



PURE ESCAPISM

Renato Casaro's poster for *The NeverEnding Story* captured the film's magic using tempera and a bit of airbrushing on cardboard.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF FANTASY FILM POSTERS

The 1980s was an era of wonderful fantasy films and, as **Garrick Webster** discovers, the poster art that accompanied them was just as astounding

There's a special kind of nostalgia that surrounds the fantasy and sci-fi films of the 1980s. Thanks to the impetus that Star Wars gave the film industry in the late-1970s, effects budgets grew and grew, but because CGI was a mere twinkle in John Lasseter's eye, the creatures and magic we witnessed were often handmade. They looked tactile, and films like *The Dark Crystal* and *Time Bandits* felt lived in and quirky, more like real life than a cold computer screen.

These were the days before Photoshop too, and the posters that enticed us into the cinemas were largely hand-painted. A whole crop of genius fantasy artists caught our imaginations with pencils, ink and paint, with three-sheet or quad-sized posters going up around town whenever a new fantasy picture was on its way.

More than that, our nostalgia is tweaked on a deeper, more psychological level. Fantasy films back then weren't just a distraction from boredom. Generation Y and hipster haircuts hadn't been invented. Back then kids were worried. Reaganomics and Thatcherism were ravaging economies. People began to die of AIDS. Famines killed millions in Africa. And the Cold War promised mutually assured Armageddon. So we gazed at Brian Bysouth's posters for *Willow* and *Big Trouble in Little China*. We were beckoned by the peculiar-looking Falkor, the luckdragon, on Renato Casaro's poster for *The NeverEnding Story*. Artists

“A whole crop of genius fantasy artists caught our imaginations with pencils, ink and paint”



THE DIRECT METHOD

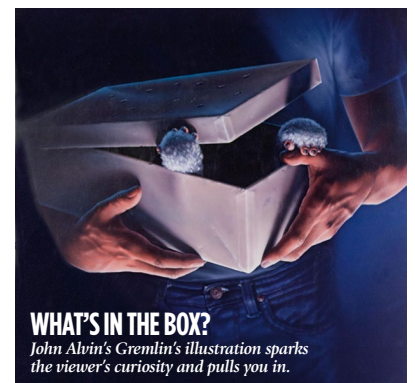
An accomplished illustrator himself, Terry Gilliam drew the Time Bandits poster himself, expertly conveying the film's inter-dimensional plot.

like John Alvin, Richard Amsel, Ted CoConis, Bob Peak and Drew Struzan gave us a gateway into imaginary realms.

John Alvin was brilliant when it came to evoking a sense of mystery. John passed away in 2005, but his daughter Farah not only grew up alongside his work, but also appeared in it. You know the famous poster in which E.T.'s finger reaches out towards a human hand? She was a small child at the time, and that's her hand in the picture.



“Much of E.T. was kept top secret by the studio – not ➡



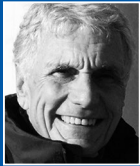
“Jim Henson was a great guy. Not only super creative, but also kind, gentle and humble”

FULL OF CHARACTER
Ted CoConis rose to the challenge of incorporating over 20 characters into the Labyrinth poster, and Jim Henson loved it.



THE INS AND OUTS OF LABYRINTH

We asked artist Ted CoConis about how his poster for Jim Henson's Labyrinth came about...



How did you land the Labyrinth poster job?

The advertising campaign was handled by Seiniger Associates in L.A., but it was Jim Henson himself who wanted me to do the artwork. Jim and I had known each other since 1973 when he had commissioned me to create a piece for a Muppets Valentine Special starring Mia Farrow and Thog.

What was it like working with Jim Henson?

Since 1980 I had been withdrawing from the world of illustration in order to concentrate on my own art, but I was really intrigued with the idea of working with Jim again. He was a great guy. Not only super creative, but also kind, gentle and humble.

What did you get to work with?

I was given the script and hundreds of photographs: black and white prints as well as 35mm slides.

What was the thinking behind the pyramidal composition with Bowie at the top, and the colour palette?

It just seemed that the best way to capture the essence of the storyline and convey the charismatic omnipotence of Jareth the Goblin King was to interweave a base of interesting elements, then build outwards and upwards into a portrait of David Bowie with his crystal ball.

What media did you use?

In those days I worked almost exclusively in acrylics on hot-press illustration board. My usual method was to create a strong, finely detailed drawing in graphite over which I would paint in thin layers of acrylic, allowing the drawing to show through and maintain its strength and integrity.

FULL-ON MONTAGE

Brian Bysouth's art conveys the film's gritty urban action, and its dark, mystical side.



