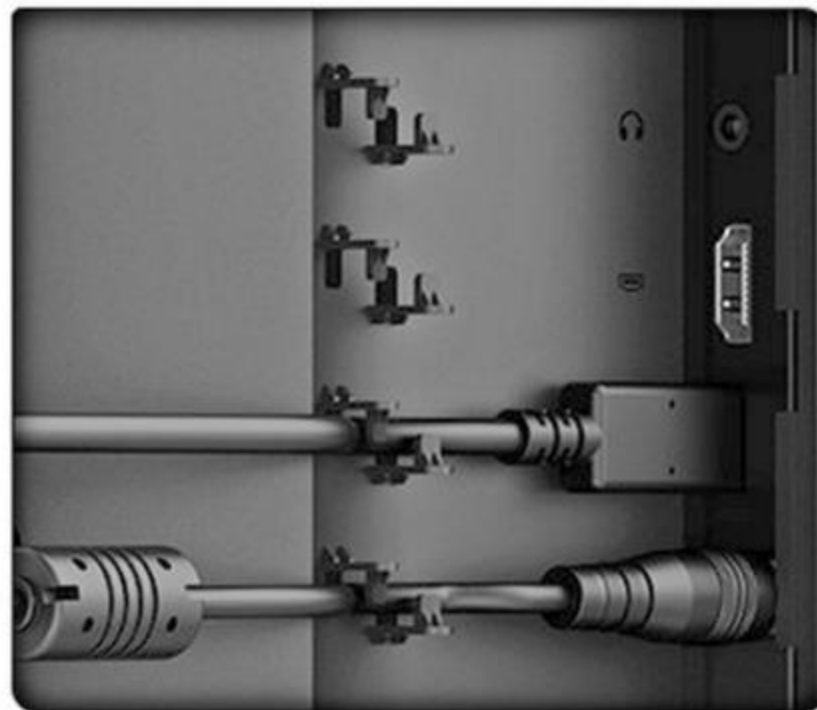
USB-A to
USB-C Cable

Power Adapter

The Artist 22 comes with an 18 month manufacturer warranty.

The stand is of new and different design than that used on the earlier Artist 22 models, on many other XP Pen monitors and also on the old Ugees. That old stand was very robust and trustworthy, but this new type of stand has two key advantages. Once its use is learned it is more easily and quickly adjusted while the user remains seated, and it can be set at a greater range of angles — going as low

as just 16 degrees. While it might look more flimsy and plasticy than the old type, it is not — and we would have every faith in this continuing in safe and unbroken use for many years to come.

There is however a certain 'knack' to adjusting it, and it does take a bit of learning and getting used to. Don't expect to immediately learn its ways and the optimal physical ways of working with it.

STEFFEN BRAND

BRITAIN
UNCHARTED TERRITORY

TERRITORY OF THE PICTONS

TERRITORY OF THE PICTONS

BRIGHTON
×

PLYMOUTH
×

We're pleased to re-present a short interview with one of the RPG industry's leading map-makers, **Steffen Brand**, featuring his acclaimed work on the *Degenesis* game series.

THE DEAD CHANNEL

THE LEOPARD ROUTE

OIL RIG OGEN

OIL RIG TETHYS

THE CELTIC SEA

CAEN
(DESTROYED)

GANA
MARCHI

MORLAIX

MONT SAINT MICHEL

× THE LAST STAND

ST. BRIEUC

USHANT

BREST

ALENCON
(DESTROYED)

CARHAIX

RENNES

LEMANS
(DESTROYED)

BRITON

VANNES

CARNAC

DAL: Steffen, welcome to the *Digital Art Live* interview. You made the maps for the upcoming RPG book *Degenesis: Justitian,* and also the 2018 *Degenesis* book *Black Atlantic*?

SB: First of all let me thank you for this interview! Yes, I was contacted while *Black Atlantic* was in production, and asked to first work on the world map for the game. But my first maps of cities will be shown in print-form within the new *Justitian*.

DAL: Great, I see. Yes, and your maps fit quite well with the 'deserts' theme of this issue.

Could you introduce yourself to the reader, please — when you trained, in what, what the role of 'freelance cartographer' involves in the year 2019.

SB: I studied Communication Design with a focus on Illustration. That was in Hamburg, Germany. Cartography, however, started out as a necessity for the Pen-&-Paper RPGs I ran. Over time, this became a 'niche' that I trained more and more in. Ulisses Spiele GmbH became my full-time employer, but I appreciate that I am still able to freelance in my free time in the private and business sector.
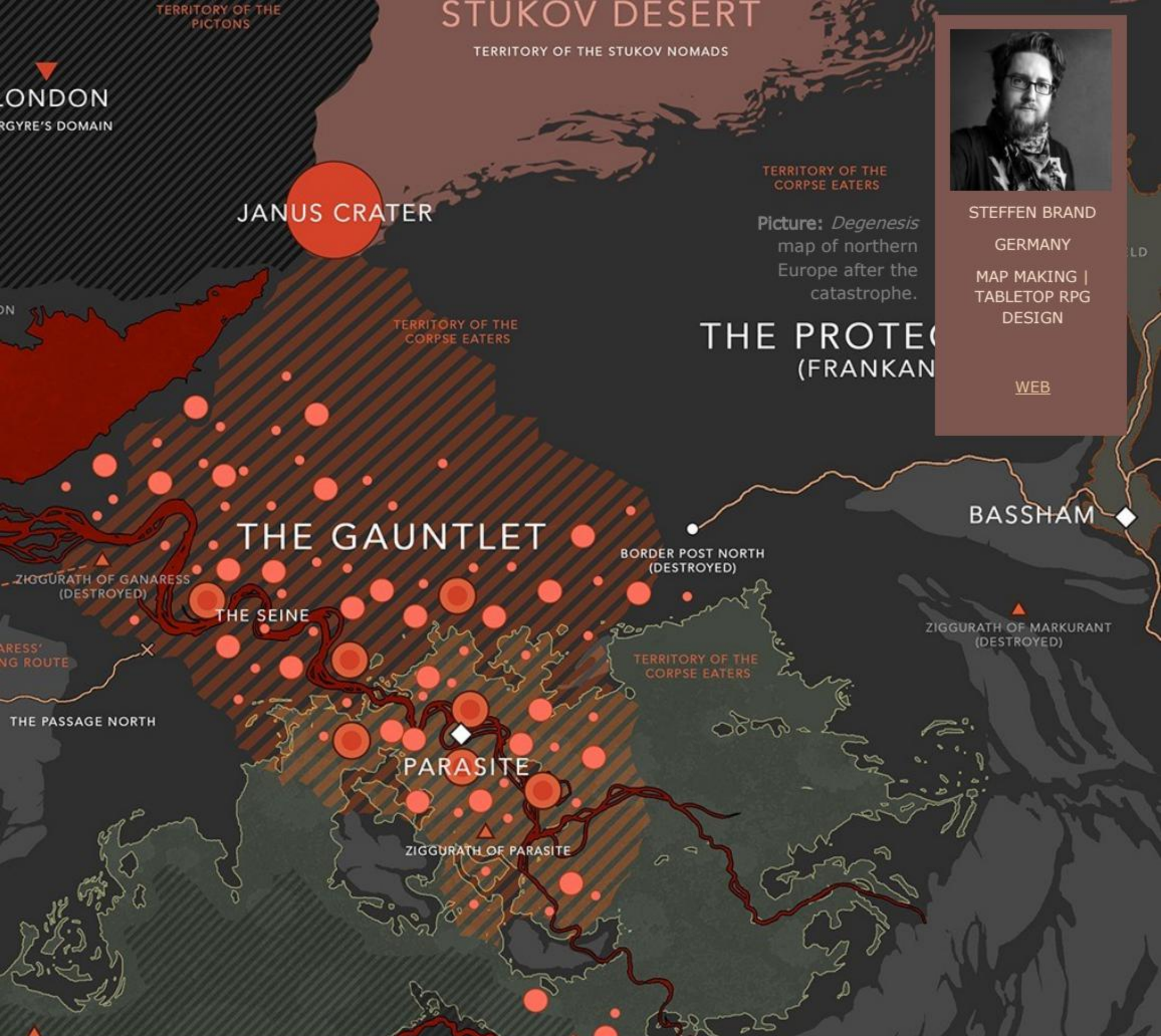
CITY   TOWN   OUTPOST   ROAD   TRADE ROUTE

