

# Milk and Cookies with Jesper Ejsing

Doug Beyer  
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The eerie gloom of *Shadowmoor* is now upon us, and I thought it would be an excellent opportunity to resurrect "Milk and Cookies," Matt Cavotta's series of interviews with the artists of **Magic**. The single most important part of conveying the change from eternal-midsummer *Lorwyn* to eternal-dusk *Shadowmoor* was the tone of the art. An artist who started his work with **Magic** during *Lorwyn* has rapidly become one of my all-time favorites, and was critical to illustrating that tonal changeover. He's already working on pieces for the *Shards of Alara* block, and I'm sure will be a mainstay of **Magic** art for many sets to come.

Please help me welcome artist Jesper Ejsing!

**DB: To start off with, tell us a bit about yourself. What's it like being Jesper Ejsing?**

**JE:** I am a Danish Viking—you know, like the bearded guys in the *Ice Age* expansion. The crazy berserkers that conquered England and burned down and plundered the rest of Europe? I am exactly like that, except from the beard, the frenzy part and the fire-starting... and I spend most of the time in the studio in front of my drawing table or a computer. I have very thick glasses and some even thicker ones for seeing the details while I paint. My back hurts when I try to lift things and I breathe heavily from going up the stairs... and I have a face like a fourteen-year-old girl, but apart from that I am all Viking berserker. I even got some live-action roleplaying weapons and armour at the studio... so don't you try nothing.

I live in Copenhagen, Denmark. I have a wife named Lea. She is a book editor and a writer. We have a son named Asbjørn (it means "god of bears" in Danish), and we are getting another son real soon.



We live right in the centre of the city where I have my favourite coffee shop and delicatessen. I really try to be a cosmopolitan snob, but the reality is that I am drawing all the time and my trendy clothes get smudged or painted on. So why bother anyway?

I share a studio with about ten other artists. We are called Pinligt Selskab (translated to: Embarrassing Company). I play roleplaying games once every week with my dear brother as a game master—the same guys and the same system for 15 years. In my so-called spare time I write books. I have written a bunch of them but so far they have only been published in Danish. They are all about fantasy, of course.

**DB: Aha, I see you're a deep fantasy goober, excellent! What inspired you to become an artist? And what led you specifically to become a fantasy artist?**

**JE:** I started out as a kid drawing almost only birds. I had a huge interest in bird watching. So I drew all these rare birds. I won a couple of contests—nothing much, but with prizes none the less. Just a set of binoculars and stuff, but let's face it—if you give a kid prizes he is going to keep on down that road to get more rewards. So I more or less kept on drawing to win some more stuff.

But one Christmas holiday I remember being at friend's house to play a new game he got for Christmas. It was the **D&D** Basic Set. I flipped through the pages and stopped at a female cleric by

Larry Elmore and thought: "This is what I will do for a living." I knew that right away. We started playing and very soon after that I started to do illustrations of my characters to show the other players. Then they asked for me to do portraits of theirs too, and suddenly I was illustrating underground roleplaying magazines, and that was that. I was a fantasy artist.

*Hunter of Eyeblights art by Jesper Ejsing*

What appeals to me about fantasy is that I am able to invite people into a world that does not exist except in my head. But with only paper, paint, and brushes (and let's say a week or so) I can take them there.

...or it might just be that I always had easy access to pencils. My father is an architect, so art supplies and well-meant criticism were always lying around.

**DB: How long have you been working as an artist?**

**JE:** I did my first real illustration jobs in high school and my first book cover when I was 18. But I guess you mean as a professional?

I went to university for four years studying literature and art history, but around that time, I was able to earn a living from my artwork, so I dropped out and skipped the educational dream of my family.

To clarify this insane life-choice, I need to tell you that education is free here in Denmark. Actually the government pays you to go to high school and the university. They pay you so you do not need to take on a job on the side so you may concentrate on your studying. But there is a catch: If you earn too much money on the side, they want the allowance they gave you back. At some point I had to choose between paying the money back or stopping doing illustrations for money. It wasn't much of a choice: Sit all day reading theory books and doing homework or sit all day drawing and painting and playing PlayStation. I went for the PlayStation—I mean the art of course.