INTO THE UNKNOWN

The design of E.T. was kept secret by the studio. All John Alvin had to work with were sketches of the alien hand.

➤ only the film itself, but what the characters and scenic elements looked like," she explains. "John was given a sketch of the alien's hand by a production designer to use for reference and then he took numerous Polaroids of my hand. He used these photos and the reference for the alien hand to create a composite sketch and then, ultimately, the painting we all know. The design concept, borrowed from Michelangelo, came from the studio. All of the aspects of light and colour were ultimately a product of his creativity."

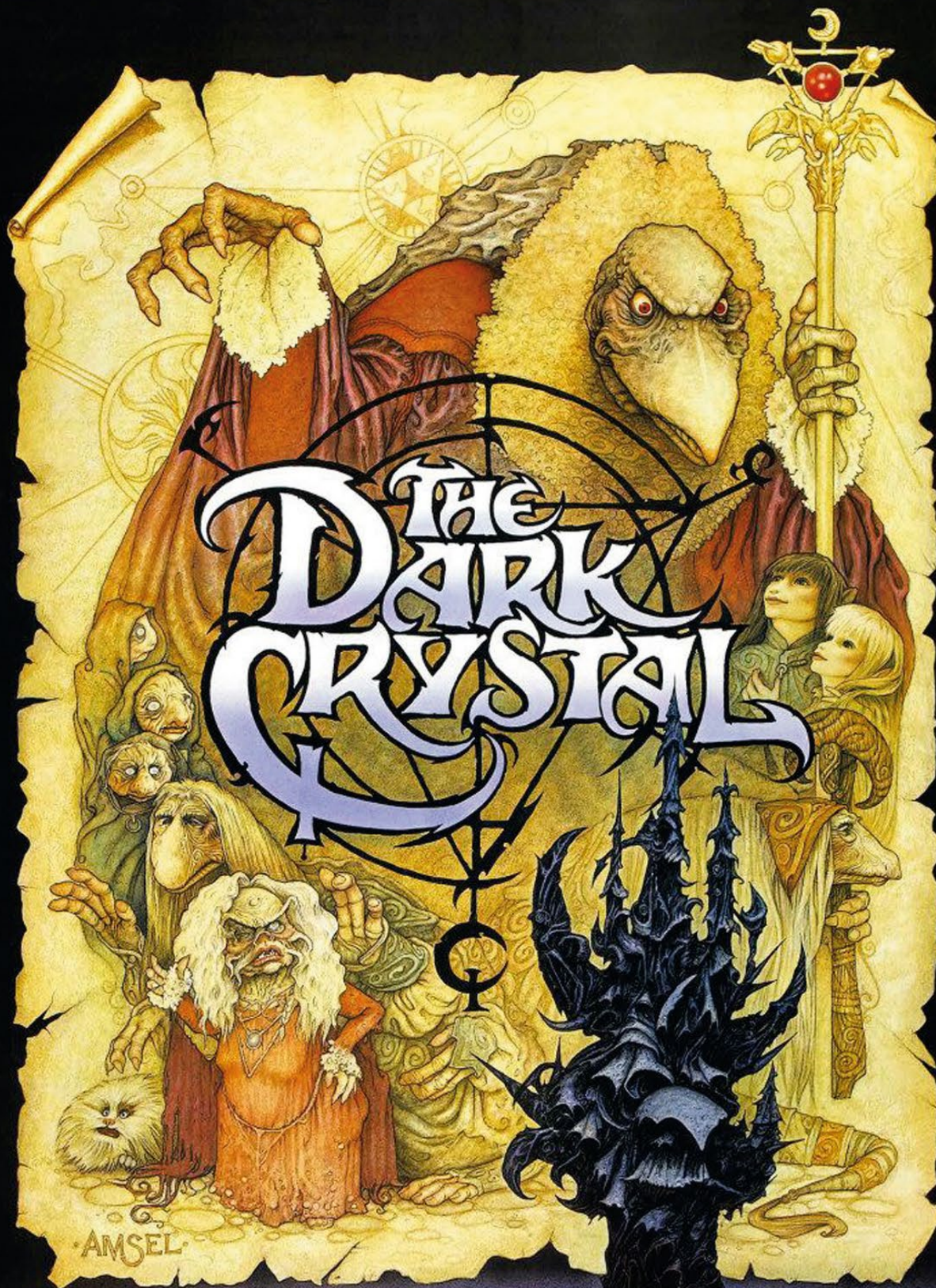
CAPTURE A FILM'S HEART AND SOUL

John would often say that his job was "to create the promise of a great experience" and he worked on the concepts of the posters as much as their execution. The artist sought to identify the key elements of a film – its heart and soul – to convey in a single, emotive image.

