

Focused Fandom: Fanart and Fanartists

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By Steven Savage

**Focused Fandoms:
Fanart and Fanartists (Sample)**

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<http://www.focusedfandom.com/>

AUTHOR: Steven Savage

<http://www.stevensavage.com/>

EDITOR: Jessica Hardy

First Edition

Introduction

Writing about careers for geeks, fans, and otaku is kind of an obsession of mine. I founded a blog with my friend Bonnie on the subject (<http://www.fantopro.com/>). I wrote a book on using hobbies in one's careers (<http://www.fantoprobook.com/>) and another focused on conventions as career events for fans (<http://www.conventioncareerconnection.com/>).

The audience I wrote for was pretty broadly defined, so I thought I should start doing specialized books. This led to a new Focused Fandom series (<http://www.focusedfandom.com/>), so I could take a look at the career options for specific geeky interests.

My first focus was on Cosplay/Costuming, since I knew the least about it – figuring that if I could write a book about Cosplay and careers then I could certainly do other books on other subjects. If I failed . . . well, lesson learned also. As you may guess, I think I succeeded.

After three months of interviews, writing, editing, and researching, it was done. I was quite happy with it, so figured it was time to move on to another subject: Fanart and Fanartists.

(I also figured I should not try to write a book in three months while working a full-time job, and slowed down a bit. That's another story **entirely**.)

Doing a book on fanart seemed easier than Cosplay. I knew a lot of artists and had contact with quite a few through my other efforts from conventions, a site of random generators for creative types (<http://www.seventhsanctum.com/>), and more. So I started a spreadsheet and started asking for interviews.

I got a large response and began collating the information. I extracted lessons, noted patterns, took down warnings, and quoted

encouragements. The book kept growing beyond my initial expectations to the one you're now reading.

No, it wasn't exactly as easy as I thought. It also wasn't as simple as I thought.

It was an incredible ride. I thought I knew art better than cosplay, but I was wrong. Artistic possibilities are even more vast and varied than I expected, the inspirations that drove people more subtle than I realized, and the path of the artist broader than I could have imagined.

So I worked to capture as much of it as possible. You, the artist, have so many possibilities it's hard to express, so I erred on the side of caution. Erred on the side of a lot more pages, really – but I want to capture the possibilities for you.

This book is the result of my journey through the world of fanartist and artists– a guide to how fanartists can leverage their passions into a career. It's a book uniquely made for you. Having seen the amazing artistic talent out there, I'm sure you can succeed – my goal is to make it easier for you.

Steven Savage

<http://www.stevensavage.com/>

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Edges

Always Have An Artistic Presence

"The internet's an awesome place. Stuff spreads around like wildfire."

- **Inklou**, <http://inklou.deviantart.com/>

"I will never look at [insert character name] the same way"

- **Steven Savage**, your author, many, many times

If you do fanart, you're probably got your art out there at websites, portfolios, journals, blogs, and more. You've got people aware of your work because of what they bought at a convention or saw in a newsletter.

Your fanart means that you always have an artistic presence in people's minds. They know you, if only through your art.

This is a great Edge if you take advantage of it – and enhance it.

If you're always on people's minds, then there's always a chance of people coming to you with opportunities. You never know what may turn up – and you need to learn to latch on to those moments of contact and turn them to your advantage.

With your art out there, there's a lot of chance to make contacts.

If you appreciate this artistic presence, you can also enhance it and improve it. You don't have to wait for random requests or calls, you can strategize your artistic presence by posting the right stuff, joining communities, etc. With the power of fandom with you you can increase people's awareness of you.

You can also take this and help it to enhance your non-fanart work. Get feedback on other projects, advice for school, promotion for your own business.

Best of all, it's often fun. Your work has an element of relaxation and of human contact. It can be both about your artistic presence and entertaining and relaxing, and ease you into good networking.

(I'm still going to run the importance of Networking in over and over this book, just a warning).

NEXT STEPS:

How Are You Getting Known?

How is your art out there getting attention for your career. Is it on sites? Blogs? Communities? Review the artistic presence you have – and ask ways you can (and want) to improve it.

Try Other Methods of Getting Known

What other methods are out there to get known you're not using? You could speak at conventions or run art shows there, do training videos and post them online, etc. Many artists livestream their work.

Ask what other artists do and see what works for you. You might even team up . .

Are You “Catching Contacts?”

How are you tracking contacts your art brings you? Do you have any methods?

I always recommend keeping in contact with people and tracking them for regular emails. If necessary, consider a solution like <http://www.salesforce.com/>, which is a full sales/customer contact/alert system. It may be pricey to you, but it's invaluable and powerful.

Also knowing customer contact software and tools looks great on a resume.

Get Out Of Your Comfort Zone

"Participate in weekly challenges like Illustration Friday to show that you can convey complex ideas in the narrative of your art. Doing a piece of fan art is great but doing a piece of fan art which also conveys an idea, thought or narrative is what potential clients are really looking for. Mastering this will set you apart from the pack. "

- **Alicia "Kat" Dillman**, <http://www.katgirlstudio.com/>

There's a weird paradox I found with fanart.