That was 12 years ago.

**DB: Let's talk about your artistic influences. Who are your favorite artists, both inside and outside of fantasy art?**

**JE:** My first real heavy money job was doing the colours for a comic book called *Valhalla*, the absolutely best selling comic book in Denmark. It was also the job that got me fully turned to the dark side of illustrations and the job that made me drop out of art history.

I learned so much from colouring comics. And Peter Madsen—the artist of the comic book—taught me so much about how to make a picture clearly readable to the viewer with the help of colours. He is definitely a huge inspiration.

My very favourite artist outside the fantasy genre is P.S. Krøyer. He is a Danish Impressionist. I love him and I hate him. Love him because he had an incredible talent and hate him because no matter what I do, how much I practice and strive to get better, I will never ever be that good. When the thought dawned on me I kind of wanted to quit drawing and start on something else.

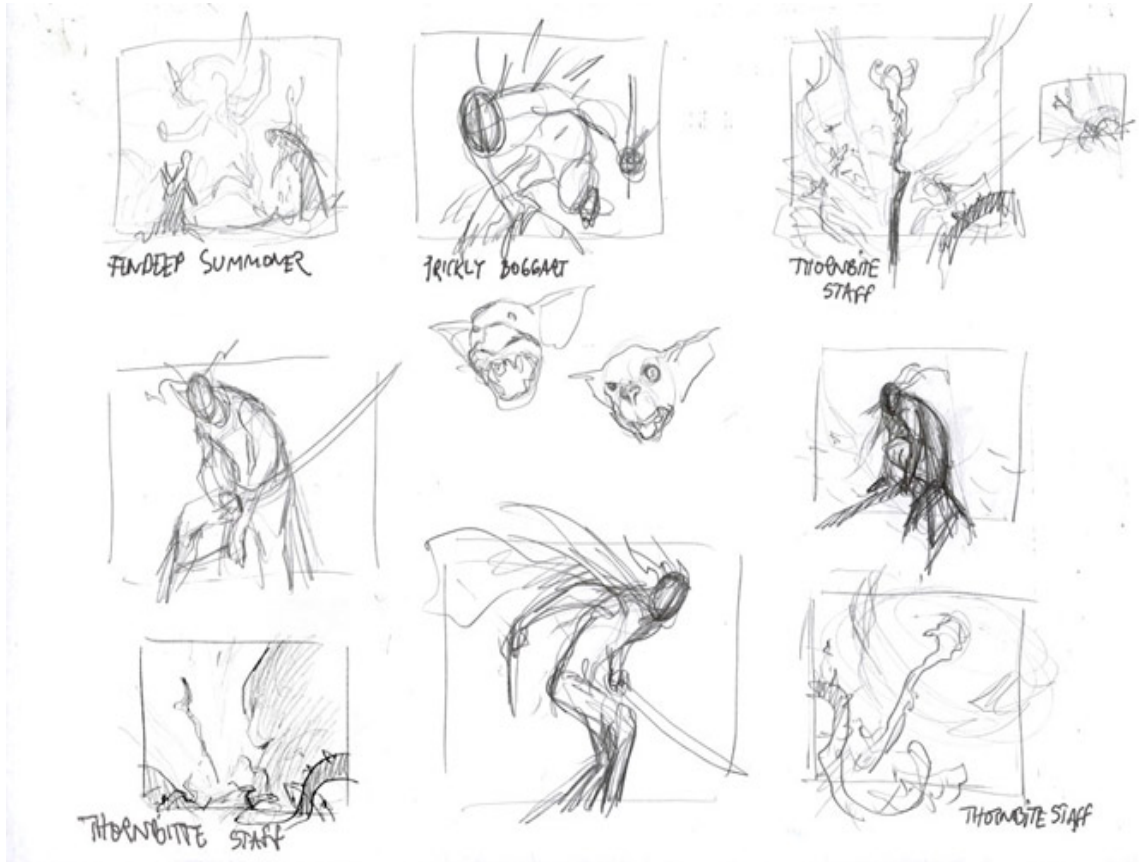
My inspiration in the beginning and the guy that formed my understanding of fantasy has always been Frank Frazetta. Also I have a soft spot for a French artist named Claire Wendling. The power of her sketches and the fantastic end result of her artwork make me feel like a beginner again.