TERRITORY OF THE
PICTONS

STUKOV DESERT

TERRITORY OF THE STUKOV NOMADS

LONDON

GYRE'S DOMAIN

TERRITORY OF THE
CORPSE EATERS

JANUS CRATER

TERRITORY OF THE
CORPSE EATERS

THE PROTE

(FRANKAN

STEFFEN BRAND

GERMANY

MAP MAKING |
TABLETOP RPG
DESIGN

WEB

BASSHAM

THE GAUNTLET

BORDER POST NORTH
(DESTROYED)

ZIGGURATH OF GANARESS
(DESTROYED)

THE SEINE

ZIGGURATH OF MARKURANT
(DESTROYED)

ARESS'
NG ROUTE

TERRITORY OF THE
CORPSE EATERS

THE PASSAGE NORTH

PARASITE

ZIGGURATH OF PARASITE

DAL: Thanks. What are your 'greatest hits"?

SB: My greatest hits I'd say are the iconic map-style for *The Dark Eye* (seen above and overleaf), that I keep alive with the help of talented freelancers I regularly commission. And the work for the SIXMOREVODKA Studio in Berlin with the *Degenesis* RPG game.

DAL: Excellent. To set the scene, tell us a more, about what a "regional sourcebook" is. For our reader unfamiliar with the output of the RPG publishing world. I think everyone knows that an RPG gamer has a "core rule-book" for the game — but where does the "regional book" fit in?

SB: Regional sourcebooks in these type of games are usually focused on an area of the gaming world, going in-depth and providing additional content. *Degenesis* from SIXMOREVODKA 'ups' the game by including campaign hooks or even complete campaigns anchored in that region. In my opinion, this captures the feeling of that area in a unique way, a way that is immediately personal to the character you play. With the new *Justitian* there are over 130 NPCs [non-player characters] introduced into the game, with an intricate interwoven web of hooks and ideas — that I think will empower gameplay for years to come.

DAL: Super. And thus the role and design of maps within that is obviously going to be quite important. How closely do you work with the writers and designers of other game elements, to shape the maps to fit the setting and content?

SB: We usually work *very* closely. Depending on the work there are already known facts that have to be included or kept in mind, but sometimes there is great creative freedom to go down interesting routes.

DAL: What is the function of a map, what does it try to communicate, how does the style help underline that, do the constrictions allow creative directions not yet used, how does the layout of a map and routes allow for an immersive and interesting gameplay?

SB: These are key questions. After sketching, it is important to communicate to the writers the approach being taken, so that text and imagery can work together seamlessly.

Maps in this RPG medium are often the most referenced image in the game. Ideally, then, usefulness and aesthetic enhance each other in a way that makes people want to use them as a tool.

DAL: Quiet. Does it help to be an RPG gamer yourself? I imagine that it does?

SB: Yes, being a gamer myself helps to keep typical problems you encountered in mind. You get 'a critical eye' for the problems that can arise due to bad or just unclear design -- and how it impedes gameplay. You cannot hide behind automated mechanics in these games, as everything is done manually. Therefore, everything you set down with your hand has to be clear or intuitive enough to be used even by beginners to the game. Over the years my thinking changed in a way to reflect that. Similar to a novel, in a way — in that… if people mention the typeface instead of the story, it is a sign that something is off!

DAL: Indeed. What was the research process for the settings, which I think were Bassham or The Spital in a future-time setting? Did you get old public-domain coast maps, work out what would have changed and then work inland filling in as you go. Or did you work from modern GIS systems which offer public-domain DEMs and data? Or was it more based on plotting the 'story routes' for the game and then filling in the surrounding hinterlands of those?

SB: Research is a key part even before scribbling. *The Dark Eye* is set in a fictional world, which would give me more freedom… if there wasn't the fact that it has been described over 30 years!

Degenesis is based on our real-world earth that holds interesting baggage from today. Abstracting what has happened and knowing fundamentals like a region's weather, its winds, the earth tectonics, and so on you can logically enhance and continue that for settings set in the future. There is some room to fill in the blanks and some things are given, but having an explanation handy as to 'why I chose a certain route to go forward' can be interesting in and of itself in-game.

Public data can help to get an early idea what I am dealing with, nevertheless. Bassham and The Spital — for example — are featured in *Justitian* and are very loosely based in real cities. But not much is left that is still recognizable.

DAL: What sort of graphics software and studio setup do you use in your work?

SB: I work on a Wacom Intuos 4 'Large' which pretty much made my career. Mostly I use Photoshop, run on a self-built workhorse of a computer that can handle the often ridiculously-large file-sizes.

DAL: Great. Do you find that there are any map-making plugins for your core software that are useful? The '3D Map Generator: Atlas' for Photoshop, for instance? Or something similar for Illustrator? Or, does proper GIS mapping software have more of a centre-stage in the production process?

Picture: Full version of an iconic region map made for "The Dark Eye" RPG game, for Ulisses Spiele & Distribution GmbH.

