Issue 1 • 2024

SPELLBINDING

A Fantasy Magazine





Delving into the Fantasy Visions
Nin Wang & Elia Pellegrini











FOLKLORE to CYBERPUNK

The subgenres of fantasy and the prominent films inspired by them







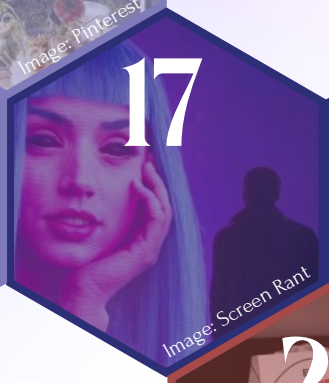
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Editor's Note

Unveiling the Magic: A Spellbinding Journey into the Fantasy Genre

Spellbinding Magazine is a fantasy magazine that features all spectrums and subgenres of the fantasy genre except superhero fantasy as it's much more colossal and deserves its own specialised magazine. This is the first issue of the magazine, so I want to start off by bringing in features that give an introductory glimpse to the fantasy world and understanding it. Fantasy by definition, is a genre of literature that features magical and supernatural elements that do not exist in the real world. This genre encompasses real-world settings with fantastical elements to entirely imaginary universes with their own physical laws and logic and populations of imaginary races and creatures. Speculative in nature, fantasy is not tied to reality or scientific fact.

I thought of fantasy as my theme for this magazine because I've always loved fantasy for as long as I can remember. I've loved movies, shows, books and even podcasts derived from fantasy but never came across a magazine that solely focused on fantasy or was fantasy themed. So, I thought of it as a fun idea to make one. My objective for this magazine is to make something that brings in like-minded people who love fantasy and are interested in one or many subgenres. These people can be teenagers to young adults, fans of fantasy and anyone looking for escapism in publishing media.

I named the magazine Spellbinding, as the term itself is related to fantasy. It means to hold one's complete attention as though by magic. I wanted to incorporate my fantastical illustrations that you'll get to see from the front cover to the page borders to give a more whimsical look to this magazine. Also the fonts that you'll be seeing from the headings of the first feature are going to be the standard fonts of their respective fantasy subgenre that I use for topics about the subgenres and the media and print outlets from them. Hope you have fun reading this magazine as much as I had and loved making it.

Sudiksha Panda
Editor, Spellbinding Magazine

Feature

FOLKLORE to CYBERPUNK: The subgenres of fantasy

by Sudiksha Panda

The fantasy genre has spawned many subgenres that range from mythical to modern and otherworldly. Understanding the different fantasy subgenres can help viewers to identify the criteria in each of them. Aspiring writers can find their niche to create fantasy works such as stories, movies and shows. Fantasy takes on many forms, and the number of distinct fantasy subgenres seems to grow with each passing decade. Here are some of the most common subgenres that have adapted numerous fantasy works and how they originated.

Image: Sudiksha Panda, Images: Pinterest



Image: Wikipedia

FOLKLORE AND FAIRYTALE

The European fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in a painting by Carl Larsson in 1881.

Folklore is the body of expressive culture shared by a particular group of people, culture, or subculture. This includes oral traditions such as tales, myths, legends, proverbs, poems, jokes, and other oral traditions. Folklore also encompasses customary lore, taking actions for folk beliefs, and the forms and rituals of celebrations such as festivals, weddings, folk dances, and initiation rites. Fantasy is usually inspired by folklore. Fairytale belongs to the folklore genre that takes the form of a short story. Such stories typically feature mythical, and often magical, entities, such as dwarfs, dragons, elves, fairies, giants, gnomes, goblins, griffins, merfolk but mostly mermaids, talking animals, trolls, unicorns, or witches, and usually magic or enchantments. In most cultures, there is no clear line separating myth from folk or fairy tale; all these together form the literature of nonliterate civilisations. The history of the fairy tale is particularly difficult to trace because only the literary forms can survive. Such stories may date back thousands of years, some to the Bronze Age. Fairy tales, and works derived from fairy tales, are still written today. Examples include Cinderella, The Sleeping Beauty and Little Red Riding Hood.







HIGH AND LOW FANTASY

Image: Forbes

Image: US Weekly

Stills of films The Lord of the Rings (left) and Pirates of the Caribbean (right).

High fantasy, or epic fantasy, is a subgenre of fantasy defined by the epic nature of its setting, characters, themes, or plot. It takes place in a setting very unlike Earth and deals with world-threatening forces. It might feature fantastic creatures, historic or unusual technologies, magical elements, and other unearthly elements. High fantasy does not need to incorporate fantasy tropes like swords or dragons, though these are common characteristics of the genre. Examples can be The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit. Low fantasy, or intrusion fantasy, is a subgenre of fantasy in which magical events intrude on an otherwise-normal world. Unlike high fantasy, low fantasy takes place in a world we recognise as our own. Instead of taking the reader away into a magical place, low fantasy writers bring the magic to them. Low fantasy places less emphasis on elements typically associated with fantasy and sets a narrative in realistic environments with elements of the fantasy. In other words, the world works just like our own. The geography may be strange, the cultures made up and people acting as people do, with some few exceptions of 'irrationality', or 'magic'. Examples can be Game of Thrones and Pirates of the Caribbean.



URBAN FANTASY

Image: The New Yorker

Still from Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince.

Urban fantasy is a genre of fantasy in which fantastical characters and concepts are placed in a real-world urban setting, often in the present day. Urban fantasy is a subgenre of fantasy, placing supernatural elements in an estimate of a contemporary urban setting. The combination provides the writer with a platform for classic fantasy tropes, unrealistic plot-elements, and unusual characters without demanding the creation of an entire imaginary world. Urban fantasy combines imaginary/unrealistic elements of plot, character, theme, or setting with a largely familiar world combining the familiar and the strange. Such elements may exist secretly in the world or may occur openly. Fantastic components may be magic, paranormal beings, recognizable mythic or folk-tale plots, or thematic tropes such as a quest, or a battle of good and evil. Authors may use current urban myths, borrow fictional technologies, or even invent occult practices, as well as using established supernatural characters and events from folklore, literature, film, or comics. Using contemporary technology such as automotive vehicles and everyday public institutions such as schools/universities, or markets establish a familiar context. Examples can be the Harry Potter franchise, and The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones.



DARK FANTASY

Image: Polygon

Still from stop-motion animated film, Coraline.

Dark fantasy is a subgenre of fantasy literary, artistic, and cinematic works that incorporate disturbing and frightening themes. It often combines fantasy with elements of horror, possessing a dark and gloomy tone or an atmosphere of horror and dread. Dark fantasy is sometimes also used to describe stories told from a monster's point of view, or that present a more sympathetic view of supernatural beings usually associated with horror. This contrasts with the traditional horror model, which focuses more on the victims and survivors. In a more general sense, dark fantasy is occasionally used as a synonym for supernatural horror, to distinguish horror stories that contain elements of the supernatural from those that do not. For example, a story about a werewolf or vampire could be described as dark fantasy. Elements of dark fantasy include themes of fighting against the “end of the world” as a plot whether that is the characters or the actual world, the character may have inner struggles with themselves, often lack happy endings, or using plot devices to draw the reader/viewer into questioning their own sanity. Adaptations of this genre include literature, anime and manga, films, and video games. Examples include Coraline, Pan’s Labrinth and Spirited Away.



DYSTOPIAN FANTASY

Image: The New York Times

Still from The Hunger Games: Catching Fire.

The dystopian genre imagines worlds or societies where life is extremely bad because of deprivation or oppression or terror, and human society is characterized by human misery, such as filth, oppression, disease, overpopulation, environmental destruction, or war. Sometimes grouped in with science fiction and speculative fiction, dystopian fantasies imagine worlds gone wrong. The settings are at once familiar to contemporary audiences and alarmingly worse than the present world. Dystopia is a state in which the conditions of human life are extremely bad as from deprivation or oppression or terror (or all three). Examples of The Hunger Games, The Maze Runner and Divergent comes to mind here. The opposite of dystopia is utopia, which means an ideally perfect place, especially in its social, political, and moral aspects. It literally means “no place,” conveying the idea that no such place could exist because it doesn’t reflect the realities of human nature or existence. Dystopian fantasy is usually set in the near future to generate urgency about real current events. Because dystopian literature and cinema is set in the future, it is by definition science fiction.



STEAMPUNK

Image: Steampunk Scholar

Still from Studio Ghibli's Howl's Moving Castle.

Steampunk is a fantasy genre that's defined by a focus on the style of the industrial era mixed with futuristic technology. In a predated sense, steampunk introduced major story props such as robots and airships. It incorporates retro futuristic technology and aesthetics inspired by, but not limited to, 19th-century industrial steam-powered machinery. Steampunk works are often set in an alternative history of the Victorian era or the American "Wild West", where steam power remains in mainstream use, or in a fantasy world that similarly employs steam power. The impact of steampunk can be seen in films like Hayao Miyazaki's Howl's Moving Castle and shows like Arcane. Steampunk may also incorporate additional elements from the genres of fantasy, horror, historical fiction, alternate history, or other branches of speculative fiction, making it often a hybrid genre. As a form of speculative fiction, it explores alternative futures or pasts but can also address real-world social issues. Steampunk also refers to any of the artistic styles, clothing fashions, or subcultures that have developed from the aesthetics of steampunk fiction, Victorian-era fiction, art nouveau design, and films from the mid-20th century.



CYBERPUNK

Image: WIRED

Still from Blade Runner.

Cyberpunk is a sub-genre of science fiction dealing with the integration of society and technology in dystopian settings. Science fiction is a genre of speculative fiction that contains imagined elements that don't exist in the real world. It spans a wide range of themes that often explore time travel, space travel, are set in the future, and deal with the consequences of technological and scientific advances. Often referred to as "low-life and high tech," Cyberpunk stories deal with outsiders (punks) who fight against the oppressors in society (usually mega corporations that control everything) via technological means (cyber). If the punks aren't actively fighting against a mega-corporation, they're still dealing with living in a world completely dependent on high technology. Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? is seen as one of the first examples of this subgenre. It would not be until the 1980s that the sub-genre would truly make itself known to the world with the iconic film Blade Runner (1982) based on the same book.

Image created by Sudiksha Panda, images: Pinterest

Feature

The Fantasy Aesthetics: Predictions and How To Follow Them

by Sudiksha Panda

This article is also available in audio format.