With those little mogwai paws reaching out from under the shoebox lid, John's artwork for Gremlins is one of the most memorable of all time. "What was important about the Gremlins poster was to indicate that this cute, delightful creature had the potential to become horrible," explains Farah. "But the film is sort of campy and scary, not gory, so I think he had to walk a very careful line and play up the mystery rather than the horror. You can't help but look at this poster and want to know what's in the box! That curiosity is, of course, the downfall of the characters in the film. So this poster reels you into the spirit and tone of the movie quite beautifully."

Generating intimacy with the observer is something a good painter can do if they have a unique style. Richard Amsel died of HIV in 1985, but his poster work for films such as Raiders of the Lost Ark, The Dark Crystal and Flash Gordon continues to ➤

Another World, Another Time...
In the Age of Wonder.



ART DECO

Richard Amsel used a number of layers in this poster. The type is central, with the characters hinting at the story around it.



ImagineFX March 2016

ITC ENTERTAINMENT Presents

A JIM HENSON Film

"THE DARK CRYSTAL"

Directed by JIM HENSON and FRANK OZ Produced by JIM HENSON and GARY KURTZ

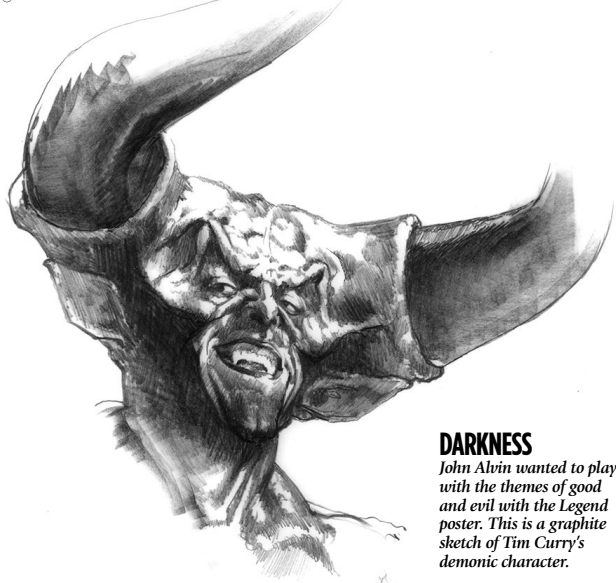
MAGIC MAN

Renato Casaro's poster for the *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* combined scenes from the movie.



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“The guy’s got mascara on, wears a sequin dress and has a sparkly ring of power. It’s wonderfully kitschy”



DARKNESS

John Alvin wanted to play with the themes of good and evil with the *Legend* poster. This is a graphite sketch of Tim Curry's demonic character.



➔ resonate because the artist's hand is clear in the rendering of the images.

Adam McDaniel works in a film studio, and is an expert on Richard's art. "His use of pencils was extraordinary, as he'd draw in all sorts of frenzied directions, while maintaining control and getting the details just right,"

says Adam. "He was very gifted in capturing personalities, too; it wasn't enough to make something look photorealistic."



INTERGALACTIC KITSCH

Richard's playful side came to the fore in his *Flash Gordon* poster. "The movie's called *Flash Gordon*, but it's Ming the Merciless who's front and centre, his penetrating gaze

directed right at us, like a serpent ready to strike," says Adam. "But the guy's got mascara on, wears a sequin dress, and has a sparkly ring of power. It's all wonderful, kitschy, 1930s sci-fi serials, as seen through the foggy vision of a 1970s glam rock concert. Richard wasn't out to make it look serious. He was in on the joke, and made the film look like the silly fun it was."

His poster for Jim Henson's *The Dark Crystal* is stunning, and was innovative at the time. He centred the work around logo art created for the film by Brian Froud, who also designed many of its creatures. On one layer there's a piece of velum with a montage of strange characters. The castle housing the crystal and the broken landscape around it burst up from the bottom of the poster in

FLASH! AH-AH!

The great Richard Amsel camped up the 1980 revival of *Flash Gordon*, the art deco elements effectively invoking its 1930s origins.

front of the parchment. It speaks of mythology, legend, and a time long ago.

Jim Henson and Brian Froud also made *Labyrinth* together, and as with *The Dark Crystal* all the film's charm comes from its creatures and characters. This time, the artist Ted CoCónis – who'd previously done posters for *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Hair* – was commissioned for the artwork. Supplied with the idea of the *Labyrinth* and a logotype for the movie, the challenge for Ted was to bring the key characters together without it looking too complex. The film

struggled at the box office, but its poster is iconic and today it has a cult following.