Möge die Fee deine Schritte behüten

Albernia & Windhag

Farindelwald

Meer der Sieben Winde

Windhagberge

Ingrakuppen

Orcanwald

Herbst 1039 BF

SB: My answer to this has to be both and neither — it can help to create something or flesh out an idea, but it too often restricts the way I personally work. GIS mapping can help as a reference for real-world maps, but all in all, in my opinion, cartography thrives in the areas not restricted by programs but only by skill of the artist to visualize his work in his own unique way.

DAL: Right. I hear that the RPG world has been very impressed by the visual and design quality of *Black Atlantic*. Has it led to others in the industry also 'upping their game' and producing works of the same quality?

SB: /*laughter*/ The same quality is hard to achieve, but I think many *try* to at least offer more than they had. I can only speak for myself here, but I try to push — in early concept development — for new games to boldly go in different directions than what we are used to.

Printers are offering more and more techniques to increase the 'haptics' of the game. If a game maker steps off the main highway they will find there are now a lot of interesting directions to go in, and I think many in the industry can learn from others in different areas of expertise like innovations in magazines or the user experience of digital games.

DAL: And I see that the fans also contribute to the game? For instance I see that there's a new *Degenesis Atlas* book which collects the best of the fan-made maps? Is there likely to be something like that for the *Justitian* book? Or does *Degenesis Atlas* cover all the territory?

SB: The fans who created the *Atlas* are dedicated to to providing no end of additional content, and I applaud them for the work they put in there. The *Atlas* is probably something that can never truly be called 'done'. There is always more that is possible and I do not see

SIEGE
ATTRITION WARFARE
2598 AD

INFORMATION
1. JUDGE'S STABLES
2. JUSTICE SQUARE
3. HELVETICS CAMP
4. RADIO STATION
5. THE PLATFORM
6. LIFT
7. MILITARY HOSPITAL
8. CREMATORIUM

SUPPLY LINES
EQUESTRIAN PATH
SUPPLY CHECKS
WATER TOWERS
SUPPLY RESERVES
BEDLAM
HOUSING DISTRICT
HOUSING DISTRICT
MAIN MARKET
THE SETTLEMENTS
PRESERVATIO QUARTERS
EASTEND
THE GARRISON
PLAZA
CONFLUX
FLANK
OLD RADIO TOWER
BOTTLENECK
DEFENSE TOWER
FLANK
BRIDGE
TEARFIELD
DEFENSE TOWER
DEFENSE TOWER

0   200M   400M   600M

them stopping after *Justitian* is out. More likely, it will spark new ideas. You can find the Atlas at DriveThruRPG and another great unofficial resource is called the Cluster and is online at www.degenesis-cluster.com.

DAL: Super. Do you also make 'guide templates' for the fans to download and use to make their own maps?

SB: Not as of yet. We'll see what the future holds...

DAL: OK. I recently discovered Gregory Manchess's 'art-novel': *Above the Timberline* (Oct 2017). That's a fine new format for storytelling, of a sort that I hadn't quite seen done before. Certainly not with such excellent design and art. Are you someone who follows such innovations in print and tablet ebooks, and if so what has most excited you in the book format over the last three years?

SB: That book by Gregory Manchess is amazing, and I can recommend it without hesitation! I quite enjoy books that try something new, sometimes small publishers try to create something incredible to stand out, sometimes books like *S. – The ship of Theseus* by Doug Dorst and J.J. Abrams (yes, that one!) or *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski. But I can't put my finger on one specific book that could rise above all else. I'm open to changing my mind...

DAL: Great. Ok, keep an eye on the Imaginarium section at the end of each of our free monthly magazine, in future. Oh, and I hear you have personal side-projects? Could you tell us more about those please?

SB: Yes, I've been interested in the design of new games for years, two attempts of mine stand out to me: *There be Monsters* is a more cyberpunk-based game — set in our world but not as impersonal as many in this niche are.

Pictures: City maps for *Degenesis: Justitian.*

MOBILIS
THE POWERHOUSE
2598 AD

INFORMATION
1. TECHNODROME
2. POWER PLANTS
3. ENERGY MODULES
4. RELAY STATION
5. MAIN POWER LINE
6. CUSTOMS CONTROL AREA
7. THE RAILRAMP
8. MINERS CAMP
9. CENTRAL EXCHANGE
10. CREMATORIUM
11. PIPELINES

My other personal project game is *Bodhisattva*, a game set in the past of a fictional India. For the latter one I have plans to publish it, but there is not much online yet. Hopefully, there is more to happen still in 2019...

DAL: Great, that sounds fun. Yes, I'd imagine there's potentially a huge market for someone who can make the first 'big hit' Indian equivalent of *Dungeons and Dragons*, which perhaps draws on relevant songs and folklore. OK, thanks very much for this interview, we realise you're a busy guy, so thanks for the time. We wish you well in the future.

SB: Thank you for this chance — I feel cartography is an under-appreciated topic in art and the fact that you are among those featuring it is greatly appreciated!

Steffen Brand is online at: https://www.artstation.com/steffenbrand and at https://www.deviantart.com/steffenbrand

The **Degenesis** game and additional material is available from:

www.shop.sixmorevodka.com

See a video trailer for the game, at YouTube.

Pictures: This page: Initial overall world-map for the *Degenesis* RGP game. Opposite: initial print gamebook, and the cover of a new and recent fan-made *Atlas* map book.

EISBARRIERE

SPORENWAND

GAELIK

BORCA

POLLEN

DANZIG

PANDORA

BRITAIN

STUKOV-WÜSTE

OSMAN

LONDON

LIQUA
DOMSTADT

JUSTITIAN
ZONENBRAND
SIEGEN
RAMEIN REGION
NULLPELLIA

NORET

DRESDEN

BRESLAU

JANUS KRATER

GRENZPOSTEN NORD

BASSHAM

PRAHA REPUBLIKA

PEST

BRNO

USUD

BREST

ST-BRIEUC
BRITON
RENNES

PARASITE

MULHOUSE

BASEL

VOIVODAT BUKAREST

FRANKA

GRENZPOSTEN SÜD

BERN

HELLVETIKA

LAIBACH

SOUFFRANCE

SANTIAGIO

DER SCHLUND

VOIVODAT BEOGRAD

AQUITAINE

GENUA

BERGAMO

CRUCES

VOIVODAT DALMAZIA

VOIVODAT SOFIA

LEON

BURGOS

PERUGIA

BALKHAN

ISTANBUL

KASTILISCHES
HOCHPLATEAU

TOULON

CAQUILA

BURGAS

HYBRISPANIA

SALAMANCA

VALLADOLID

PERPIGNAN

ROMA

VOIVODAT IONNUS

MADRID

NOX

MIRAR

CORPSE

PURGARE

DISMOSDANZ

LISSABON

SEVILLA

CORDOBA

BEDAIN

KRETA

HUELVA

AL-ANDALUS

GRANADA

CARTAGENA

GIBRALTAR

ALGIER

CONSTANTINE

TUNIS

SYRACUS

ARIBAT

ATLAS

FES

BISKRA

QABIS

KAIRO

MARRAKUSH

EL GOLEA

TRIPOL

BENGASI

ANUBIEN

ZILLAH

NIL

MURQUZ

AFRICA

TESSALIT

EMBAYE

DHORUBA

GAO

AGADESH

PSYCHOVOREN-GÜRTEL

The game is set in Europe and North Africa at the end of the
26th century, 500 years after an asteroid slammed into the
Earth — just at humanity was at the edge of achieving a
transhumanist utopia. Primal new cultures emerge from the
ruins and struggle for survival in a new Ice Age. Many groups
find themselves infected by an alien entity that arrived with the
asteroid, which turns humans into a new *Homo Degenesis* race.