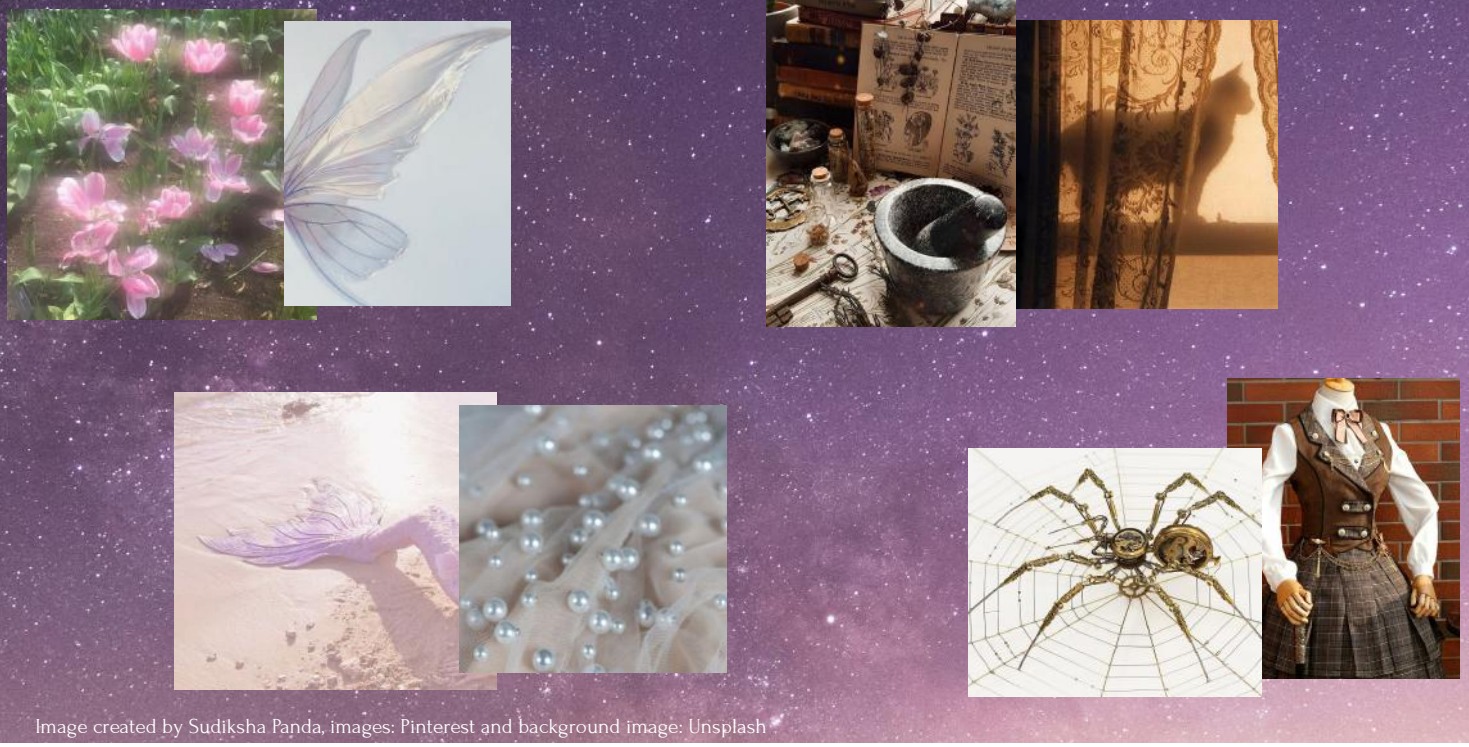


Image created by Sudiksha Panda, images: Pinterest and background image: Unsplash

Today the term aesthetic is widely used. When your social media is dominated by all facets of fashion, every month or so you'll hear about a supposed TikTok trend with an aesthetic name that stops your scroll. Last year alone, we came across fantasy aesthetic trends such as mermaidcore because of the release of the live-action The little mermaid. From all things pearlescent, beachy, and shimmery, this is a more ethereal aesthetic, geared toward a siren.

But what is an aesthetic? The word "aesthetic" originated as the philosophical discussion about what beauty is, how we should approach it, and why it exists. It's about lifestyle, as well as visual and artistic elements that express a certain theme, mood, identity, or community affiliation. The emergence of this concept is associated with the new era of social media, particularly TikTok. Throughout the 2010s and 2020s, online aesthetics gained increasing popularity, specifically on social media platforms such as Tumblr, Pinterest, Instagram and TikTok, and often were used by people to express their individuality and creativity. They can also be used to create a sense of community and belonging among people who share the same interests.

Next question would be, why is the mermaid aesthetic called mermaidcore? The -core suffix is used in aesthetics to enlighten a defining feature. Moreover, in today's online world, almost every style or trend is embodied in the form of a niche aesthetic recognized by its -core suffix. There are other suffixes used as well such as punk suffix and wave suffix. Since the pandemic, the proliferation of aesthetics has exploded. Now everyone can find their niche online. It's almost disturbingly easy to sort yourself into an aesthetic box. I'm going to highlight what are the expected fantasy aesthetics in social media and how does one follow the fashion in them.

Images: Pinterest









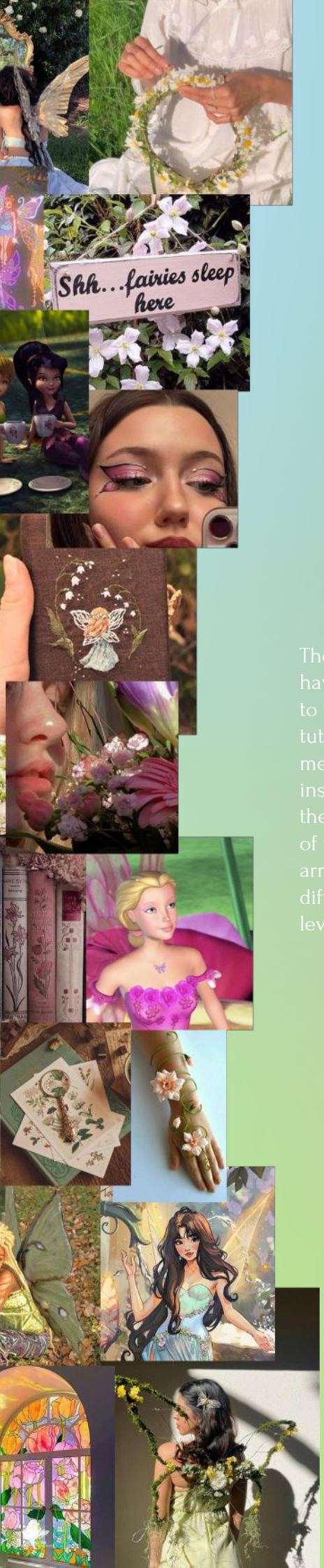





FAIRYCORE

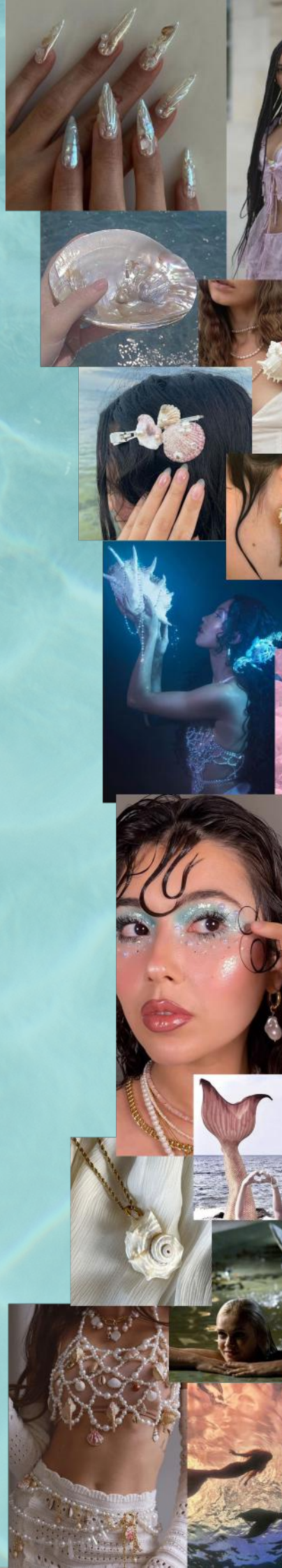
It is a fantasy themed aesthetic that centres predominantly around fairy (alternatively spelled faerie) and elf mythology. Shows like Winx Club and movies like Barbie in Fairytopia, and Tinker Bell/Pixie Hollow were mixed in their views of fairy. They either brought back fairies to the tiny Victorian ideals or embraced Urban Fantasy's view of them as mysterious "Fair Folk" that could walk amongst humanity virtually unseen. Visuals include nature, soft pastels, butterflies, magic, flowers, soft animals like bunnies, and the vibe of springtime. Fairycore usually features feminine visuals and styles. Fairycore fashion is inspired by artistic depictions of fairies, so outfits usually have a Ethereal vibe, with heavy nature inspiration. Fairycore fashion includes Bows and ribbons, Glittery, or glowing makeup, Puffy dresses, DIY Fairy wings, and Jewelry like long gold necklaces.

Image: Unsplash



These Instagram reels and tiktoks have hashtags #fairycore added to them. There are many of these tutorial videos across social media platforms that give an insight on how how to achieve the fashion and/or home decor of the fairycore aesthetic. I have arranged the videos based on difficulty level; easy to advanced level.

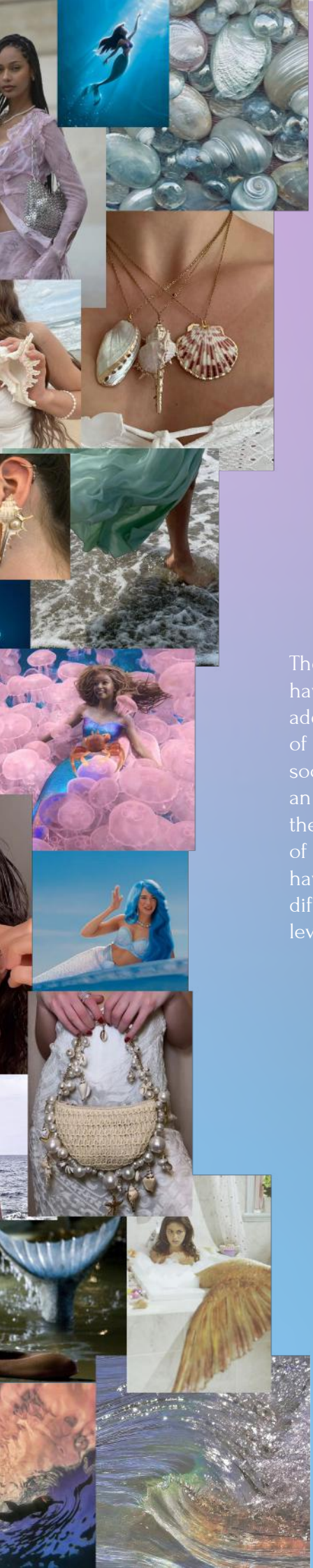
Images: Pinterest



MERMAIDCORE

Once just a niche subculture of style, mermaidcore is all about matching the mythical sea creatures with clothing, makeup, and hair. To get the aesthetic, think of crochets, shiny embellishments, prints, and shimmering fabrics in shades of blue, green, and purple. Coordinate with an aqua-inspired shade of eyeshadow topped with an iridescent glitter that doubles as highlighter. Complete the look with effortless waves or loose curls, and the addition of shell or pearl accessories. Mermaidcore gained prominence thanks to pop culture. The live-action remake of The Little Mermaid starring Halle Bailey and Dua Lipa starring Mermaid Barbie in the 2023 Barbie movie. And the classics such as Aquamarine and H2O: Just Add Water that still resonate with "TikTok teens."