For some people, it's feared as a straitjacket or becomes one. After all there's really so much anime-style, steampunk, gothic, Americomic, or other art styles you can do before you're sick of it and limited.

But for others fanart becomes a way to throw off one's shackles. New styles challenge you, a new artistic interpretation pushes you, exposure to an entire new art, art style, or culture awaits you. I've dealt with some of this in the "Experiment" edge.

For some fanart is just there. For some a prison. For some it's a way to get outside of one's limits.

If you examine this it makes sense – if you do fanart and follow friends to a new series, discover a new artist, find a new style, you'll be driven to try it. You'll have social support (and pressure) to drive and prepare you. You'll also experience it as fun, even though you are indeed being stretched as an artist.

Fanart can kick you right outside your comfort zone, if only because so many factors beyond art influence it.

I can't say, obviously, that doing fanart is going to be your straitjacket or your key to your prison. But keep in mind this Edge

may be there – and may be valuable to you.

NEXT STEPS:

Which is it?

Ask yourself if your fanart work provides you the opportunity to get beyond your comfort zone - or if it confines you. These hard questions will tell you a lot about yourself and leveraging your hobbies.

Look For Opportunities

If fanart is something that keeps pushing you then help it along. Jump on trends, seek odd experiences, try different commissions. Go and fully use the chances to expand your horizons.

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Careers

"Just remember, a job's a JOB, and that providing your employer with they asked for is how you get more work."

- **Gennifer Bone**, <http://razielart.deviantart.com/>

Careers – A Note

This was the hardest part of the book to write. I would assume with the amount of resources available, the many interviews, it would be easy. It wasn't.

That of course brings an important point to fanartists wanting to turn their passion into a career: “Art Careers” is such an insanely broad term that it borders on the meaningless.

Many careers use art, some people wouldn't consider particularly “artsy.” Many people who are artists have Portfolio careers that cover many grounds. This all ignores the fact that there are people who work to support “artists” whose jobs are “artsy” but aren't seen as “artists” (as many a computer graphics person has dealt with).

Then there are the people for whom art is a job but is a part time thing that will never go full-time as an intentional choice. Or people who have a side business doing art. Or people whose career “contains” art as part of a larger set of what they do.

You get the idea. Me, after knowing artists for decades I'm starting to think you can't “get” art careers without having one. Either that or a lot of my artist friends reading this right now are nodding and going “yeah, I told you so.”

This section is thus meant to cover as many ideas for your career as possible and give you resources and direction. It's meant to inspire, but it's in no way a guide to careers or even a comprehensive list. It's meant to get you think and get you started and then go read other books and bother people.

There are two challenges you'll face as an artist:

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- Figuring out how what kind of career you want.
- Figuring out how to make sure your choice isn't too broad or too narrow.

Thus this section is a start, a giant braindump to help you get going and inspire you. So yes, I'm starting broad to help you out.

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Concept Artist

Concept Artists are an interesting bunch. Their goal, simply, is to create (and improve) a concept on paper or other media. They're not just artists, but idea engines that can (and often do) create an onslaught of characters, settings, and what have you. Other artists often take their work and implement it in other media, such as games or cartoons or movies.

It's a strange profession, if you consider it. In many cases you don't work on the final product, and your great dreams are mostly discarded. At the same time, your imagination gets free reign within some boundaries.

Like many art professions, it's not a well-defined one (which you might prefer), and there's often cases it intersects with other professions in art. But it's also a vital one – if you've done any research on media properties, you've doubtlessly uncovered fascinating amounts of concept material that never made it into movies, films, etc.

It's also a profession that's a mixture of volume and speed – while preserving content and quality. Not everyone prefers this or can do it.

Is it for you? I find it's a good profession for an artist who's long on imagination and able to get it out of their heads – and can tolerate a few slams to their ego as ideas are thrown away. On the other hand you also get some freedom.

I've seen people seriously consider monstrous corgi's while doing concept art. Consider that kind of freedom.

NEXT STEPS:

Is It For You?

Is this for you? Consider:

- Do you like to produce ideas?
- Can you work fast?
- Can you edit and improve ideas in feedback?
- Are you – or do you want to be – able to use many forms of artistic tools.
- Can you take what seems to be continuous rejection.

It also helps to talk to Concept Artists and investigate communities. Fortunately there's the fantastic <http://conceptart.org/> for you to go to.

Build On That

If you want to try out Concept Art, take a look at the traits and ask how you build on them to make yourself a concept artist.

Parallel Job

Most Concept Artists do Concept Art as part of an overall “Art” career. Make sure you have an Art career that is not just aimed at Concept Art – it gives you room to grow, something to do outside of Concept Art, and keeps you informed.