GALLERY

What better fit with a 'maps' theme, than a small gallery from artists who have creatively evoked the many mysteries of 'the library'.

Libraries are akin to maps in several ways, being detailed and organised 'plans of knowledge', giving an overview of many things that are either distant or elsewhere. Libraries have comparable sets of rules that are required to understand and navigate them with success. Like maps they may perhaps lead to hidden treasure, but libraries have a shifting and ambigious relationship to the real world. They are often as untrustworthy as maps, if assumed to be a 1:1 reflection of reality.

Picture: "Library" by <u>Mr Nick</u> of the Netherlands.

Pictures: Two pictures we could imagine show libraries on a mysterious island ("Temple Cave") or on Mars ("Ancient Mars"). Opposite is "Magician's Study". All three are by ExitMothership of Germany.

Digital Art
LIVE
£3,274 DAY
11:1

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE: 80 Days

The year is 1872, but with a steampunk twist. You play the manservant of Mr. Phileas Fogg, Gent., who has ambitiously wagered that he can circumnavigate the globe in just 80 days. Dash to the railway station and travel on by airship, submarine, mechanical camel, trans-Siberian steam-train, American paddle-boat, tramp steamer, elephant, and any other means your employer can afford. This acclaimed and multi award-winning interactive-text 'choose your own adventure' game was a huge hit in 2013 for developers Inkle, and they continued to polish and add to it until summer 2019 (v1.5a1). Many new cities, characters and situations were added. The experience is gripping and polished, with a great story and very simple mechanics and stats. If you have not played it yet, you are missing out. *80 Days* is available for Windows, Android tablets and phones, Nintendo Switch, and Mac. It costs just £3 on Android and plays perfectly with a 10-inch Kindle Fire tablet.

Our pick of the most inspirational products and shows. Make your imagination LIVE!

IMAGIN

Y 7   **MONDAY**

9 AM

But tell me, Monsieur — what is the
purpose of our journey?

I have made a hefty wager, and I
do not intend to lose!

What next
Money

Most screens are elegantly animated, as you race
against time and other players around the globe.

£3,948   **DAY 59**   THURSDAY
8:24 PM

PITCAIRN ISLAND

SLEEP
(+1 day)

PLAN

88

RENBURG

x2

ARIUM

♥ 100
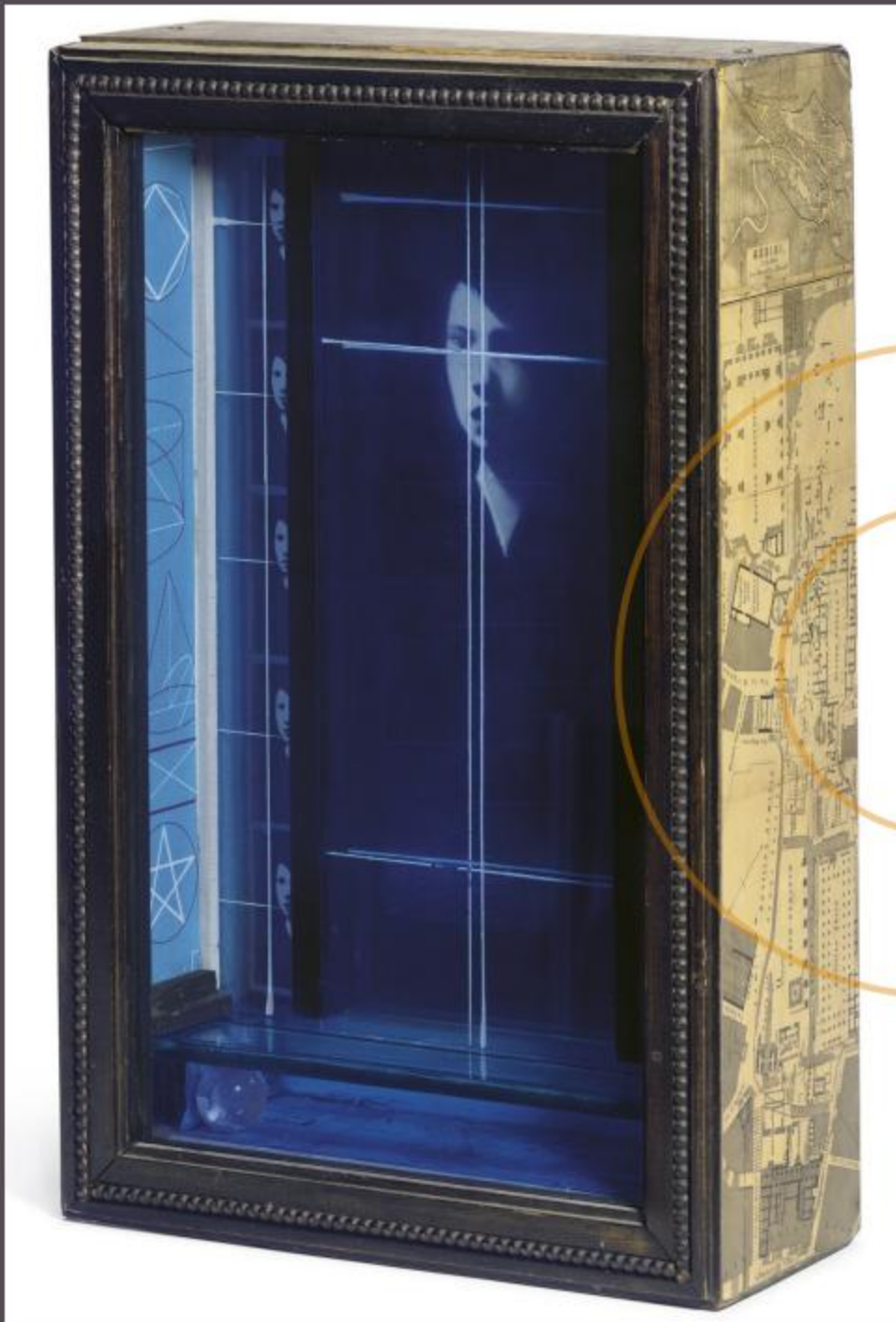
Artbook: Shadowplay Eterinday

Joseph Cornell: Shadowplay Eterniday (2003) was a sumptious oversized hardback produced for the centennial of Joseph Cornell's birth. Cornell was a key outsider artist of the 20th century, but one who produced restrained and very elegant work of the sort seen above. The book has 265 pages and is profusely illustrated in colour with crisp photography showing his masterwork shadow-boxes. It offers a fine introduction to a key American artist of the imagination, whose work also extensively used old maps and charts.