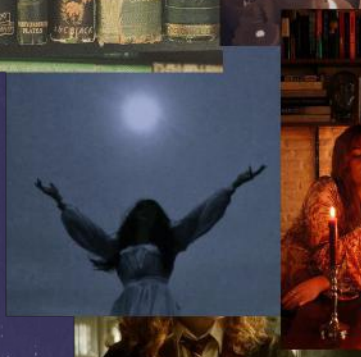
Image: Unsplash



These Instagram reels and tiktoks have hashtags #mermaidcore added to them. There are many of these tutorial videos across social media platforms that give an insight on how how to achieve the fashion and/or home decor of the mermaidcore aesthetic. I have arranged the videos based on difficulty level; easy to advanced level.

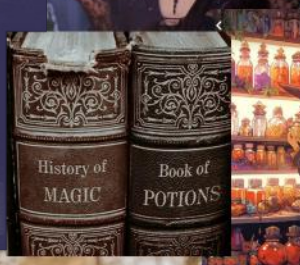
Images: Pinterest

















WITCHCORE

Think Sabrina The Teenage Witch, Wizard of Oz and Harry Potter, we've known about witches and wizards for a while. Witches are still prominent today through crystals, Tarot cards and more. Witchcore is an aesthetic centered around the themes of modern witchcraft. It often involves magic, herbs, and gem collecting. It has some elements of Cottagecore or Naturecore since some of the aesthetic revolves around the outdoor setting. Witchy fashion utilizes a variety of darker hued, natural colors and black. Vintage wear from thrift stores or hand-me-downs are often seen in this aesthetic. It also includes, Vintage white wedding dresses and nightgowns, Cloaks, Maxi dresses and skirts and laced boots.

Image: Unsplash



These Instagram reels and tiktoks have hashtags #witchcore added to them. There are many of these tutorial videos across social media platforms that give an insight on how how to achieve the fashion and/or home decor of the witchcore aesthetic. I have arranged the videos based on difficulty level; easy to advanced level.

Images: Pinterest













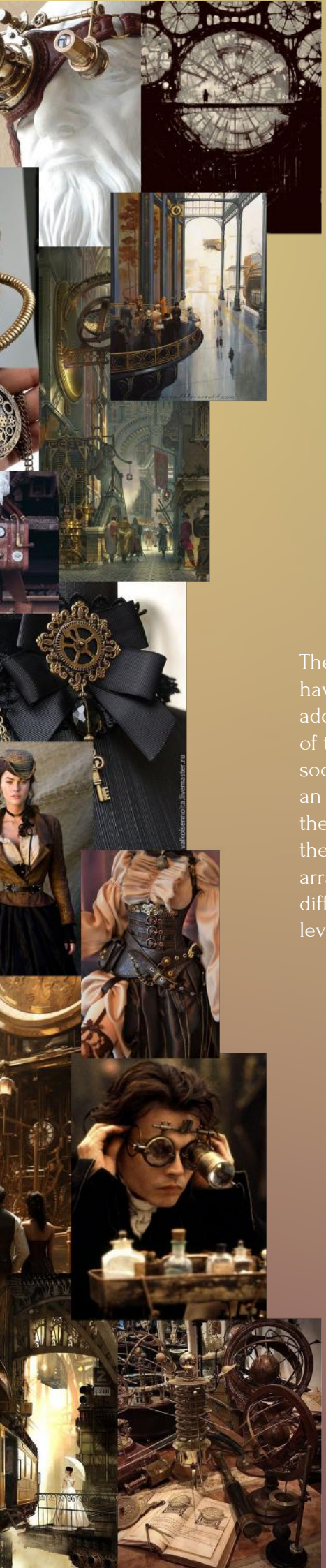


STEAMPUNK

Steampunk has also become an aesthetic that comes from a sub-genre of science fiction of the same name that incorporates technology and designs inspired by 19th-century fashion and industrial machinery (including steam-powered machinery, hence the name). Visuals often include visible gears and screws, analog clocks, and steam-powered machines such as airships that often carry flying wooden ships. Steampunk fashion include Victorian-style clothing, such as suits, waistcoats, top hats and long dresses. Lace, leather and brass are common materials. Accessories such as brass/copper jewelry, pocket watches, and goggles. Jewelery often incorporates gears, cogs, and other mechanical elements that are inspired by the technology of the Victorian era. There may be a resurgence of the steampunk aesthetic with the second season of Arcane coming on Netflix this November. This could result in an innovative perspective towards the aesthetic when done differently instead of staying in the past with gears and clocks.

Having an aesthetic means identifying with an aesthetic in visual and personal expression. It can be through fashion, interior design and/or a preferred media. It is important to note that you don't need an aesthetic. This is an unessential subculture of the Internet, rather than a mandatory skill to have. Also, you can appreciate an aesthetic without incorporating it into your daily life. If you're not actively wearing/doing the activities your desired aesthetic has, you can still participate by making moodboards, participating in discussion, and fantasizing about it.

Image: Unsplash



These Instagram reels and tiktoks have hashtags #steampunk added to them. There are many of these tutorial videos across social media platforms that give an insight on how how to achieve the fashion and/or home decor of the steampunk aesthetic. I have arranged the videos based on difficulty level; easy to advanced level.

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THE WIZARDING WORLD OF Harry Potter

Advertisement image created by Sudiksha Panda, mockup image: Unblast

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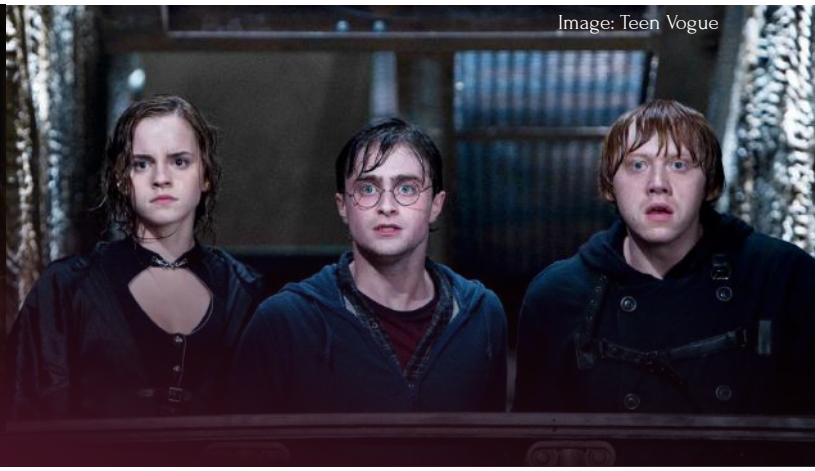
Feature

Deep dives into Prominent Movies and Tv Series in Adapting the Fantasy Subgenres

by Sudiksha Panda

In the feature of the subgenres of fantasy, we learned about the common subgenres and how they came about. There are a lot of fantasy movies and tv shows that have become prominent due to their unique plot, stellar performances, cinematography, and advancement in the industry. Some have become iconic, cult classics, and/or currently popular today. Here are deep dives into some of the most prominent fantasy movies and tv shows. I've chosen three of each that represent their adapted subgenres in an authentic manner. Let's start with the movies. (Spoiler Alert)





Harry Potter Franchise

Stills from Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (left) and Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows Part 2 (right).

Harry Potter is a film series based on the self-titled novels by British author J. K. Rowling. The series is produced and distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures and consists of eight fantasy films, beginning with Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (2001) and ending with Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2 (2011). The novels and films qualify as urban fantasy and low fantasy.



Illustration of the witnessing of The Dark Mark from the book Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire.

The Harry Potter novels are a series of seven fantasy novels which chronicle the lives of a young wizard, Harry Potter, and his friends Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley, all of whom are students at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. At the beginning, all students are sorted to their houses that best suits them. These houses are Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw. The main story arc concerns Harry's conflict with Lord Voldemort, a dark wizard who intends to become immortal, overthrow the wizard governing body known as the Ministry of Magic, and conquer all wizards and Muggles (non-magical people).

A series of many genres, including fantasy, drama, coming-of-age fiction, and elements of mystery, thriller, adventure, horror, and romance, the world of Harry Potter explores numerous themes and includes many cultural meanings and references. Major themes in the series include prejudice, corruption, madness, and death.

J.K. Rowling first had the idea for Harry Potter while delayed on a train travelling from Manchester to London King's Cross in 1990. Over the next five years, she began to plan out the seven books of the series. She wrote mostly in cursive and combined a mountain of notes, many of which were on scraps of paper. Despite the







Stills from Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (left), Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Askaban (middle) and Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows Part 2 (right).





BLADE RUNNER AND BLADE RUNNER 2049

Stills from Blade Runner (left) and Blade Runner 2049 (right).

The timeline of the original Blade Runner and its sequel Blade Runner 2049 has been expanded significantly through a variety of media, including novels, games, comics, and short films. The original Blade Runner is a 1982 sci-fi neo-noir film set in 2019 in a dystopian cyber-punk society. Rick Deckard, a Blade Runner for the LAPD, tasked with hunting rogue replicants, genetically engineered humans designed to tackle tasks that human beings cannot. When four replicants go rogue and begin killing humans, Deckard is forced out of retirement to hunt them down and stop them - but the truth isn't as simple as it seems. Deckard will have to reckon with the philosophical dilemma of what makes someone human.





Stills from Blade Runner 2049.