Of course, many of my favourite artists are also **Magic** artists. I really love Jim Murray's stuff. Being an acrylic painter like him I can really appreciate the details of his technique and just as easily spot all the things he does so much better than me. Paul Bonner has had a big influence on me, mostly from sharing his work and thoughts with me.

I have a soft spot for Kev Walker. I always wanted to ask him about his artwork and have already prepared around 68 questions, so if any of you out there has his email or lives close by his studio, please tell me?

**DB: Listen, we all have soft spots for Kev Walker. Maybe you can run a Milk and Cookies with Kev someday. But let's get back to you, artist boy. What media and/or art processes do you use?**

**JE:** I use acrylic on watercolour board. A picture usually starts with a thumb sketch. I do plenty of those almost abstract forms. I end up with a handful of different approaches to the illustration and chose the one that seems the strongest image. The thumbs are mostly very sketchy images of figures with no faces or details, but only a gesture of movements. The thumb I turn into a clearer sketch when needed.



Before submitting the sketch I add some grey tones to capture the mood and the lighting.

Then I transfer the whole thing to a board by rubbing the backside of the drawing with graphite dust and then pressuring all of the lines with a pencil. That way I get the image pressed down through the paper onto the board. This is the part of my job that absolute sucks the most. I do not add anything; I simply act as a copy machine, and a really bad one, that is.

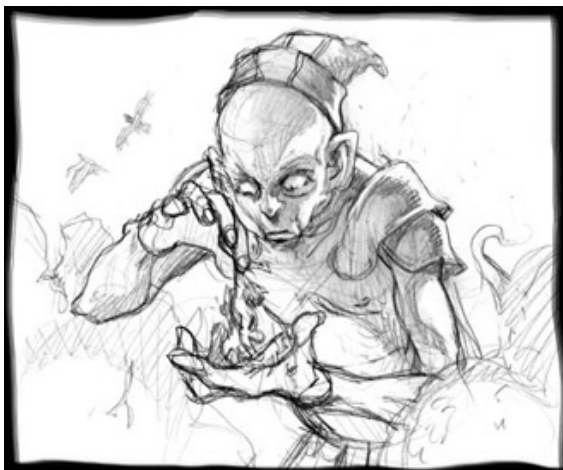
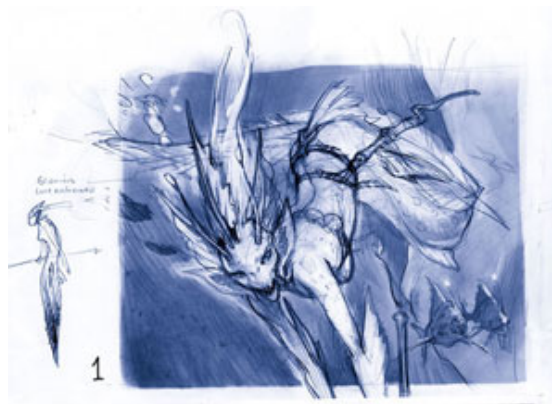
Then I ink the transferred sketch with a pen and add grey tones and blacks. Actually this is almost as if I am finishing the painting in black and white.

Then I take a Xerox of the black and white and do a color rough. Most of the times I have a clear idea of what the colours are going to be, but sometimes I do even 8 or 10 different colour schemes before I chose which one is the right one for the picture. I do think color rough is very useful to me, being a traditional artist. On the Xerox I can let loose and be free and I dare use a lot more contrast and bright colours than I would on the original. When I start on the original I already have the color rough to prove that I can do it and there is no thinking second of it. I cheat myself that way.