The book can still be had used at a reasonable price. But, if buying used, try to get the first printing and be absolutely sure that the DVD-ROM is in the back-pocket of the book. This disc is an outstanding example of the accomplished interactive multimedia production made in the early 2000s, and is well worth your time if you can get it running today.
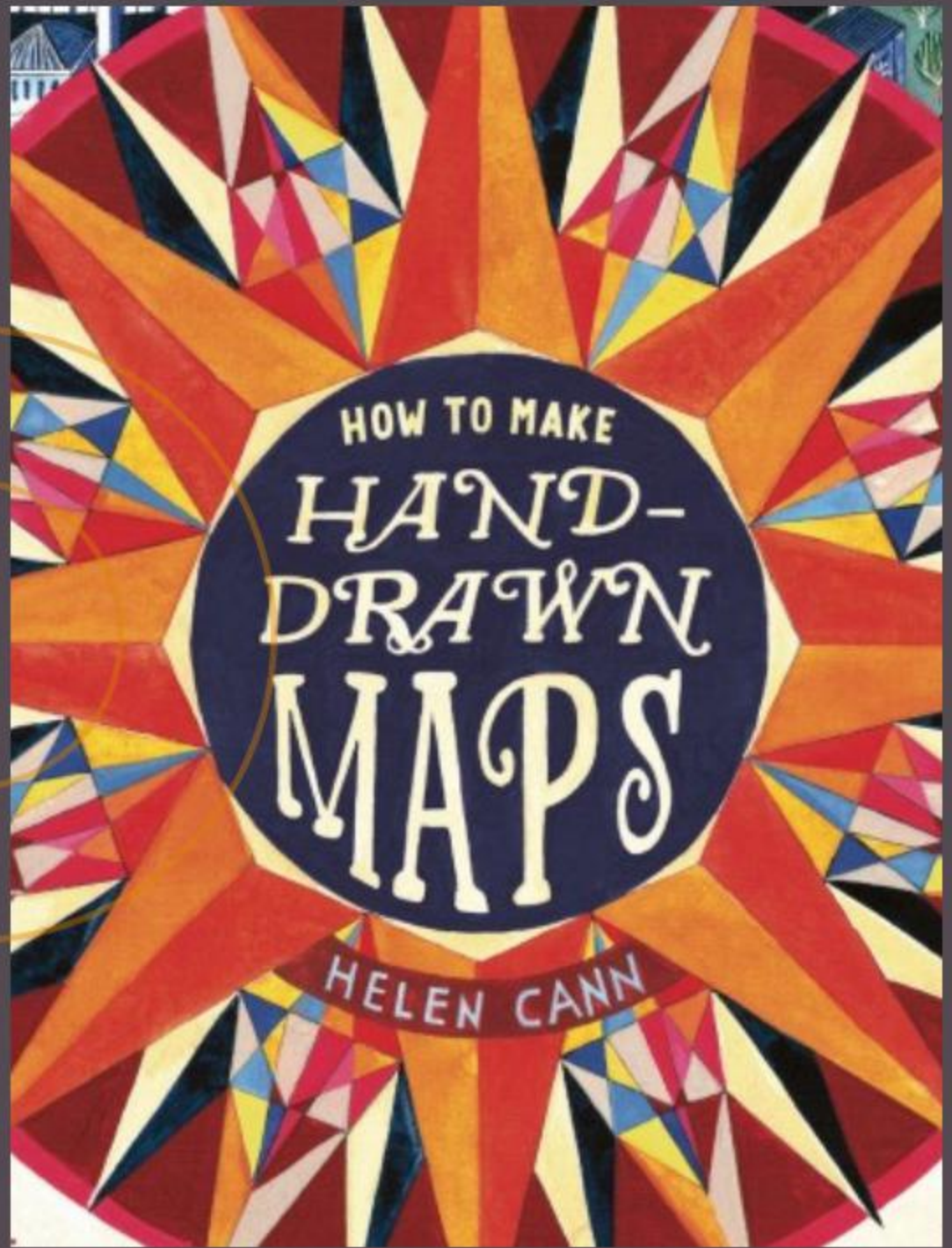
Guidebook: Make Hand-drawn Maps