The inspiration for Ridley Scott's Blade Runner came from Philip K. Dick's groundbreaking novel Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? Despite the film being a loose adaptation of the novel, Scott chose the name of a completely unrelated book as the title for his film. The Bladerunner, also published as The Blade Runner, is a sci-fi novel by Alan E. Nourse that was published in 1974 and was the main inspiration behind the naming of the 1982 movie.



Still from Blade Runner.

Set thirty years after the original film, Blade Runner 2049 is a 2017 sci-fi neo-noir film by Denis Villeneuve. The film follows a new Blade Runner, a Nexus-9 named K, who discovers a devastating secret that could throw society into total chaos. To stop a potential war between replicants and humans, he'll need to locate missing former blade runner Rick Deckard and uncover the truth. K was drawn into a deep mystery after his discovery of a replicant corpse that had apparently died during childbirth. The revelation that any replicant woman could be capable of giving birth was something that had been believed impossible and proof of replicants not being human. This sends K into a spiral, as some of his implanted memories suggested he might be the woman's child.





Still from Walt Disney's Alice in Wonderland, 1951 (left) and original illustration from the book by John Tenniel (right).

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland or commonly Alice in Wonderland widely beloved British children's book by Charles L. Dodgson using the penname Lewis Carroll, published in 1865. With its fantastical tales and riddles, it became one of the most popular works of English-language fiction. It was notably illustrated by British artist John Tenniel. Fantasy subgenres include children's fantasy, and crossworlds fantasy or portal fantasy (characters transporting from a normal world to a magical one).

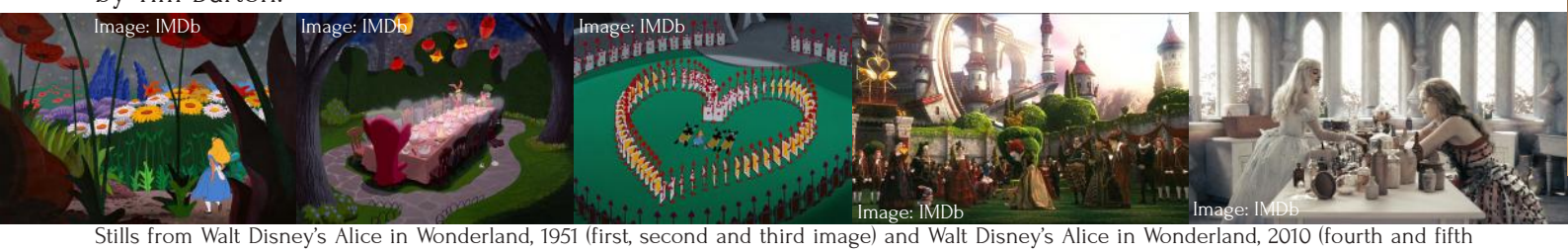


Original illustration of the Cheshire Cat from the book by John Tenniel.

The story centres on Alice, a young girl who falls asleep in a meadow and dreams that she follows the White Rabbit down a rabbit hole. She has many wondrous, often bizarre adventures with thoroughly illogical and very strange creatures, often changing her size unexpectedly. Her encounters include the Cheshire Cat, a strange endless tea party with the Mad Hatter and a game of croquet with the Queen of Hearts who calls for the execution of almost everyone present. Later, Alice is called as a witness in the trial of the Knave of Hearts, accused of having stolen the Queen's tarts. However, when the Queen demands that Alice be beheaded, Alice realizes that the characters are only a pack of cards, and she then awakens from her dream.

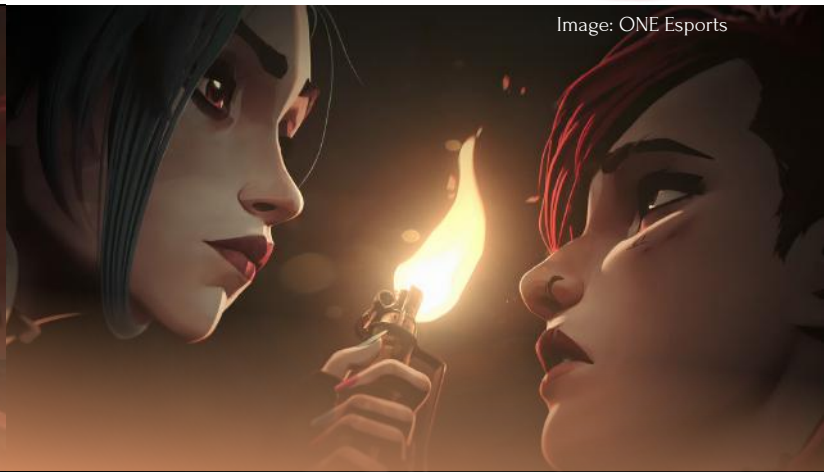
At Oxford, Lewis Carroll befriended Alice Liddell, the daughter of the dean of Christ Church. According to Liddell, Carroll told her and her siblings fantastic stories and fairy tales, including Alice's Adventures Underground (an early oral version of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland). It is often supposed that Liddell herself inspired the character of Alice. The book attracted a following and led to a sequel, Through the Looking-Glass in 1871. Themes include puns, and parodies, mathematics, literary nonsense, rules and games.

The book's most well-known adaptation, the 1951 animated film Alice in Wonderland by Walt Disney Studios. It is based on Lewis Carroll's novel and its sequel. When first premiered in theatres it was considered a disappointment, its 1974 re-release proved to be much more successful. Over the years, the film is regarded as one of Disney's best animated films today. In 2010 and 2016, live action versions of the animated feature and novel were released titled Alice in Wonderland and the sequel Alice Through the Looking Glass directed by Tim Burton.

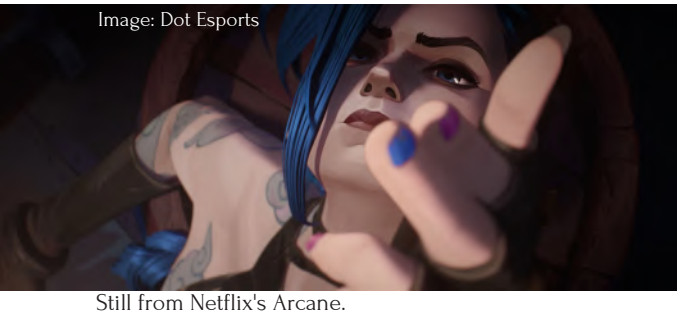


Stills from Walt Disney's Alice in Wonderland, 1951 (first, second and third image) and Walt Disney's Alice in Wonderland, 2010 (fourth and fifth image).





Stills from Netflix's Arcane.



Still from Netflix's Arcane.

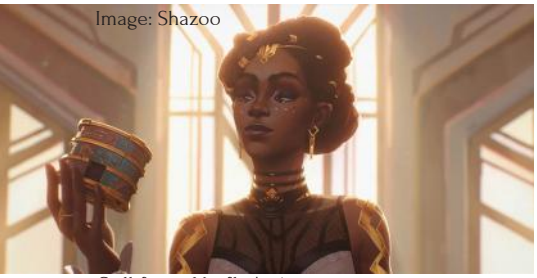
Arcane first released in November 2021 is an animated steampunk action-adventure television series that tells the origin story of two iconic League of Legends champions, Jinx also known as Powder and Vi. They are sisters that find themselves on rival sides of a brewing war between the utopian city Piltover and the oppressed region Zaun. The first season introduced the devotion Vi has when protecting her little sister. This sets up their characters' struggles throughout the series: Vi being the tough defender of her family and Powder striving to prove herself useful to her sister. They are completely transformed by the end of the first season, as Powder becomes the mischievous Jinx and Vi proves she's one fierce champion. They find themselves involved in a developing conflict over clashing beliefs and arcane technologies.

Based on the popular multiplayer online battle arena game League of Legends, the animated series was constructed by co-creators Christian Linke and Alex Yee and was produced by the French animation studio Fortiche in partnership with Riot Games. A good number of League of Legends champions appeared in the first season, some more prominent than others. Along with sisters Powder/Jinx and Vi, you'll also meet Caitlyn, Ekko, Jayce, Singed, Heimerdinger, and Viktor.



Still from Netflix's Arcane.

Arcane recieved widespread acclaim, with praise directed at its animation, story, worldbuilding, action sequences, characters, emotional weight, sound and voice acting. Praised for it's eye-catching visuals, due to it's oil-painting-like style pushed the boundaries of 2D and 3D animation and created the moving art piece, Arcane.



Still from Netflix's Arcane.

Piltover and Zaun are deeply interlinked, literally standing on top of each other, with Piltover built atop the cliffs that Zaun is built in. Despite being so interwoven, the two regions are at odds often due to differences in living conditions and cultures. Piltover is a hub of trade, science, and the brightest minds learn about cutting-edge techniques of hextech science, and how to develop it further. In contrast, Zaun is a much dirtier district and suffering higher rates of poverty and crime. Tragic accidents involving industrial mishaps happen often there.

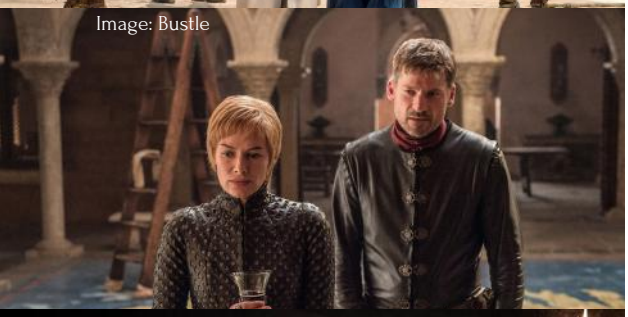




GAME OF THRONES

Stills from Game of Thrones (left) and House of the Dragon (right).







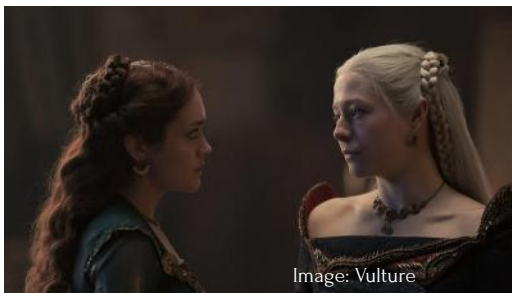
Stills from Game of Thrones.

Game of Thrones is a fantasy drama television series created by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss for HBO. It is an adaptation of A Song of Ice and Fire, a series of low fantasy and medieval fantasy novels by George R. R. Martin, the first of which is A Game of Thrones. The fantasy drama TV series takes place in an imaginary world where several prominent royal families fight for The Iron Throne of the seven kingdoms. The show premiered on April 17, 2011, and concluded on May 19, 2019, with eight seasons broadcasted.