When starting to paint the picture I first do a thin wash over the entire picture to tone the black, the colour that most of the image is going to have. Then I mask the figure out with frisket film. It is a see-through film that glues to the paper. You then cut around with a scalpel the parts you want to mask out and remove the rest. With the figure masked with film, I can use some very fresh and coarse brush strokes on the background. It all adds to the sense of depth in the picture.

Having finished the background I remove the film and paint the figures. I only add paint to the parts that is going to have light on them. All of the shadow areas I already did in the grey tone step and the toning step in the beginning. So this last step is actually just filling in the blanks. Look at the tail of the figure. It is almost only the greyscale step with some blue tone and a little highlight.

I sometimes use models for reference on poses or hands or light. Sitting in a studio with a lot of fellow artist makes the whole thing a lot easier. When doing the picture for Changeling Titan I asked my friend Emil Landgreen for help and he posed for me with a lamp almost in his face. (See picture.) I really didn't need him to look stupid, but it was revenge for last time I had to pose for him. He made me dress up in a skirt as a model for a female elf. He ended up mailing the photo of me dressed up all girly, posing with the hips sexy and all, to one of my editors. She now has it hanging at her office. Now I pose for most of the girls on Emil's covers. I wonder why?



My least-known trick is to use an airbrush, but only with water in it. No paint. I use it to vaporize the wet parts while painting to keep it from drying too fast. That way I can work with several and large areas of paint at the same time and mixing them together.

Sometimes I use an old tooth brush for splattering effects—as seen in the cliffs. They add randomness to the picture that is hard to attain in other ways. I got to admit it is a little nervy to splatter on a perfect good painting with a toothbrush, cos you will never know what you get. I have a wet cloth nearby when I do.

I spend about to three days on a painting. One for sketches and one for transferring, corrections and colorroughs and one for painting. Sometimes I narrow all of it down to two days, during which I exchange sleeping and eating with espresso and loud rap music.

**DB: Sounds like me during the two days before my Taste the Magic article is due... ahem. So, where else might we see your artistic handiwork?**

**JE:** You can check out my web site ([www.jesperejsing.com](http://www.jesperejsing.com)). Most of the covers I've done are for Danish books and will not be known outside this little country of mine.

**DB: Excellent. Hey, reader! If you want to learn more about Jesper's art, be sure to check out that web site. There you can find a gallery of his Magic work, and a cool video that showcases his art process.**

**But enough digressions. Here's a question that many Magic players like to know about an artist. Do you, Jesper, know how to play Magic?**

**JE:** Ohh yeah. I started when you could still buy *Arabian Nights* boosters. I remember the shock when the store ran out and they told us there wouldn't be more of them. Back then my deck consisted of all the cards I owned. I had one Sengir Vampire and five Demonic Tutors to find it for me.

I took a long break from playing when I moved to Copenhagen, but now I have picked up the habit of building decks again. My favourite card is Tradewind Rider.

**DB: What were your very first Magic illustrations?**

**JE:** *Lorwyn* was the first set I contributed to. I did seven pictures for that expansion. The first one I painted was Lignify. I remember the trouble of having to do the happy, happy sunshine combined with destruction and twisting confinement. I just love the *Lorwyn* world. Maybe because it is so European in style.

**DB: And I think you transitioned that style really well to the eerie gloom of *Shadowmoor*. My favorites of your Magic pieces are from *Shadowmoor: Ballynock Cohort* and *Boartusk Liege*. Can you talk about what you were going for with these two pieces?**

**JE:** For Boartusk Liege, I did soo many sketches of that ugly hog to get it right. My problem was that if it looked to close to a realistic wild boar like it would be boring, but on the other hand it shouldn't look too much like a monster, since that would draw the focus away from the rider. This is the sketch I was happy with:



Like a pig/goblin-version of Frazetta's Deathdealer.

My thought for the rider was that he should also have tusks like his steed. You know, like a dog resembling its owner—or is it the other way around? Also, around this time, Todd Lockwood gave me the advice of trying to get more colours onto my dark areas, to make them more exiting and not just being pitch black and flat. That is why the pig has a grey light on its back. From this painting and forth I have been trying to follow that idea.