If your budding inner map-maker needs a clear introductory guidebook to the various types of creative maps, *How to Make Hand-Drawn Maps: A Creative Guide with Tips, Tricks, and Projects* (2018) is the book. In 192 colour pages you are whisked through 25 types of creative map, but you begin with basic advice and components — such as drawing compass roses, decorated panels with mileage scales, general mapping symbols, and suitable lettering. The examples are well chosen, and there are micro-interviews. This is not an RPG book and there are only few pages on RPG game-maps, here called Dungeon Maps, and a few more on Treasure Maps. The author also considers some charts such as family trees, idea-maps, and so on. There is no consideration of software, but most of the ideas and projects could be easily translated to digital provided you have a pen monitor. While a relatively slim starter book like this cannot be an Ultimate Bible of Techniques, the book keeps a useful focus on practical ideas.
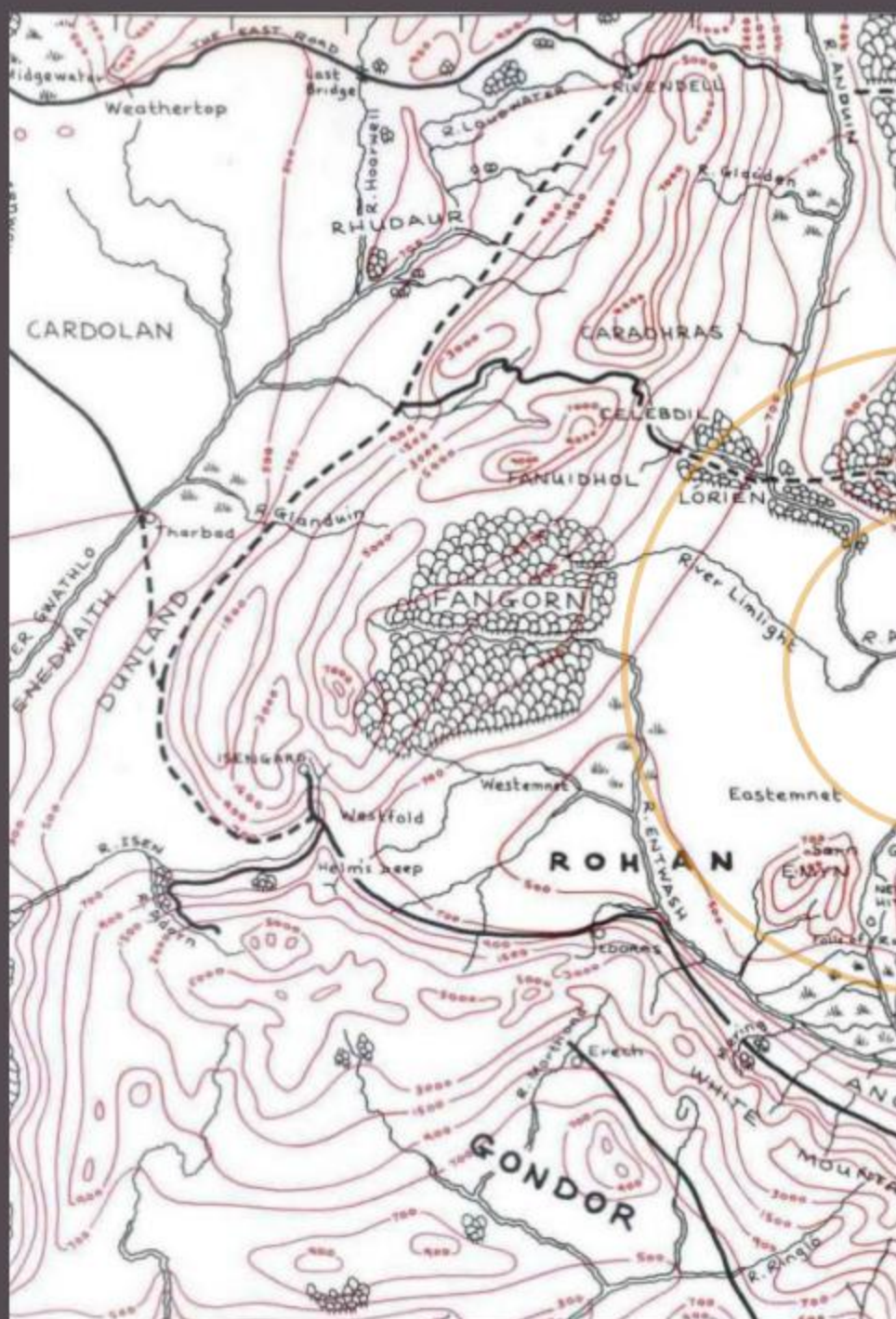
Map-book: The Journeys of Frodo

Barbara Strachey's outstanding map book for *The Lord of the Rings* contains fifty-one finely-drawn maps. These show the actual journeys undertaken by Frodo and his companions through Middle-earth, and also by all the others in the book. Produced in 1981, *Journeys* might lack the extreme polish and heft a publisher would bring to it in 2021. But it is all the better for that. The slightly homespun three-colour look suits the hobbit-journeys well, and also fits well with the hand-drawn maps by Tolkien and his son Christopher. The book is in landscape format and the maps also contain dates and stopping-points, so readers can easily follow the travels in *The Lord of the Rings*. This is an ideal companion to *LoTR*, or the full-cast unabridged audio version by Phil Dragash.

The hardback is now becoming a £120+ collector's item, but the paperback can still be had used for about £25. The 1998 reprint is also to be found on Archive.org.
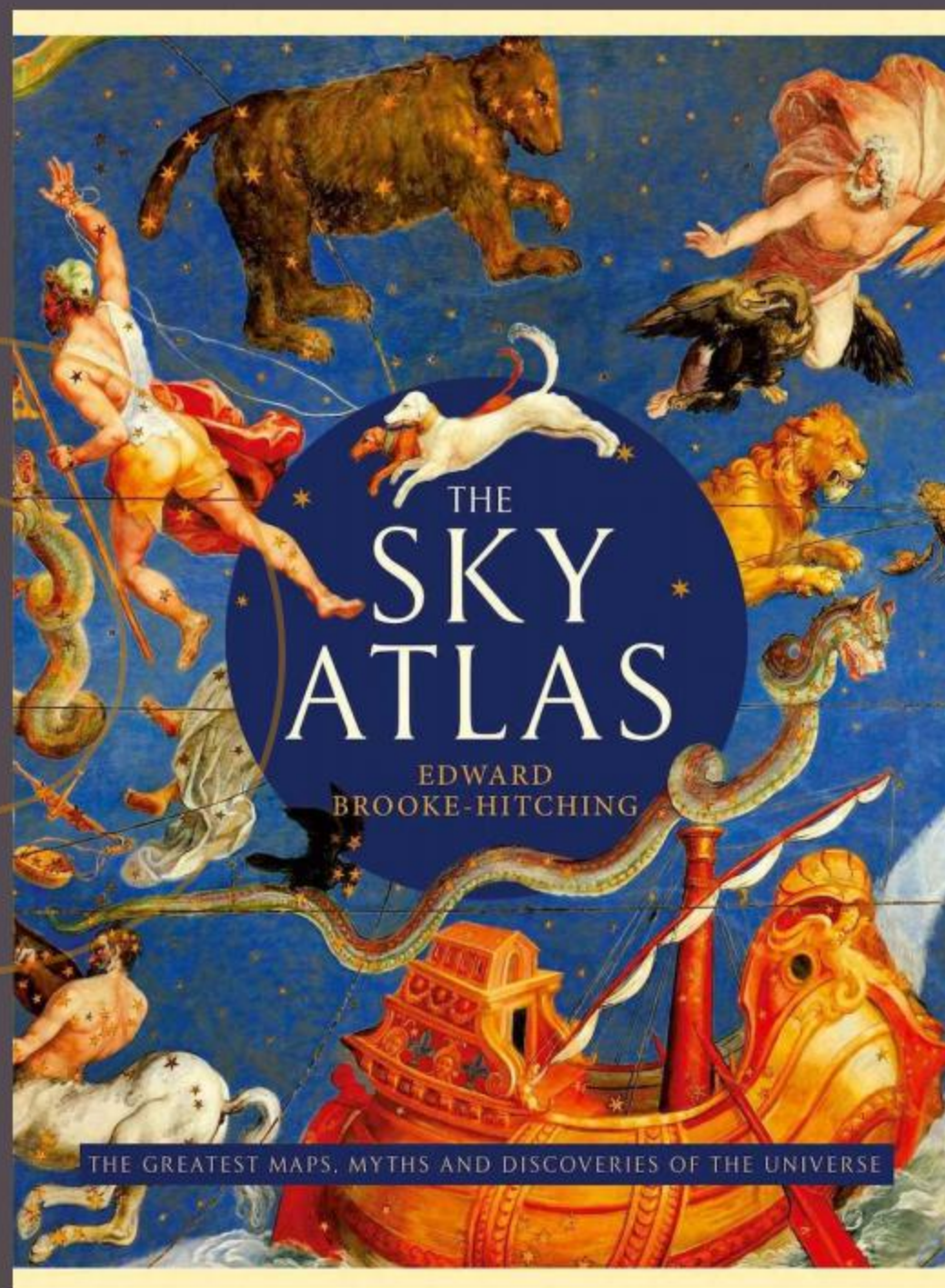
Map-book: The Sky Atlas