The story unfolds through many alliances and betrayals between the numerous main characters all to win the ultimate prize, the Iron Throne of the Seven Kingdoms. Not only are these royal families fighting each other which includes Targaryen, Lannister, Stark, and many more. They're also battling mystical creatures like the White Walkers led by the Night King. But not all creatures are against humans, some are even be tamed by them, like the dragons. It includes a rotating set of individual point of views, the success or survival of any one of which is never assured.

The novels are set on the fictional continents of Westeros and Essos. Martin's stated inspirations for the series include the Wars of the Roses and The Accursed Kings, a series of French historical novels by Maurice Druon. There are three intertwined plots: a dynastic war among several families for control of Westeros; the growing threat posed by the powerful supernatural beings from the northernmost region of Westeros; and the ambition of Daenerys Targaryen, daughter of the overthrown Westeros king to return from her exile in Essos and assume the Iron Throne.

The prequel to Game of Thrones, House of the Dragon is a fantasy drama television series which premiered on August 21, 2022. Based on Martin's 2018 book Fire & Blood, the series begins nearly 200 years before the events of Game of Thrones, and 172 years before the birth of Daenerys Targaryen. The show portrays the events leading up to the beginning of the decline of House Targaryen, a devastating war of succession known as the "Dance of the Dragons".



Still from House of the Dragon.





Hazbin Hotel

Stills from Hazbin Hotel (2024)



Stills from Hazbin Hotel (2024)

Hazbin Hotel is an American animated musical comedy television series created by Vivienne "VivziePop" Medrano. The series revolves around Charlie Morningstar, princess of Hell, on her quest for sinners to be rehabilitated and allowed into Heaven, with the help her Hazbin Hotel, as an alternative to Heaven's annual extermination of souls due to Hell's overpopulation. The first season premiered on Amazon Prime Video on January 18, 2024 and as of January 2024, Hazbin Hotel was the largest global debut for a new animated series on Prime Video. The show contains the subgenre of dark fantasy and grimdark fantasy (characters in grimdark stories are frequently flawed, and the settings are often depicted as harsh and unforgiving).

Medrano began fantasizing about Hazbin Hotel in middle school when she started drawing illustrations for the characters and their world. She started thinking more seriously about bringing the world of Hazbin Hotel to life during college at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. The success of shows like Bojack and Rick and Morty showed Medrano there was an audience for complex animated stories with characters that evolve and aren't always funny.

The YouTube pilot which was released on October 28, 2019 was self-financed with contributions from Medrano's Patreon subscribers, who helped support her and the project with monthly donations during the episode's more than two-year development process. In February 2024, the pilot episode surpassed 100 million views on YouTube. The show's first season takes the familiar tone and spirit of the original YouTube pilot and expands it to the scale of a prime-time animated series.



Still from Hazbin Hotel Pilot (2019)

Hazbin Hotel has covered a long road from Medrano's sketches and original YouTube video to the hit pilot and now the newly premiered series. It showcases how powerful independent animators can be by making their own work and choosing when to work with studios and when to do it yourself. The series is praised for its unique art style, humour, and exploration of moral themes within a supernatural setting.



Advertisement image created by Sudiksha Panda, mockup image: Unblast, image: Unsplash



Image: Nin Wang

Crafting Imaginations: The Enchanted Illustrations of Nin Wang

Explore the Journey of a Digital Illustrator, Creations Where Reality and Imagination Converge

Nin Wang is a concept artist and illustrator with a passion for a wide variety of projects. She is originally from Taiwan, now attending Art Center College of Design for Entertainment Design and currently lives in Los Angeles. Along with concept art and illustration, she's also talented in character design, world building, prop design, 3D artworks and drawing. Also, she loves ice-cream and hamsters. In this interview, Nin talks about how she started out as an artist, her inspirations, process, and future plans.

1. Could you explain your journey of being a digital illustrator, motion graphic and 3D artist and how did you begin?

I've been interested in drawing since I was a kid, and I never have a chance to learn traditional art in formal teaching. At that time computer just started to become more common, and I got to try out drawing digitally for the first time when I was in middle school. I started out with Photoshop and started learning through tutorial, online courses and practising regularly. Since then, I just kept going! Later on, I started to learn motion graphics using After effects and 3d modelling with Cinema 4D. Like with digital illustration, I spend a lot of time practicing and experimenting with these tools to improve my abilities. I've learned a lot in my journey of being an artist and I look forward to learning new art styles and skills in the future.

2. Do you have any digital illustrators and motion graphic artists in mind that have inspired you through your journey?

Yes! I'm a huge fan of Jaedoo Lee, Jonathan Djob Nkondo, and Airi Pan. Jaedoo Lee is a freelance illustrator and animator living in New York City. His work utilizes lots of bold colors and shapes and is influenced by many comic book and animation artists. Jonathan Djob Nkondo is an animator, illustrator and concept artist who creates art with simpler shapes and fewer colours, often inspired by manga and anime. Airi Pan is a freelance illustrator and concept designer whose skills include concept design, illustration, and visual development.

3. Could you explain your process when working on your projects?

I've been interested in drawing since I was a kid, and I never have a chance to learn traditional art in formal teaching. At that time computer just started to become more common, and I got to try out drawing digitally for the first time when I was in middle school. I started out with Photoshop and started learning through tutorial, online courses and practising regularly. Since then, I just kept going! Later on, I started to learn motion graphics using After effects and 3d modelling with Cinema 4D. Like with digital illustration, I spend a lot of time practicing and experimenting with these tools to improve my abilities. I've learned a lot in my journey of being an artist and I look forward to learning new art styles and skills in the future.

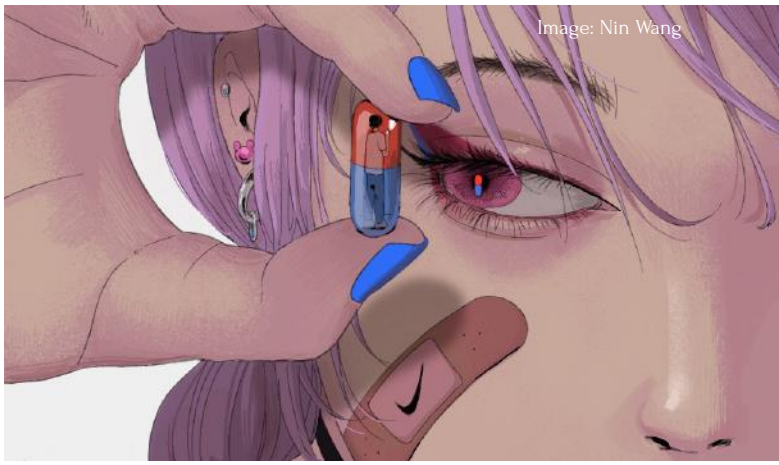

Image: Nin Wang

Illustration by Nin Wang.



Illustration by Nin Wang.

4. What are your go-to softwares and tools that you use for your projects? And do you prefer to illustrate digitally or traditionally?

For digital illustration and other types of work, Photoshop is my best friend! For more casual painting, I use procreate too. For motion graphics and 3d, my go-to are After Effects and Cinema 4D. I prefer illustrating digitally since I have more familiarity and experience with it but I do want to try out traditional painting in the future. Although I'm not that familiar with traditional painting, I do want to learn more about gouache and do some plein air in the future.

5. Where do you take inspiration from when working on your projects?

I love taking inspiration from everything! Both digital or fine art, sometimes from fashion or furniture design. Nature gives me endless inspiration, seeing the beauty and diversity in it. Also pop culture, my imaginations, other artists, and my Taiwanese culture. Ultimately, inspiration comes from anywhere and everywhere, I keep an open mind, staying curious, and embracing the beauty and wonder of the world around us.

6. What are your favourite fantasy themes or subgenres you like to use in your works?

I always love something with a little imagination involved. Anything that's whimsical, I love it. I also like science fiction, medieval fantasy and high fantasy as well, where I like the elements of world building, enchantments and mythical creatures. I like fairytales too and I guess from that comes my love for whimsical things. I like how fantasy is built on imaginative ideas that are so creative and engaging.

7. Is fantasy one of your favourite film genres?

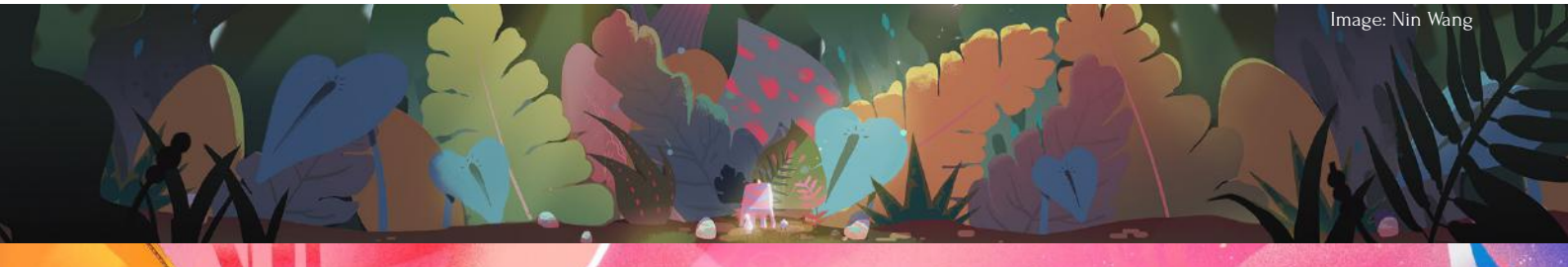
Not really! I like fantasy, but I'm more drawn to a slice of life kind of films. I have some favourite fantasy films for sure for example science fiction films and Disney films but I don't consider the genre as my favourite. Slice of life is my favourite genre because of the focus on everyday experiences of ordinary people so the relatability, the calm and comforting feelings, the cultural insight I get from the various films in the genre and how it highlights the positive aspects of everyday life and the optimism. I like other genres as well like comedy and adventure films.

8. What are some of your favourite fantasy movies and why?

For animation, I'm a big fan of Zootopia and How to Train Your Dragon. Specifically, these two because Zootopia shows the depiction of social issues, the compelling characters and the humour in the film. How to Train Your Dragon because the emotional depth between characters and the story is so heartwarming. For live action, I like Dune which is more like science fiction. I like studio Ghibli films cause while they do have fantasy they still touch on relatable topics, especially Spirited Away and My Neighbour Totoro.



Illustration by Nin Wang.





Illustrations by Nin Wang.