"Every single character is a work of art in itself: ➔

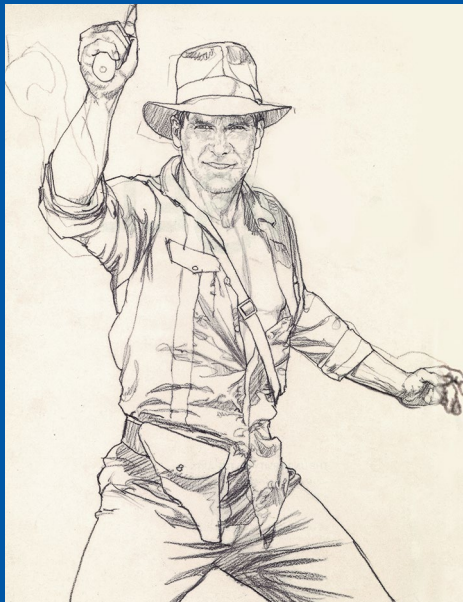


RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK REDUX

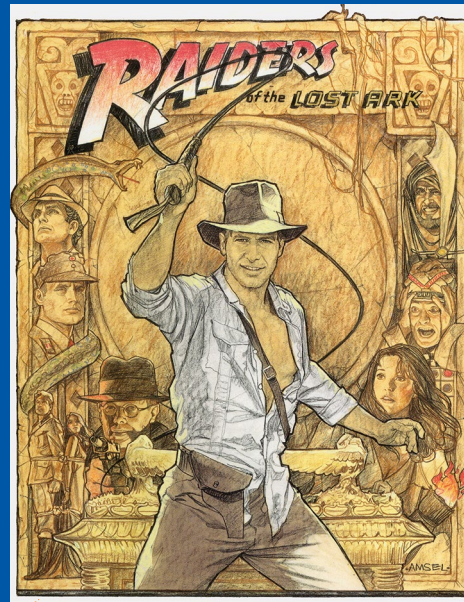
Richard Amsel's poster for the 1982 re-release of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* perfectly embodies the film, conveying the characters, the intrigue and the whip. Adam McDaniel, an expert on Richard's techniques, talks us through its creation



1 Richard would often make scores of preliminary thumbnail sketches, trying to figure out how best to capture that direct essence of a design.



2 Once he'd chosen a route to follow, he'd draw a more solid and accurate sketch – here he still gave himself options on the whip arm position.



3 Richard would then render a rather detailed colour comp, which he would show for creative approvals before embarking on the final illustration.

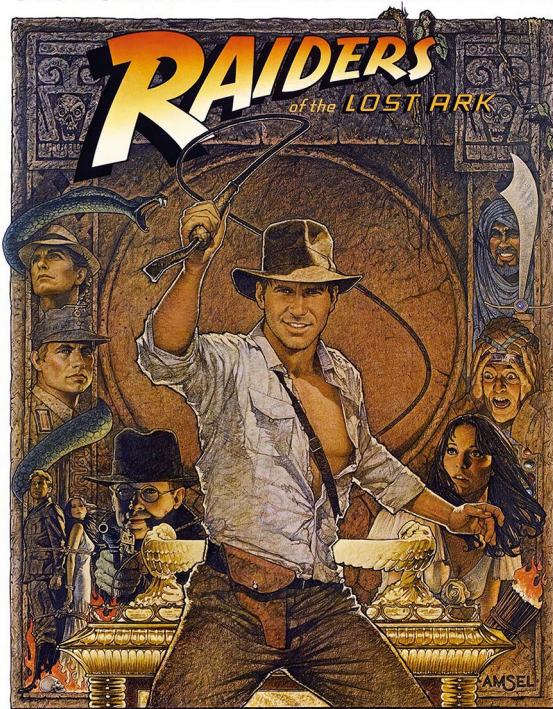
INCONCEIVABLE!

Steve Crisp's highly unusual composition for the UK release of *The Princess Bride* captures several story elements in what's almost a book cover. The right-hand portion of the image is still used on the DVD case.



Courtesy Everett Collection/REX/Shutterstock

The Return of the Great Adventure.



PARAMOUNT PICTURES Presents A LUCASFILM LTD. Production
A SEVENTEEN PICTURES Film
Starring HARRISON FORD
KAREN ALLEN • PAUL FREEMAN • RONALD LACEY • JOHN RHYS-DAVIES • DENHOLM ELLIOTT
Music by JOHN WILLIAMS Executive Producer GEORGE LUCAS and HOWARD KAZANJIAN Screenplay by LAWRENCE KASDAN Story by GEORGE LUCAS and PHILIP KAUFMAN
Produced by FRANK MARSHALL Directed by STEVEN SPIELBERG
A PARAMOUNT PICTURE
PG-13 Parents Strongly Cautioned Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13

4 For the final poster art Richard would start with the detailed pencils, work with washes of paint, then add coloured pencils and gouache in a back and forth process until he was happy with the results.