British author Edward Brooke-Hitching is well known for books on historical maps, and his new Spring 2020 book *The Sky Atlas* did not disappoint. The oversized colour book offers a richly-illustrated treasury showcasing the finest examples of maps showing the heavens and constellations. This gloriously cosmic genre of map-making is often overlooked in the histories of map making, partly because it was deemed un-scientific — religion, myth and fantasy were imaginatively overlaid on the night-sky. The book covers the: Ancient Sky (Babylonians onward); Medieval Sky; Scientific Revolution (early period); and Modern Sky (1880s-1940s). Note that this book does not cover many historic star-charts or planispheres — the emphasis is mostly on the art-history value of the maps rather than current scientific accuracy.

The Sky Atlas has been a best-seller and thus can be picked up for a modest £15 as a 256-page oversized hardback, and is also available at about the same price as a Kindle ebook.

V for Vendetta: Behind the Mask

Until 31st October 2021 / London

London's Cartoon Museum has an exhibition on a ground-breaking British comic, Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta* (completed 1989). The exhibition looks at the original, the Warner Bros. movie version, and also the later use of the Guy Fawkes mask as a generic street-protest symbol. Tickets to the show costs £5.

https://www.cartoonmuseum.org/whats-on

Pictures, from left, across double-page:

Detail from cover–art of one of the original British pamphlet comics reprints of *V for Vendetta*. The strip had first appears serialised in several British multi-character comics, and took a while to appear in complete book form.

Detail from a Will Eisner camera-ready original splash page for his *The Spirit* magazine, showing white-out fluid and other small corrections.

Detail from "Infinity Mirror Rooms: Filled with the Brilliance of Life", a dynamic mirrored art installation, by Yayoi Kusama.

'Envy Nightlife', design & implementation by I-5 Design of Washington, USA.

The Spirit of Will Eisner

Until 29th August 2021 / France

The major ferry port of Cherbourg, France, is staging a large gallery exhibition devoted to the American comics genius Will Eisner (1917-2005). The new show at the Thomas Henry Museum (*Musee Thomas Henry*), part of the port's 10th 'Biennale of the Ninth Art'. The show runs until 29th August 2021.

The curators survey the entire career of Will Eisner's greatest creation *The Spirit* and his afterlife in the 1970s and 80s. The show also zooms in on the comic's relationship with the fabric and people of New York City (which has historically had strong sea-links with Cherbourg). There are also sections on Eisner's robust entrepreneurialism, setting up the first comic book studio based on the factory/movie-studio principles, and later developing his own brand and publications. The same team who previously worked on Windsor McKay and Jack Kirby exhibitions have, by all accounts, produced another very worthy staging for Eisner — and one that will especially delight fans of black & white comics. A large printed catalogue is available.