Image: Nin Wang

Concept illustration of characters in Island Reja by Nin Wang.

9. On your recent work Island Reja, could you explain the inspiration and process behind the creation of the characters?

I want to create a bunch of characters with magic power that live on the isolated island. Instead of making weapons or armours, I want them to look more like a normal character that live their day-to-day life, and how magic will help them when they're working! That's why I have traveller, surgeon, blacksmith, a shop owner and an old guardian. The island is a peaceful place but the boy traveller wants to know what lies outside the island.

10. What are your future plans as a digital illustrator, motion graphic and 3D artist?

I would love to work with brands and do some collaborations with other artists, and also make more personal art and one day have my own gallery show. Perhaps work on future projects than include VR and AR. I'm also planning on experimenting with AI but entirely with it, maybe a fusion of my work and AI to see how it goes and whether I can find it to be useful in my projects. I'm going to continue to push my boundaries of creativity and expression and see what comes next in my journey as an artist.



Image: Nin Wang

Concept illustration of The Boy: Tippa in Island Reja by Nin Wang.



Image: Nin Wang



Image: Nin Wang



Image: Nin Wang



Image: Nin Wang

Concept illustrations of The Surgeon; Anja, The Guardian: Roo, The Blacksmith: Tully and The Owner: Bathany in Island Reja by Nin Wang. (Top to Bottom)

Realm Weaving: Unveiling the Mystical Artistry of Elia Pellegrini

Step into the Surreal Universe Crafted by Elia Pellegrini, Where His Dreams Take Shape


Image: Elia Pellegrini

Elia Pellegrini is an Italian digital artist whose perception of the world is shaped by the interplay of time, light, and sound. His creative endeavours are deeply rooted in ancient times and dreams. As an Italian artist and musician, he also specializes in visual arts such as drawing, painting, and digital art. He is the creative director and 3d Artist at NORUWEI. And he also works as a Freelancer CGI & VFX Artist. His artworks also include surrealism about time, light, and music, deeply inspired by epic and ancient concepts from night dreams. In this interview, Elia briefs on how he started, his experience and workflow as an artist, how does he come up with such surreal works, his future plans as an artist and much more.

1. Could you explain your journey of being a 3d and concept artist and how did you begin?

It's still going on because without any endless point, I started when I was a child basically and I thank both of my parents because they're both artists especially my father because he was a painter so basically it all started when I was five years old and now I'm 25 years old. And I started with hand drawing and oil paintings, so with physical art. From that I wanted to try new techniques when I was almost 12 years old, so I started using 3D Studio Max with my first laptop. It was pretty interesting because I didn't know anything about computer graphics, etc. and at the time the graphic was pretty not so good and stuff. But since that time, I tried new things a lot, every day, for years. After a few years, I started studying astronomy but I left studying for work. My first serious job as an artist was as a 3D generalist in a photography studio in Milan. I worked first line with a lot of clients like in advertising with Aperol and stuff because I'm Italian. But I realised I wanted to do more interesting things and just for advertising which are annoying in some ways. I started trying to make my own art and keeping on experimenting. The interesting thing is my knowledge about hand painting and hand drawing because if you know how light and perspective works, you're at an advantage working with 3D graphics. You already know then how to work with lighting in a 3D space and lighting is one of the most interesting things to work with and the emotions lighting can give. So, when I was 20, I started working with another agency called Star Engineering in Maranello, Italy for supercars like Ferrari it was a pretty new style of work because I started working for super technical things but at the same time, interesting way making lighting, environments and concept art. Same thing with that experience, that's not what I wanted to do in my life. I knew a guy who's from Italy but works in LA so in 2019, I started working with him as an a 3D artist, CGI artist and VFX supervisor Yhellow, an agency in Los Angeles. And for 2 and a half years, I worked with a lot of music videos and live concerts so it was a really step in my personal performance. Mostly because all the stuff most of the time was super creative, the music videos super stressful, I'm living in Italy and he's in LA so the time



Concept 3D artworks of Atlantis of Time (left) and Receiver of Great Light (right) by Elia Pellegrini.

could be normal to crazy creative so from that I started to make crazy things. I had some interesting clients like Billie Eilish, Santana and so on. But at the same time it was super stressful, I'm living in Italy and he's in LA so the time is really irrelative and I used to work at nighttime mostly because it's daytime in LA. And works with more budget there was more stress so that situation was too heavy, and the working style shifted in many ways so I decided to cut the relationship and luckily I met another guy from Rome and he's got an agency called NORUWEI Studio and I'm now working there for almost 3 years as CGI artist, digital artist and coordinator of digital arts. With the growth of AI every day, it's dangerous but at the same time interesting because it pushes us to reach higher of quality with our work and also to increase our levels of creativity because as you know my works contain surrealism and fantasy, having ancient and futuristic so we're trying to implement this vision in our works.

2. Do you have any 3d artists in mind that have inspired you through your journey?

Yea, a lot. One of the most important things I think is to look at all artist not only the artists from your style but also from music, and even science because scientists can be artists in their own way. In visual arts, Paul Chadeisson is one of my inspirations because he creates world out of time with these super huge structures, epic structures and sometimes it's super science fiction so spaceships and satellites, stuff like that. But I like more ancient temples and super futuristic like in Dune by Denis Villeneuve. By the way he worked as the concept artist for Dune, his style is really unique. Also, Pablo Dominguez who's a concept artist who's worked in a lot of movies nowadays like the new The Lord of the Rings series and Obi-Wan Kenobi, his style is similar to my concept of art. I like mythology, lost in time, creatures, and architecture, I really like architecture as you may have seen in my works so these two artists in particular. Photography and movies have influenced me a lot. I also mentioned Dune so Denis Villeneuve's movies from Dune, Sicario to Arrival, all those movies were bombs for me because the vision, the lights, also the music were super insane. Denis Villeneuve is one of the most important names because he' a director but his visions are really unbelievable. I think he's innovating the film industry. In music, there's Thylacine and WoodKid who make regatino music.



Concept 3D artwork of Valle dei Primordi by Elia Pellegrini.





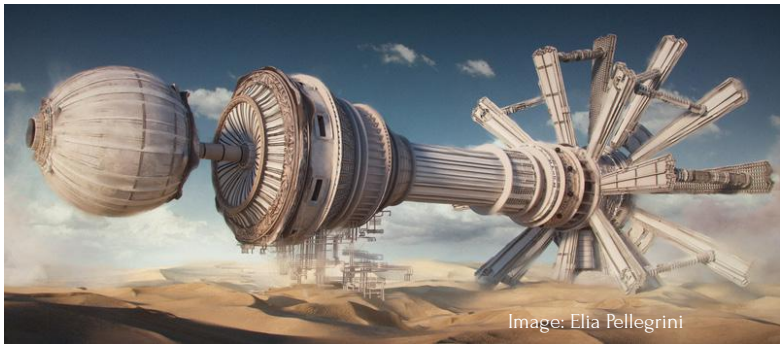
Concept 3D artworks of The Beginning of Long Melodies (left) and Wheel of Life (right) by Elia Pellegrini.

3. Could you explain your process when working on your projects?

So, depending on the work, suppose CGI, I usually start with a pencil sketch and most of the time the ideas come like flashes in my mind while listening to music, eyes closed, and while sleeping. Random images are flowing in my mind at uncontrollable speed which images and ideas, psychedelic stuff, I don't know why but it's really interesting. Sometimes it's pretty other time it can get really annoying because it's too much so I need to open my eyes. It's pretty strange but I've had this ability from a young age. So with the sketches, I'm clarifying and materializing the idea and from that I translate it to digital art. For example, for creatures I did 5 first surreal creatures, materialising them with concepts of space, time and ancient themes. Then I use Zbrush for sculpting everything in detail, substance painter for texturing by hand and even substance designer for some specific surfaces. Also Cinema 4D, this is the base for all my works where I put everything together with octane render. Then photoshop for postproduction. Recently I'm using a lot of Unreal Engine and it's beautiful because it speeds up render time as you can imagine and it's great.

4. Do you prefer to illustrate traditionally or digitally?

Traditional art has more impact because it's physical art, you can feel it, the texture, and the kind of feeling they give isn't better or worse but different. The beautiful thing about traditional art iis that you create it with your hands, it's more manual and a deeper process. It's not reversable with just pressing ctrl+z, you need to be skilful to fix it. For example, I use oil painting and the whole process, from preparing the canvas, the oil and everything it's a journey. Every painting is time consuming especially oil painting you need to wait for the canvas to dry. Digital art



Concept 3D artwork of The Way of Wind by Elia Pellegrini.



Concept 3D artwork of Ancient Travel to the Future by Elia Pellegrini.



Concept 3D artwork of Dualism's Guide by Elia Pellegrini.

is different because now everyone can create crazy things by just looking at tutorials and now with AI everything has exploded. So, if you want to create art, you need to study, and gain experience. Digital art can be super personal as well because it can represent the vision of the artist for example I create a lot of sketches from my experience in traditional art. For other artists it's different according to their visions. Traditional art is more essential as you feel more creating the art with your own hands instead of just looking at a monitor, it another experience but you have something more with older techniques. That's my message everytime to experiment, to try new things and get out of your comfort zone because now the world is going in the direction of comfort, careless and simple, but everything is complex and life is complex. So if you're comfortable to get out of your comfort zone, your mind can evolve and improving your art and visual style.

5. Where do you take inspiration from when working on your projects?

Everyday I search for inspiration, and most of the time it's randomly. they come from movies, Behance, Instagram which is a tool like everything else so it can be dangerous but if you use it in a good way you can find a lot of artists to inspire from and music. It's one my most important form of inspiration, because I really like it and I listen to a lot of music everyday for my whole life. I also play and create music so it's all connected. So if I have an inspiration for a soundtrack and then from that I'll get more inspiration for visual art. In movies, but recently I'm getting tired of modernity. Now I'm living in Rome and the feeling of living here is a mix of love and hate. Rome huge and beautiful, every corner we're emerged with ancient art everywhere from the colosseum to ancient temples, museums and exhibitions. But it's super chaotic and now living in a world that's so overcrowded and even the pollution, it's compressing my mind. So recently I'm finding inspiration in nature so I really like to go to the woods with friends, climbing rocks and just immerse myself in nature and lots of information comes from that moment.

6. What are your favourite fantasy themes or subgenres you like to use in your works?

I really like to use science fiction is a lot of my works. In my last project, The Ascent which was interesting but challenging and working with the team for this project, working with Unreal Engine was necessary and the I'm new to the software. The final result was insane, I didn't expect something like that and a lot of artists were in team who also worked on it. It's related to science fiction with an arena, high skies, huge statues with resemble with my style.