*Boartusk Liege art by Jesper Ejsing*

For the Ballynock Cohort, I simply wanted to do a strong figure portrait. I tried different and more action like poses, but in the end I chose one that showed the whole figure and all the equipment. To make up for the lack of action pose I tried to get a strong focus on the face.



This is one of the pictures where I did many different color roughs. In the end I went for the brown-orange tone, instead of bluish. I wanted it to have a warm colour for the mood of a white card. I used the art deco-like banner as a compositional element to give life to the background. Usually I add birds in flight (see Lignify); they are a sure way of picturing a scene in motion, a captured moment like a snapshot. But the billowing banner has the same effect.



The colours are loosely based on a picture from Tim Burton's Sleepy Hollow movie. The trick to doing monochromatic paintings is to resist the constant urge of using different colours.



*Ballynock Cohort art by Jesper Ejsing*

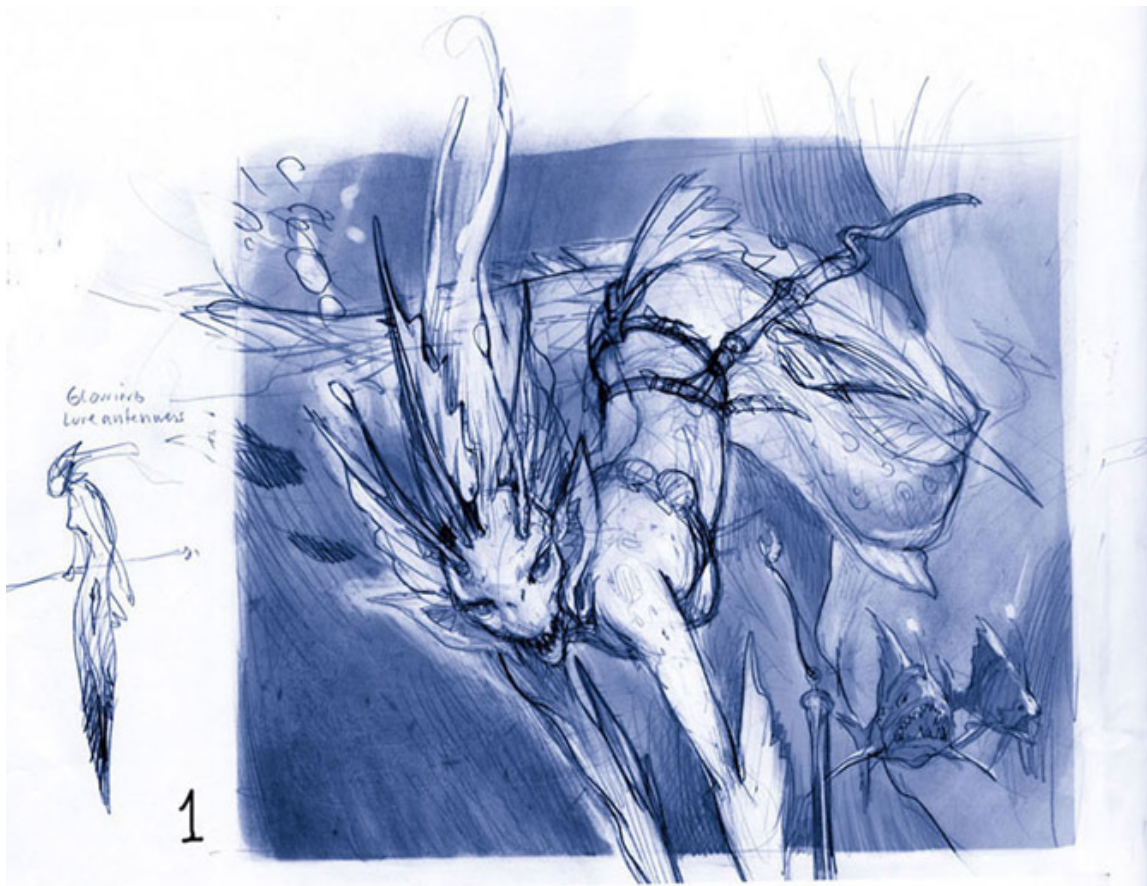
**DB: Awesome! Which of your Magic illustrations are you most proud of?**

**JE:** I am very proud of the boggart duo, Tattermunge Duo. According to the art description, one needed to be a fighter and the other one a shaman. I like the way they really are different. The big guy is clearly too bestial and dumb to get far by himself, and the little one with the brain just doesn't have the muscle to make a difference. But together? "You got the body and I got the brain."