https://www.cherbourg.fr/infos-services/
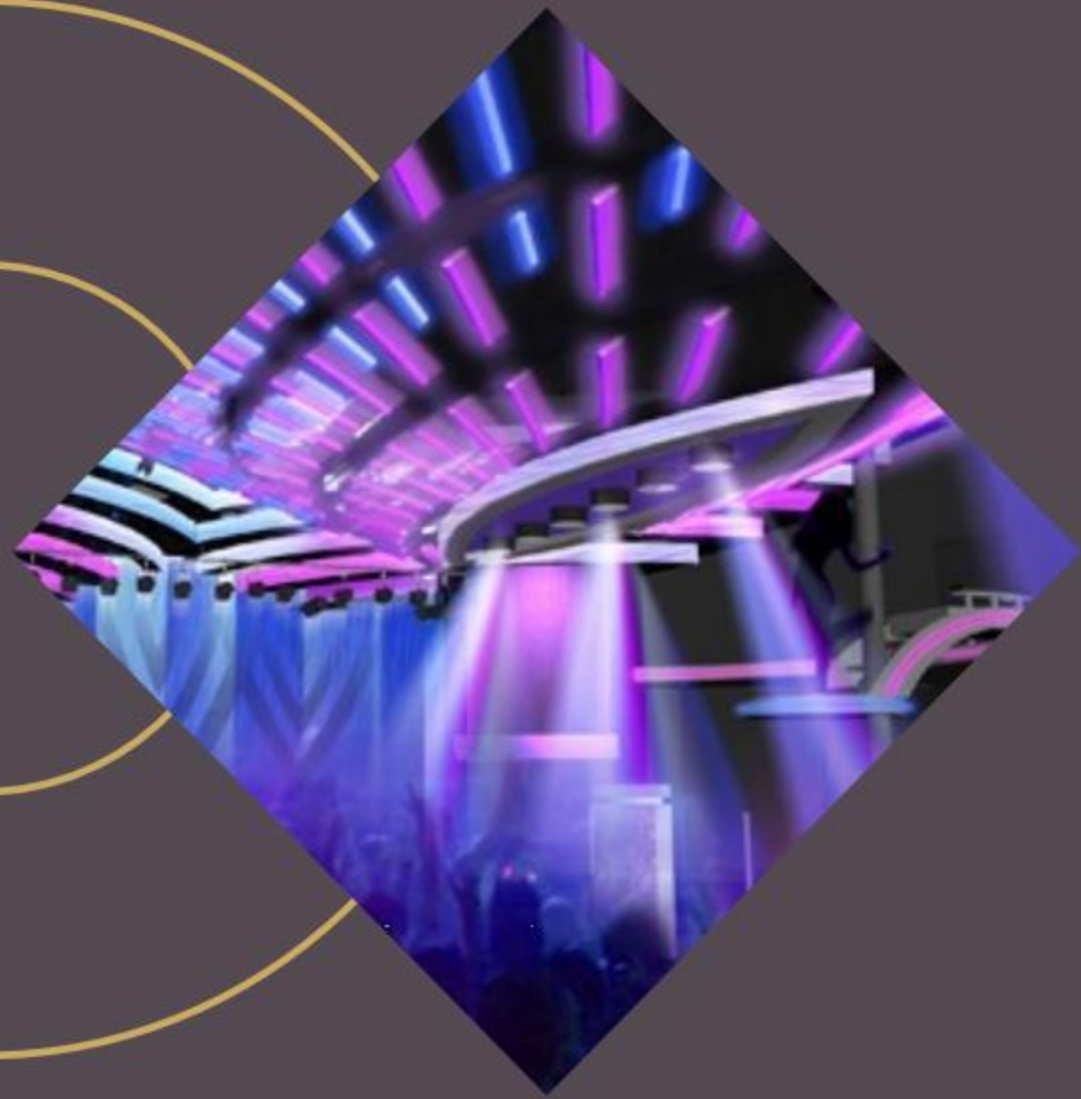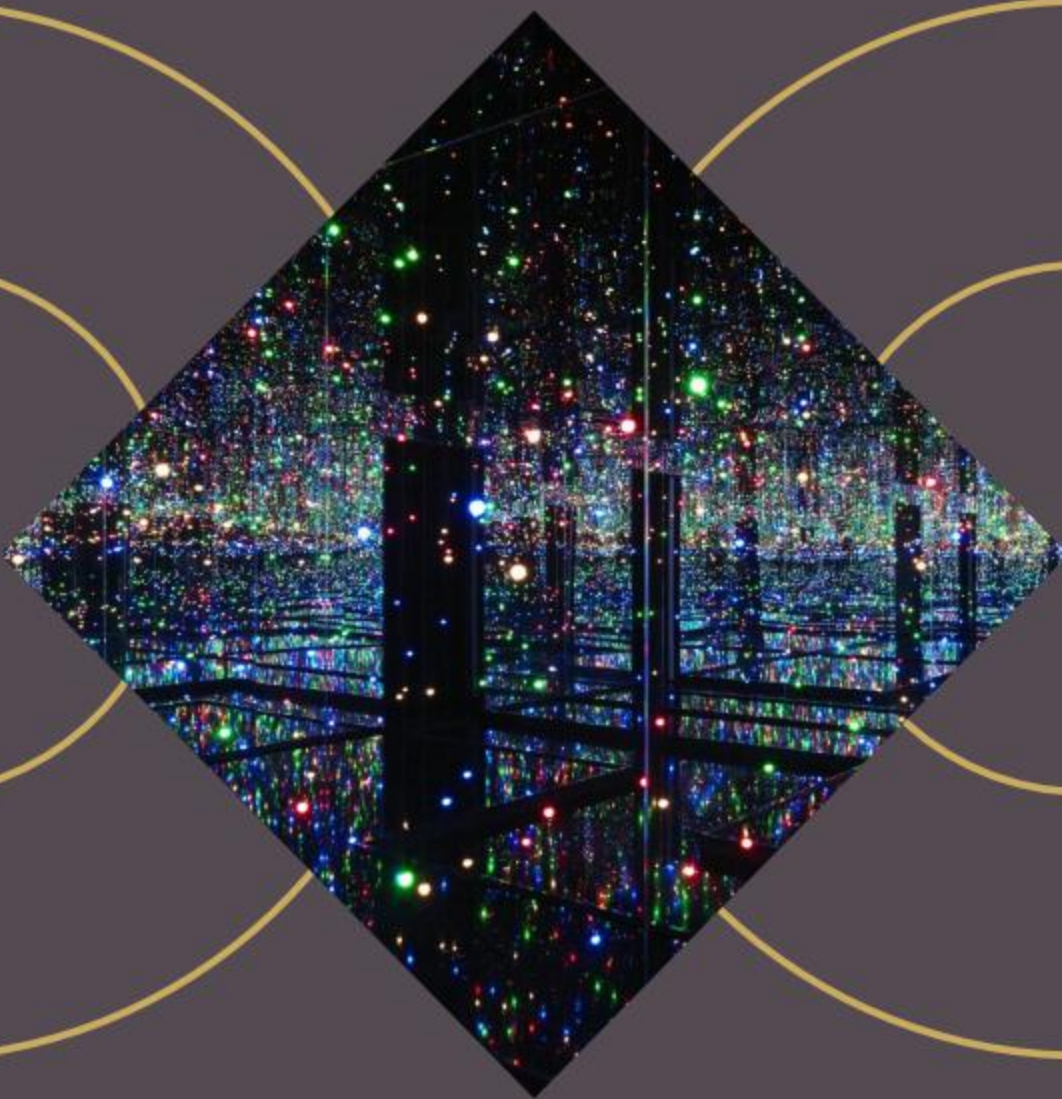
Infinity Mirror Rooms

Until 10th June 2022 / London

The London Tate and the Bank of America have joined forces to present a rare chance to experience Yayoi Kusama's very popular Infinity Mirror Rooms installations. Even if you don't usually care for installation-art, these outstanding examples of the form are not to be missed. Seen here in a suitably large setting at the Tate, these interactive environments transport the visitor into Kusama's unique vision of endless reflections in a 'futuristic funfair' environment. Also being presented at the Tate is the 92 year-old Kusama's… "room which creates the illusion of a boundless universe of rotating crystal chandeliers" together with a small presentation of photographs and moving images related to the history and inspirations for the rooms.

The show is in The George Economou Gallery at the Tate, and it has of course proven extremely popular — tickets are currently sold out through 24th October 2021. But the Tate website states that more tickets go on public sale in September 2021.

https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/

Night Fever: Designing Club Culture

Until 9th January 2022 / Scotland

The UK city of Dundee is now hosting a major exhibition on the often-futuristic design of dance clubs. The show aims to be a "joyful history of nightclub design" and enjoys the ample space and facilities available at V&A Dundee. It is said to be… "the first large-scale examination of the relationship between dance club culture and design, charting the evolution of nightclubs from the 1960s to today". The show explores not only the personalities and cultural scenes that centred around key disco and electronica clubs, but also demonstrates how… "architecture, art, fashion, graphics, lighting, performance and sound all come together to create an immersive sensory experience where design, music and technology meet on the dancefloor", and shows how this has had a "far-reaching influence on popular culture" — in terms of stage design, movies, TV, VR and e-sports arenas.

The show is ticketed at £12 and is due to run until 9th January 2022. An online event titled "Behind the Exhibition: Night Fever" will take place on 5th July 2021.

https://www.vam.ac.uk/dundee/

NEXT ISSUE: AUGUST 2021
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Are you interested in being interviewed in a future issue of the magazine? Or presenting a webinar for our series? Please send the Web adress of your gallery or store, and we'll visit!

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AQVA

Picture: "Aqua I" by Darkakelarre of Spain.