7. Is fantasy one of your favourite film genres? And what are some of your favourite fantasy movies and why?

It depends because fantasy can be everything maybe too obvious but my taste in movies isn't fully fantasy, fully science fiction nor fully drama, it's a mixture. Dune is what I think a movie could be for me that has everything, not just the mystery, the fantasy and science fiction depiction but a mix of them all. I've also read the books, the first and second. I need to read the third one, The Children of Dune. Also, Arrival which seems to have fantasy themes because of the ancient cosmic powers works for humanity, and the science fiction feeling from flying objects in the sky so basically, I like those themes. But super fantasy movies like dragon stuff, and wizards, for example The Lord of the





Concept 3D artwork of Eye of Adocentyn (top) and Relative Heavy (bottom) by Elia Pellegrini.

Rings, I like it but it's too fantasy and too categorised but I really like surrealism and creativity so like again The Lord of the rings and many more fantasy and science fiction movies. But there are movies with no fantasy and science that are great. One of my most favourite film, I Origins, a love story between a scientist that wants to study the evolution of eyes and his assistant. It's spiritual with discussion of religion and science and it could be science fiction in some ways.

8. On your recent work The Ascent, could you explain the inspiration and process behind the creation of the cinematic?

First thing was the great connection between the client because when they're super clear with you and responsive, it's everything because most of the time clients answers you after 1 week and they don't know exactly what they want. So, you need to keep going on this way and it's pretty complex. But in this case, everyone was super-fast and immersed in the project. For inspiration they sent me as a reference one of my works and other inspirations, so the starting point comes from the client because they had a clear idea of what they want, and they put everything together. At the beginning I started working with Cinema 4D but then realised it's too slow to render because it's full of snow and few lights with dark atmosphere, so we switched to Unreal Engine. Inspirations also came during the working of the project for example a part of the bridge when the character walks and climbs, everything was straight on without problems except for the switching from Cinema 4D to Unreal Engine but after that everything was pretty fast. I modelled and textured the bridge then worked on the world round it like the mountains, the hdri with the cosmic stuff with the clouds. We did a lot of research because we wanted to reach the highest levels of quality, so the inspiration was different and then after a lot of tests we found the best solutions. I'm not an expert on creating human models so I went to someone who is, the skin texture and even with the texture on teeth was insane.



Concept 3D artwork of Pansiero by Elia Pellegrini.







Stills of The Ascent cinematic by Bluereel Studio team including Elia Pellegrini.

9. Seeing how you use your dreams to create these stunning artworks, could you explain about your Kairos artworks, and do you have future plans on it?

Kairos is a really huge part of my production because for two years I've created a lot of things on Kairos and I'm still creating the vision of Kairos. The interesting thing about this project is the style is what I really like and is my signature because it's like a mix between ancient and futuristic with mythology. I have plans for it are interesting because I'm preparing a book right now, not a novel but maybe essays or preparation for what will be a novel that is the mythology of Kairos. I've also created the trailer and a lot of illustrations that come from 5 different projects like from nothing to the first organisation of this world of Kairos. It's got it's own mythology so I had the first part but I'm making it more complex and more readable so I have a lot of idea. The next step would be a book connecting all the illustrations so like an illustrated book but it's complex because of the process. Now I have another book published regarding the times and the concept of time but there's a lot of complexity in making books because again with artificial intelligence everything is complex but this is the plan. One of my dreams is to create beautiful artbooks with opaque cover and good quality illustrations inside with the story. Kairos come from a Greek word that means the right moment, the special moment. The reason I use this word is really important for me because it means the connection point of everything, the right moment. Even because in the Kairos mythology, Kairos is the name of the world created by one of the sound of time like ancestral time and the courage and will to















Concept 3D artworks of the creatures, Atbasiryiion - Spirit of the Great Windy Light, Breath of Awareness the Space, Neo Kleos - Dimension of Creative Repetition, and The Golden Firmness - The Queen (Top; left to right), The Safe Keeper, Torre, and Violent Cunning (Bottom; left to right) by Elia Pellegrini.

use one specific moment, it's like carpe diem. I also have more complex ideas for the project, I wanted to create not a game but a visual journey into the Kairos world but its pretty complex because translating everything into first person view where you can interact and walk around this world, it's complex and needs time. Even a full CGI short film maybe, why not, because the future of Kairos is the creation of the living creatures in the world but again it's complex so for now working on the book is the nearest objective.

10. You've created a lot of creatures as well, could you explain your inspiration and process when making them with examples of your creatures?

The first serious project of the creature was The Dust of Time, the one with the chess pieces and that one was like a challenge for myself why not, let's create some creature with a great work flow and complexity. From there the idea of Kairos started, to create a collection of visions so from the creatures especially the Pleonastic Dimensions a creature with all the diffusion reaction texture around the body and shapes. I really remember the moment I had the visions; I was in my house listening to music with closed eyes and seeing what my brain launches to my eyes. I remember seeing textures and shapes super clearly and then thought woah I like it I need to create something with this, so I started making sketches that the serious came from that moment and it's beautiful. Other times there was more research, for example The Dust of Time, I wanted to express with materialised characters with importance of great and bad things about humanity in a concreate way. Like the lowest form of humanity to the king, queen that represents the aspects of humanity with bad and good at the same time but with other creatures like the creature of ages from ancient Egypt and Rome I wanted to create creatures that represent being valuable and the human mind. Again, we have good and bad characters like the Egyptian one was the keeper of sacred knowledge and the Roman one was the symbol of cruelty and violence. The next one was to create essence of destruction using space and time and one of the last ones were the one with materialised stones in a poetic way. My favourite is the green one that comes from nature in a way. The good thing about living near nature is that you can hear sound you can't hear in cities. Like the wind, its beautiful and for me it's essential. For example, last week I went to Perugia for a personal trip and I randomly went to a church but seems like a temple. It's circular in structure and different from the standard architecture here in Italy. I remember there was a lot of wind and inside the church it was silence and the wind and that was everything for me, it was beautiful. At that specific moment of life, it was like there were bombs in my brain full of ideas. And of that similar moment comes here and the result was the one of the series of Kairos. So, the inspirations for the creatures was from ideas, studies, I read a lot of books so I really like to know, to research and I really like the symbolism. I read a lot of books on the symbolism of everything basically. A lot of ancient history, and mythology so lots of inspiration comes from those books. For example the series of the Egyptian comes from my studies of the ancient civilisations so this is the work around the creatures.

Film Review - The Boy and the Heron

by Sudiksha Panda

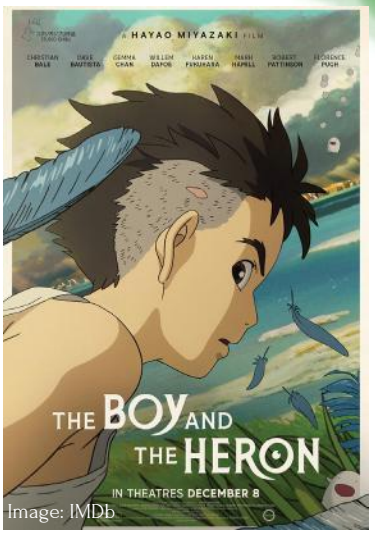


Image: IMDb

Poster of The Boy and the Heron, 2023.

The Boy and the Heron is the latest Studio Ghibli film, and Hayao Miyazaki's first release in a decade. His previous films include Spirited Away My Neighbor Totoro and Howl's Moving Castle. The film won the category for best animated feature in this year's Academy Awards, making this the second win for Miyazaki for the same category since he won for Spirited Away. It's been long rumoured that this would be Miyazaki's last film. But it appears to be untrue, and according to Studio Ghibli vice-president Junichi Nishioka, while Miyazaki will no longer be working on animation, he does plan to continue writing and coming up with new ideas.

The film is centres around Mahito Maki, a young boy Mahito who encounters a talking heron that takes him to another world with the promise of getting his deceased mother back, and what follows is a fantastical journey of coping with loss and figuring out the right way to live one's life. Mahito encounters magical creatures and talking animals in a surreal world similar to Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland.

The film much like Miyazaki's previous works, is very much an emotional drama, and the script appropriately does a great job of adding humanity to its incredible cast. Mahito and Himi get the most impact, with the film going to great lengths to explore their various traumas and how they react to them. The more comedic characters are also great additions to the film like the Grey Heron that serves as a great comedic frustration to Mahito, and the parakeets provide lots of cheerfulness. On the contrary, the noble pelican, with little screen time, does a great job of emphasizing the cruelty of the world Mahito finds himself in, and Mahito's granduncle was excellent at emphasizing the grand scale of everything beyond mundane problems.


Image: IMDb

Still from The Boy and the Heron, 2023.

The film centres around themes of loss, grief, death, and afterlife through the eyes of Mahito, a boy who finds maturity and acceptance after traveling to the fantastical world. The muted colour palette at the beginning of the movie matches and reflects Mahito's inner repressed feelings. The film balances the darkness of change and war subtly with the muted colour palette, contrasting with the vibrant colours of the fantastical world Mahito travels through after following a talking heron disguised as a ridiculous looking man. This world is filled with vibrant creatures and characters. While the story is great as expected from Miyazaki, but it's not without its faults. For starters, much of the supporting cast like Kiriko, Natsuko, and Mahito's father lack any sort of significant development so it's hard to get attached to them. Also, the pacing of the second half feels hastened, which causes the nature of the other world, Mahito's acceptance of Natsuko, and the high concept nature of Mahito's granduncle's godhood, to end up underdeveloped and complex. The film still manages to bring everything together in an organised manner, but these points unfortunately end up being the film's weak points.

But everything from start to finish is engaging, as Miyazaki explores his usual avenues of war and humanity, and the exploration of those ideas through Mahito's character arc makes for truly riveting drama. The film also takes care to balance things out with plenty of comedic and quiet moments that never overstay their welcome, all of which result in a story that's nearly perfect with its execution. If the speculation that The Boy and the Heron being Hayao Miyazaki's final film were true, then it would have been an amazing film to end his career on. The film wasn't without its faults, mostly regarding its story, but with its amazing direction, characters, and universal themes more than make up for it and create a film that stands out as one of Studio Ghibli's best. This is a film any fan of Hayao Miyazaki would be remiss to skip, and seeing how he tops something like it with his next project will truly be a sight to behold.


Image: IMDb

Still from The Boy and the Heron, 2023.

