

EXERCISE 13

CHAPTER 13: COMPOSITION AND STAGING

Exercise 13: Thumbnails

When deciding on the composition and lighting of any image, the best way to work out the various problems is to create a series of thumbnail sketches. By working in this format, quickly and on a very small scale, you will be able to try out ideas without losing too much time on variants that don't work. It can also save a lot of headaches that you might run into later on if you launch into a detailed image without having thought out potential issues first.

Thumbnails should be fast and simple. The reason for working on a small scale is that this allows only the major elements to be fleshed out and you can quickly evaluate your composition and staging without being distracted by details. It's also a good idea to draw several thumbnails rather than just one. You will often find your best ideas and arrangements don't come on the first try and exploring several possibilities invariably leads to new and improved ideas.

The following sketches are an example of the thumbnailing process used to create an alien landscape. They show how the composition and lighting was established at this initial stage.



To begin with four black and white thumbnails were drawn very quickly to show the character walking through an alien jungle environment. As you see, the sketches are extremely simple and the differences between them fairly subtle. It wasn't until the fourth sketch that a strong foreground element was used to create some depth in the scene. Only by going through the thumbnail process was the decision reached to push the character into the background to show a wider environment. Once this idea was settled on, a colour thumbnail was created.

EXERCISE 13



This thumbnail enabled the colour scheme and lighting, and the composition and staging, to be established more fully. In this sketch it was very important that the relatively small character was a strong focal point and, thanks to the way the light is distributed, you can see this is the case.

The most difficult compositional problems having been worked out, the illustration was then painted. There were still changes along the way – nothing is ever set in stone – but the thumbnails provided the blueprint from which to work.

