



# JOHN HOWE

## *fantasy art workshop*

FOREWORD BY TERRY GILLIAM

AFTERWORD BY ALAN LEE

(PREVIOUS PAGE) CELTIC MYTH

◀ SKILL PILLARS ▶

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## FOREWORD BY TERRY GILLIAM

OK ... let's be totally honest.  
This book has depressed me ... really depressed me.  
Let me explain.

I thought I could draw, I thought I could paint, and I believed I had a vivid imagination but, having studied this book for the last few hours I realize I have been fooling myself. I've been living in a fantasy world. Here is the real thing ... a man who draws beautifully, paints like a Leonardo, and is able to imagine worlds that I gave up dreaming about long ago. Not that I wanted to give up dreaming about them but, unable to render them as I saw them in my mind's eye, I shut them out. So you can understand my depression at being reminded of my failings.

Nevertheless, John Howe is the kind of artist the world desperately needs. An ancient pagan returned to live among us. A wizard from the North West. He looks deep into flowers. He knows their inner lives. He understands moss. He knows that stones harbour spirits. He can taste the flavour of a wind. He has felt how deep water can cut. He has seen the sky fall. Yet, with a wave of his brush, he defies gravity and tames the elements. He makes all of this real ... so real that I want to dive in and never come back. I'm a child again – willing to adventure into these worlds. He makes me believe once again, that there are still heroes and great deeds to perform.

With this book he inducts us into the secrets of how he breathes life into his imaginings. He encourages us to develop the skills that will allow us to render our dreams on paper. He's very articulate. Wonderfully open and clear about the way he develops his ideas. He invites us into his studio. Shows us his techniques. Nothing is withheld. Or so he wishes us to believe. But these are clever diversions. The real secret is never revealed.

Unfortunately for him, he has unwittingly left a clue to the truth of his magical skills. Look closely at page 27. And again at page 43. Do you see it? The giveaway clue. No? Look again. Note the way he holds his stylus and pencil. Is it between the thumb and forefinger? Like a normal person? No! Do you know why? I'll tell you. It's clear as day – beyond a shadow of a doubt – that John Howe has made a pact with the devil!!!! Shocking? Yes ... but true! How else could a human being create such sublime art?

Don't let him blind you with moist pages for watery skies or toothbrushes for spattering sea foam. The secret is in the way he holds the brush. I have been trying for some hours now and am slowly getting the hang of it. I've also turned off the lights and have been burning sulphur and chanting incantations to the demonic forces. I think it's beginning to work.

So, look out John Howe. I'm on your tail. I'm giving up directing movies and am going to show the world that I too can paint wonderous worlds of imagination and dreams. And I'm going to beat you, John Howe! You should have cropped those photos more carefully.



**GREEN FACE**  
'Green faces' or 'Green Men' are one of the most fascinating, inscrutable and enduring motifs in medieval art, from Celtic forest spirit to high Gothic flamboyance.

# INTRODUCTION

I wanted to call this book 'How to Draw Like Me It's A Cinch Anybody Can Do It', but the editors seemed strangely reticent. (They said it was too long, so we agreed on a different choice of words.)

It's almost what the book is all about, but not quite. I will ramble on endlessly about how I draw and paint, but it's really all about how to draw like YOU. If you're reading this introduction, and wondering if buying this book would be money well spent, I'll try to save you some time.

If you know how to draw already and you are quite satisfied with the results, then this book is not really for you. If you feel that figurative and narrative imagery is dull, this book is not for you. If you feel that mythology and fantasy have little to say to our modern world, then this book is most definitely not for you. If you are searching for off-the-shelf methods and surefire technical tricks of the trade, then this book is not for you. If you believe pictures should speak for themselves, I'm tempted to tell you to buy it, because there are lots of images in it. However ...

If you find your mind is full of images and that they keep escaping from your fingertips, then this book may be for you. If you are unsure of the direction your artwork wishes to take, but know you should be heading somewhere, then this book may be a signpost of a kind for your journey. If you find pleasure in telling stories in pictures, then this book may help you. If life has obliged you to leave pages of yourself unturned, and you'd feel better with a little company for a chapter or two, then perhaps this book is for you.

I should say right from the start that I dislike most 'How To ...' books, unless they are purely technical, and concern themselves with spark plugs, hot water pipes or computer software. I dislike the temptation to reduce an intuitive and intensely personal process to a series of steps or a recipe. I am dubious about assemblages of rectangles and circles that magically turn into horses, tigers or trees. I moan when I see famous paintings divided into arbitrary circles, triangles and (fool's-) golden means.

Drawing is giving yourself up to an exercise with no immediate application. It is a form of communion with your subject, be it in front of you or in your head. Expertise and skill go hand in hand with your desire to express feelings, to tell stories, to create and share worlds. It's personal.

So I have tried to find the words to say how I feel. With each picture being worth a thousand, that makes quite a few. The editors have had to seriously cut their number, and I'm grateful to them for allowing my thoughts such unruly growth, pruning only when necessary.

## NIGHTMARE CROW

This illustration for *A Clash of Kings* by George R. R. Martin is the stuff of bad dreams: one of the protagonists of the novel is plagued by a three-eyed raven that pecks at his face. I've always loved crows and ravens, but I would not like to encounter this one. Even more disturbing than the bird's extra eye are the feet modelled on human hands. It's a wonder things like this don't give me nightmares.





This book is personal, too. I can only speak for myself, not for illustration. Nor am I trying to speak to some fictitious potential reader. If I could, I would rewrite this book for each one of you, and include a couple of chapters of your work. Of course, this isn't possible, so I beg your indulgence.

Inside, you'll find a first section that talks about how I get along with the muse and find my inspiration (wherever and however I can); the second section is about the materials and techniques I use and how I use them (as best I can). The third part looks at a selection of my work, with step-by-step case studies that give blow-by-blow accounts of the process, and the fourth section deals with presenting your work, with a last bit about the varied fields illustration can lead you to wander in.

The case studies are the book's reality-show slice of life, complete with commissioning editors, deadlines and last-minute deliveries. I confess to having been hard-pressed to present these in a useful manner. The initial colour washes define the atmosphere and tone of most pieces, while the second stage is usually a redefining of the initial sketch and a blocking-in of volumes and forms, but from that point until the final touches, the choices are far more arbitrary. I've tried to include episodes of significance, but making an image is a three-way conversation between the idea, the artist and the emerging work, and it can take unexpected turns. Many pictures go through phases where they are unattractive and laborious, so I've singled these out too, since they may not be pretty, but they are instructive. The very last stage is the adding of light and highlights, the final injection of life into an image before you make the final step – and the first – away from one picture and on to the next.

Finally, to my comrades-in-art and fellow illustrators, I beg your indulgence for this foray into the dreaded land of Explanation and the perilous realm of Reason, momentarily forsaking the foggy shores of Inspiration. I am speaking only for myself, not for my profession. All of you have your own voices. (But buy the book anyway.)



#### THE FORGED HORSE

Back cover illustration for *The Golden Fool*, Book II of *The Tawny Man* by Robin Hobb. This castle is one I know very well and have visited frequently. The ability to go and walk around places like this is perhaps the main thing that keeps me in Europe. (It is certainly more revealing than typing 'castles' into an internet search engine.) On first arriving in France 25 years ago I fell in love with the millennia of history present everywhere, and that sense of wonder and inquisitive interest has never dulled. Occasionally, real places seem to find their vocations in works of fiction with little change. This castle has become a fundamental piece of architecture in the Robin Hobb trilogy. In addition, its collection of furniture provided a significant portion of the furnishings in Bag End for the *Lord of the Rings* movies.