Tattermunge Duo art by Jesper Ejsing (click for larger version)

Notice the sore red bloody marks where the big one's armour is nailed to his flesh. I smiled a quirky evil smile at my own twisted thought while adding those.... This is one of the very rare instances where a picture just sort of clicked and everything succeeded on the first try. This one almost bled out of the brush by itself without me interrupting too much.



My other favourite is the Inkfathom Infiltrator. Normally when doing this kind of fantasy figure portraits you tend to show them in a hero pose with weapon poised or threatening. I drew a pose where I wanted her to look like she was gliding fast by in the water—something like the aliens in Crisis. I zoomed in close and let the weapon disappear out of the frame to add to the snapshot effect.



I had some fun of choosing the design of an eel body instead of an ordinary fish tail. The Amazon River has these kinds of hybrids between eels and fish that I tried to make it look like. I like this picture because it has strong elements of all that I strive for to get into a picture: a strong composition, dynamic pose, interesting design, and depth in the drawing as well as in the colouring.

The monochromatic colouring, I find, has a way of simplifying all of that by not disturbing the eye too much.

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Also, doing a picture in only one color palette kind of makes the blending of colours on the palette really easy. You got to look for the easy part in being an artist. I do not think anything in art working is easy. As soon as I find myself comfortable in some areas the skills I have obtained just makes me see all the stuff I am missing. Being an artist is like climbing an endless mountaintop in fog. You can never see the top, but only a couple of meters ahead at a time... and it is so foggy that you might have been climbing sideways for the last couple of years... and the equipment you have sucks and there is no one to help you and... I just ruined a perfect metaphor didn't I?

**DB: Nope, sounds right on to me. Thanks a zillion, Jesper, for taking the time to delve into the gory detail of your work and passion, and for taking us along for the ride!**

### **Letter of the Week**

Today's letter of the week came with (a Photobucket URL to) a visual aid!

Hey Doug,

A friend of mine asked me to explain the difference between Shadowmoor and Lorwyn. Since I had gotten an interesting sunburn hours before, I marked the normal-colored area "Lorwyn" and the darker and more painful area "Shadowmoor", but he didn't seem to buy it. Is there a better way I can explain it to him?

-Marcus G.



Ouch. Marcus, you may be on to something. Did Lorwyn get so much exposure from the eternal sunlight that it became the stingingly painful world of Shadowmoor? Is the whole plane actually some being's cosmically huge, yet ultraviolet-sensitive forearm? Could the Aurora be prevented by the simple application of some SPF-50? Or is my selection of this question based almost solely on the inclusion of the flavoriffic, clever, and yet oh-so-family-friendly picture? These are questions only the sages can answer.

But hey, it's my column, so here's my take.

"No, but also yes." In literal terms, no, the changeover from Lorwyn to Shadowmoor was nothing like a sunburn. Shadowmoor isn't the result of an overexposure of the plane to light, nor is it just a slightly different region of the same world—it's the complete transformation of an entire world. But in metaphorical terms, it's a pretty compelling image. Only a few of the creatures from Lorwyn still remember that sundrenched world—the faerie queen Oona, the kithkin hero Brigid, and the sapling of Colfenor, to name a few—but all of Shadowmoor's creatures feel the pain of living under constant dusk. They may not know that the world was once green and suffused with fairytale beauty, but they understand nonetheless that there's a residual sting to the world, a soreness that runs deep and that no balm can assuage. Shadowmoor's residents don't recall experiencing the sun of the World Before, but they must endure the dull throb of an unexplained ache even long after their homeland sought the shade.

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