TRILOGY

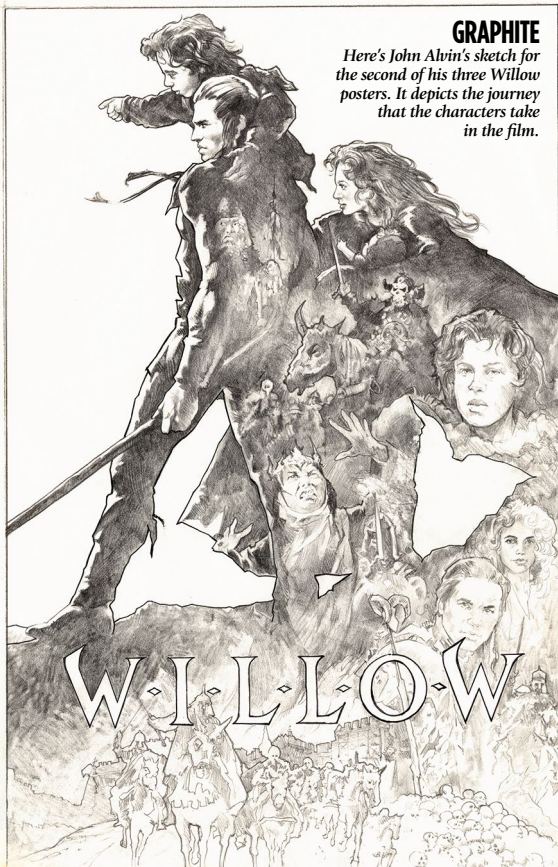
Here's the final teaser poster for Willow painted by John Alvin. The negative space to the left hints that there's more to come for viewer and for the characters.



METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER Presents
A LUCASFILM LTD. PRODUCTION
Of A Film by RON HOWARD • WILLOW
Starring VAL KILMER • JOANNE WHALLEY-KILMER • BILLY BARTY • JEAN MARSH
Music Composed by JAMES HORNER Story by GEORGE LUCAS Screenplay by BOB DOLMAN
Executive Producer GEORGE LUCAS Produced by NIGEL WOOLL
Directed by RON HOWARD
In Association with IMAGINE ENTERTAINMENT
Original Motion Picture Soundtrack Available on Vinyl, Cassette, and Compact Disc
PG-13 Parents Strongly Cautioned Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13
Read the novel by WILLIAM BODD

GRAPHITE

Here's John Alvin's sketch for the second of his three Willow posters. It depicts the journey that the characters take in the film.



“Jim picked a handful of key figures, and I was free to tie everything together with whichever ones worked best”

➤ brilliantly conceived, masterfully constructed,” says Ted. “In the end, Jim picked out a handful of key figures, and I was free to tie everything together with whichever ones worked best for the design.

“I was completely free to do whatever I thought would work best in terms of concept and design. The only client input – which I had to override – was their insistence that Sarah be portrayed in blue jeans. That was completely inappropriate for the look and feeling of the painting as well as the movie itself. She simply had to be wearing the gorgeous gown she wore in that fabulous ballroom scene.”

MISSING A TOUCH OF MAGIC

Today, it's easy to see photos of the characters being montaged together, much like the posters for The Lord of the Rings films. But where would be the fun in that?



Renato Casaro, who painted over 1,500 posters during his career, including those for The NeverEnding Story, believes that without the hand of an

artist, today's posters are often devoid of that touch of magic.

“Hand-painted artwork died in the 90s,” Renato laments. “To give you an idea of what we've lost, The Folkwang Museum in Essen, which is the most important poster gallery in Germany, organised a big retrospective including my movie posters. During the exhibition they invited graphic design students to transfer my artwork into Photoshop, and use elements of my artwork to create new posters. The results were unsatisfactory; they were unable to capture the special magic that you need in particular for movie posters.”

How do we get some of that 80s magic back into movie poster art? Perhaps what some of these wonderful illustrators we've talked about here lends some inspiration. A sense of mystery and expectation, the return of a painterly feel, evidence of a painter's hand, and a fresh injection of character might just help us to escape the pressures of the 21st century, or at least feel a bit less like we're being marketed to. Artists, it's over to you! ●