Remember, It's Art

A Concept Artist is an artist first and foremost. Make sure you develop as an Artist.

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To Do's

"So just draw what you enjoy, make it look as awesome as you can, put it on the internet. Fan art, original works, whatever you're more interested in is fine. If you're good and you keep at it then the opportunities and new connections will manifest themselves eventually. If you're not quite good enough yet it's good practice to becoming a better artist. And if you're no good at all at least you'll make some new friends and will have had fun making it."

- **Ryan Dunlavey**, <http://www.ryandartist.com/>,
<http://www.eviltwincomics.com/>,
<http://www.dunlavey.deviantart.com/>

Find The Right Niche(s)

If you're going to use your art for your career, and really want to grow in it, you need to find the right niche(s) for you, which is much harder and more complex than it looks.

It's a classic truism of business and careers – you need to find where you fit in and deliver in that area. If you're specialized enough, know an area enough, you can do exceptionally well. If you're too broad, too unfocused, then you will never really get your projects off the ground or hone your skills.

It's easy to put that into one paragraph, in practice it's much, much harder. In fact I honestly think you can't really plan for a niche so much as try and shape something out of the existing experiences and interests in your life.

Your nicheing will often occur in:

- Specific media used.
- Styles used.
- Themes, elements, characters, and genre.
- What other work you do associated with it (marketing, logo design, writing)

How to find your best niche is usually a mix of business sense, self-exploration, and a mixture of luck and “what the heck.” You'll doubtlessly revise your plans over the years, months, and in some cases minutes.

But at least you're trying.

Some artists also gradually expand or switch niches as they see fit – out of boredom, profitability, or other reasons. A niche now may lead to more things later – just look at how artists and businesses

who start with niches end up expanding their horizons.

Finally you may be one of the kinds of artists I called “style vampires” or “chameleons” whose niche seems to be adsorbing and integrating styles. You might have that ability to adapt and learn so quickly your niche is actually focused on changing.

I wish I could provide more useful advice, but this is a highly personal and intimate area. You need to be aware of it so you can make it happen.

Even if your awareness is “man, this is difficult . . .”

Get Educated

"I would say that I developed my skills as an artist on my own up until college. That is when I received my first dose of solid art critique and instruction. My skills drastically improved under the instruction of a few amazing artists and since then I have continued to push the development of my abilities and skills as an artist"

- **Sven Bybee**, <http://www.svenbybee.com/>

Yes, your fanart and personal experience is going to make you a hell of an artist. I'm constantly amazed how many artists I meet who grew incredibly with no training, merely from their hobbies and willpower.

But for most people it's not enough – and even if it may be enough, getting education has many benefits. Or in short – if you want an art career of any kind, if your fanart has led you here, start looking at education and certifications.

First, it will give you access to training you won't get elsewhere or didn't know you needed. Think of it as a kind of polishing or fleshing out process.

Secondly, it may give you access to tools you can't afford otherwise – those banks of computers running expensive programs, odd printing devices, etc. School may just add some extras to your repertoire you couldn't get anyway.

Third, it lets you network with your fellow artists and teachers. You can flesh out your LinkedIn.com portfolio and your contacts quite easily. You'll meet people you may stay in touch with for years, if not for your life.

Fourth, it gives you other job search resources – the resources the school has. It may make your career much easier.

Fifth, and finally, it gives you credibility. Having that degree shows you care, you're educated . . . and you blew a lot of money on it.

Yes, many do fear school will dampen their enthusiasm and crush their inspiration. I won't lie and say I've talked to artists who had dismal problems with teachers and education. The risk is worth the benefits.

Of course it's not easy. So let's get to your next steps.

NEXT STEPS:

Research Degrees And Certifications

If you don't have a degree, do research on what degrees you can get. In short, hit the internet, a bookstore, and talk to other artists to find what degrees are good for you – or if you already have the right one.

Don't Forget Tutorials

There are legions of tutorials out there to help you educate yourself on top of degrees and certifications.

- <http://www.thegnomonworkshop.com/> - Provides video training on a wide variety of artistic subjects.

Did I Mention Talking To People?

Yes, throughout this book I keep pushing you to meet people with your interests for mentorship, alliances, and sanity. Make sure you ask these people about your education plans.

Consider The Level of Education

Do you need a full degree? A certification? An Associates. Determine what level of education you need for your career ambitions.

In some cases that'll be spread over time. Maybe you get a degree

now and a certification later. Perhaps you just need an Associates degree to go with your killer portfolio. Find what works for you.

Maximize The Educational Opportunity

When you do get education, exploit it as much as possible – network, learn, borrow books (return them too), etc. Use the heck out of the opportunity.

Always Network

Network in training, classes, schools. Always.

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I hope you enjoyed this sample. The full book comes out Mid-April 2012, complete with giant sections on Edges, Careers, and ToDos! With extra Appendices and other resource, it's YOUR career resource for finding out how fanart can be more!

Visit www.focusedfandom.com for more details!