Advertisement image created by Sudiksha Panda, mockup image: Unblast, image: Unsplash

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

LIMITED EDITION



ENCHANTÉ

Scented Candles

Dubai Miracle Garden

by Sudiksha Panda, photographed by Sudiksha Panda

A floral wonderland of 50 million flowers, the Dubai Miracle Garden is one of the UAE's most original attractions. Known as the world's largest natural flower garden, it flaunts hundreds of flower-formed displays spread over 18 acres, all of which create an extravaganza of colour and scent on the outskirts of Dubai. Some of the most common flowers are sunflowers, marigolds, petunias, and geraniums. This exhibition includes heart-shaped passageways, umbrella tunnels, a Smurfs village, and castles and houses decorated with vibrant flowers.

As this beautiful piece of land is in Dubai that is not ideally suitable for growing flowers, it requires a great deal of maintenance. This floral beauty is maintained by a team of well-trained and experienced horticulturists.



The logo of Dubai Miracle Garden is seen at the entrance of the garden.



When leaving the entrance passageway, these green horses are first spotted.



A boat fountain and water mill on a pond surrounded by flowers.



One of the many colourful umbrella tunnels in the garden venue.



Peacock statues on the sides of the tree tunnel with flowers and leaves as their tails.



A castle decorated with many colourful flowers.



A floral clock with two peacocks on both sides decorated with flowers.



One of the many floral villas that can be seen in several parts of the garden.



A castle decorated with moss and many colourful flowers.



A peacock sculpture decorated with flowers is placed beside the castle.



One of the many floral heart-shaped passageways.



The new attraction to the flower garden, the Smurfs Village.



Large character sculptures in the trees of the Smurfs Village.



Displays of Smurfs and their mushroom shaped houses in the village.



Many architectural sculptures adorned with flower plants against the trees.



One of the many leafy heart-shaped passageways.



Many seating areas, food stalls and shops surround the floral garden.



At the exit, visitors can see these car sculptures carrying flowers.

Watch:
Upcoming Fantasy Movies in 2024
by Sudiksha Panda



Image: IMDb

If
Release date: May 17, 2024
A young girl named Bea gains the ability to see people's imaginary friends, referred to as "IFs" for short, who have been abandoned by the kids they helped. Bea then discovers that her neighbour, Cal, has the same ability.

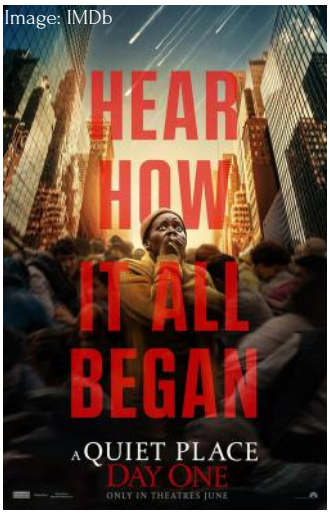


Image: IMDb

A Quiet Place: Day One
Release date: June 28, 2024
Prequel of the first two Quiet Place movies comes the story of a woman starring Lupita Nyong'o who navigates the horrific first moments of the blind, monster-like aliens that hunt down anything making a sound in New York City. She soon joins up with a fellow city resident and together they try to survive living in the loudest city in the world which now must be quiet.

The Wild Robot
Release date: Sept 20, 2024
An epic adventure that follows the journey of a robot ROZZUM unit 7134, "Roz" for short that is shipwrecked on an uninhabited island and must learn to adapt to the harsh surroundings, gradually building relationships with the animals on the island and becoming the adoptive parent of an orphaned baby goose.



Image: IMDb



Image: IMDb

Nosferatu
Release date: Dec 25, 2024
Nosferatu is a gothic tale of obsession between a haunted young woman and the terrifying vampire infatuated with her, causing untold horror in its wake.

Wicked
Release date: Nov 27, 2024
Misunderstood because of her green skin, a young woman named Elphaba forges an unlikely but profound friendship with Glinda, a student with an unflinching desire for popularity. Following an encounter with the Wizard of Oz, their relationship soon reaches a crossroad as their lives begin to take very different paths.

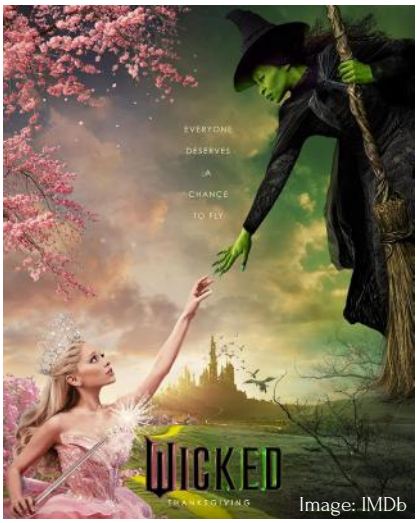


Image: IMDb

Watch:
Upcoming Fantasy TV Series in 2024
Looks like we've got a lot of sequels coming. (Spoiler Alert)

by Sudiksha Panda



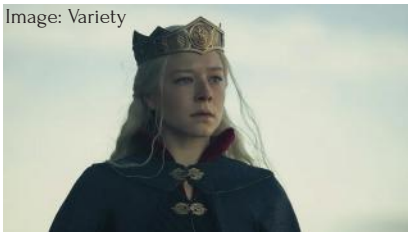
Arcane Season 2
Release date: Nov 2024

The first season of Arcane was a surprise hit when it debuted on Netflix in 2021. Few expected a TV show based on the PvP video game League of Legends to be this dense, exciting, and visually spectacular, but Arcane pulled it off. Season 2 will return us to this steampunk dystopia and continue the story of Vi and Jinx, sisters who find themselves on opposite sides of a conflict in a futuristic, deeply divided city.

The Umbrella Academy Season 4
Release date: August 8, 2024

Season 4 will mark the end of The Umbrella Academy, Netflix's loopy action series about a family of dysfunctional superheroes who find themselves having to stop one apocalypse after another. This season will be shorter than the first three seasons, but at least we'll get to say a proper goodbye to the Hargreeves siblings.





House of the Dragon Season 2
Release date: June 16, 2024

HBO's House of the Dragon is set over 100 years before Game of Thrones, back when the Targaryen dynasty was at the height of its power. The second season of the show will pick up where the first left off: Lucerys Velaryon, the son of Queen Rhaenyra Targaryen, is dead, slain by his own uncle Aemond Targaryen. Queen Rhaenyra wants blood.



Castlevania: Nocturne Season 2
Release date: TBD, 2024

Netflix announced that Castlevania: Nocturne was coming back for a second season in October; in fact, production was already underway. Given that the original series usually released one season per year, we can expect Nocturne will be back sometime in 2024.

Severance Season 2
Release date: TBD, 2024

This mind-bending workplace sci-fi drama gained a lot of fans when it premiered on Apple TV+ in 2022. Ideally, the second season of Severance would already be out, but filming paused with some delays, due to the writers and actors strikes that shut down Hollywood in 2023. Season 2 is expected to come out in 2024.



Read:
Upcoming Fantasy Books in 2024

by Sudiksha Panda

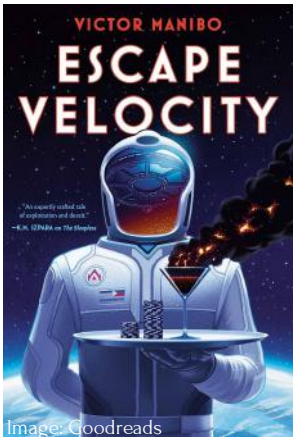


Image: Goodreads

Escape Velocity by Victor Manibo
Expected publication: May 21, 2024

Space Habitat Altaire, a luxury resort in low Earth orbit, is hosting reunions for the Rochford Institute, allowing alumni to compete for power and advance their applications for a Mars settlement. Earth is dying, and only the best deserves to save themselves. While four former friends settle scores with stakes, an unforeseen threat infiltrates in the service corridors, and guests will experience the hospitality they deserve.

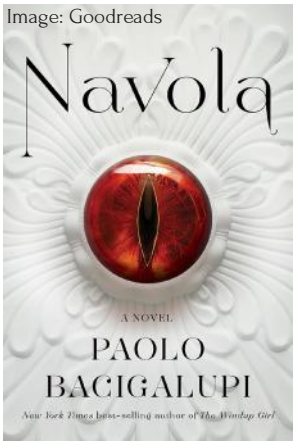


Image: Goodreads

Navola by Paolo Bacigalupi
Expected publication: July 09, 2024

Navola, a city-state dominated by influential families, is a hub of business and power. The di Regulai family, who have led a vast empire for generations, Davico di Regulai will be the next heir soon. However, ancient traces, like the fossilized dragon eye, symbolizing the family's raw power, and talisman that seems to be summoning Davico to act.

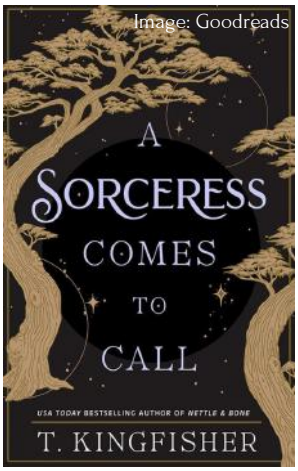


Image: Goodreads

A Sorceress Comes to Call by T. Kingfisher
Expected publication: Aug 6, 2024

Cordelia's mother, a sorceress who controls her daughter. A death in their town causes them to leave at midnight, to the Squire and his sister, Hester's remote manor. The sorceress intends to marry the Squire and Cordelia knows this is terrible for the siblings. Hester sees how Cordelia behaves around her mother. She knows that to save her brother and Cordelia, she will have to face the witch herself.



Image: Goodreads

Heavenly Tyrant by Xiran Jay Zhao
Expected publication: Dec 24, 2024

The sequel to Iron Widow follows Zetian, who gains power in Huaxia after many challenges. But she has also learned revelations about an enemy which forces her to share her power with a dangerous man she cannot avoid, navigating truth and lies to defeat their common enemy, who holds Zetian's loved one hostage.



Image: Goodreads

A Witch's Guide To Magical Innkeeping by Sangu Mandanna
Expected publication: Dec 24, 2024

Sera Swan, once a powerful witch in Britain, lost her magic after resurrecting her great-aunt, befriended a fox, and exiled from her magical society. She now helps her aunt run an inn in Lancashire, dealing with her guest's shenanigans and longing for her lost magical future. She discovers an old spell book with the secret to restoring her power and seeks help from a historian to unlock its mysteries.



Quote of the Year:

It's kind of fun to do the impossible.

-Walt Disney