Interview
We talk to HR Giger about his past, present and future...

The legacy of...
How HR Giger has influenced popular culture.

Inspired by...
Barringer Fox Wingard III creates a Giger-inspired piece.

Welcome to this very special issue of ImagineFX. I'm hugely excited to be featuring a legend such as HR Giger. His work on Alien is obviously a high point, but he has done so much more - and has had such a massive influence on modern sci-fi artists. Enjoy the issue, and let me know what you think.

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ALIEN EGG
One of the early designs for the egg stage of the Alien, in the film of the same name.

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Alien Egg III, 1978, acrylic on paper, 140x100cm
Love or loathe his unique style, there's no denying that Swiss fine artist HR Giger is the master of dark nightmarish visions.

First, the bad news: we will never again see a new painting from Hans Ruedi Giger. "I'm not working any more - I'm not doing any more paintings," the world-famous surrealist explains. "I'm already 68 years old and it's time to retire! After all, that's normal."

As devastating as that might sound, rest assured that Giger - pronounced "Geeger" with a hard 'G' - doesn't intend to sit around wearing his slippers and reading the paper. "It might sound very strange that an artist can say he's retired, but just because I'm not doing any more paintings, it doesn't mean that I'm not thinking about things," he continues. "I still write my diaries and my dream book, where I record my dreams. And drawings too, sometimes. But now I'm mostly concentrating on sculptures and overseeing my bar and museum."

Fortunately, there's an awful lot of Giger's work still to admire. Over the
past 40-odd years, the Swiss artist has gradually transformed from a cult figure into an acclaimed master of dark, nightmarish visions. His trademark style, often incorporating biomechanical mixtures of flesh and machines, is as much copied as it is admired, and like them or loathe them you're almost certain to recognise one of his creations.

REAL-WORLD PROJECTS

Now, though, Giger has his sights set on real-world projects, as he explains in his sometimes halting English. "I'm working on the fountain in my garden. That will be in Gruyères, just in front of the Giger Museum... the local people wanted to erect it. It looks fantastic, right next to the bar."

"I'm also working on a show in Berlin, in the citadel in Spandau, for the end of June. It's a kind of castle surrounded by water. It's quite famous in Berlin and was also named by Hitler," he chuckles. "During the war, the Nazis' money was hidden there."

The museum and bars are very important to Giger, a sign of the recognition it has taken him many years to achieve. There are two bars, one in his hometown of Chur and one as part of the museum - both featuring custom interiors and furniture designed by Giger. The museum is 10 years old this month, and plans are in motion to celebrate that.

"We've produced a commemorative book, HR Giger in Gruyères: The First Decade," he explains, (available now for $25 from the museum website, www.hrgigermuseum.com) as well as a catalogue, in conjunction with his friend Martin Schwarz. "It has everything I've ever done in it - older sketches, the diaries, and so on. The works are printed very small, postage stamp sized, mostly to act as a reference for all my work."

It must be strange, we muse, seeing them that small when his paintings are famously so big. "Some of them were. The bigger ones could be 2x2.4m. That was important to me somehow, because at that size you're surrounded by the image. I liked to say these works went from one ear to the other! The size makes them more impressive."

BELLY ART

Whether it's because of language difficulties or because he's simply reluctant, attempting to coax any analysis of his work from Giger is nigh on impossible. "I had some ideas in my head, ways of realising images I had in my brain," he tries to explain. "In the beginning I had no idea what I was doing - I just did some clouds or whatever, and then I would make an eye or something. It was just, you know, from the belly."

As a boy, he says, he was always interested in trains - especially ghost
Rather famously, Giger used an airbrush to lay the foundations of his biggest paintings, despite the tool’s reputation for being somewhat unwieldy. "Well, you can't do small things with an airbrush - I never did smaller paintings that way," he adds. "It's not ideal for fine drawings really.

"I would use mostly black ink. Later on I put some white acrylic paint and overworked with that, to make different colours - kind of a sepia effect. My work isn't very colourful, it's mostly monochromatic, perhaps with some red or green. The airbrush is great for that. But I stopped using it as a tool in 1992.”

Although he says he's aware of digital technology and the use of computers to create art, it's not something he's interested in pursuing - especially after his retirement. "I'm too lazy to learn that!" he laughs. "If someone shows me something then I'm fine with it, but I'm not familiar with computers at all. If I was younger then I would probably learn how to do it."
trains - castles, skulls, mummies, "and all that mystery stuff. I couldn't find many images about that so I had to do it myself. That's how I started. I didn't think it would ever really be important to other people..."

**EROTIC ELEMENTS**

But what about the erotic element in his work? Many images feature subtle (and often decidedly unsubtle) depictions of various human body parts, entwined in peculiar ways. He appears to ignore the question entirely: The strongest thing in my work, I think, is the claustrophobic stuff. I still sometimes have shitty dreams with that in... being inside rooms that are like graves, a stone grave, a tomb. And I always think in the dream, 'Oh my god, why am I here?'" He laughs. "Claustrophobic things are terrible. I used to think all that was finished but it's still here. That's more important to me than the erotic stuff."

He adds that it was "never in my mind" to try to shock people with that sort of imagery. "I like my work very much and

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"I sometimes have claustrophobic dreams, being inside rooms like graves, a tomb, and I think why am I here?"

I'm free to realise my dreams, all these childish dreams. Everyone has the freedom to think what they want about them."

**ALIEN AUDIENCE**

It was Giger's design work for Alien, of course, that really brought him to the attention of a worldwide audience, and he's still proud of his collaboration with director Ridley Scott. Much to his regret, he missed the opportunity to work on Aliens due to his commitments with the film Poltergeist II, and other film collaborations such as Species didn't fare so well.

Perhaps having been somewhat spoilt with the level of hands-on enthusiasm that Ridley - a trained artist - brought to the concept design process, Giger found his ideas being diluted and changed in subsequent films. In any case, he has no plans to work in film again - at least, not other people's films.

"When I worked on Alien, I was in Shepperton Studios for about seven months," he explains. "If you want to do something really good, something effective, then you have to travel and work with the people making the film. If you work long-distance, it's really not possible
THE SKULL BENEATH THE SKIN

“When I was a kid, there was a mummy in the museum in Chur that fascinated me,” Giger reminisces. “It wasn’t in a very good state - there wasn’t much flesh, so the bony structure seemed stronger. It fascinated me... the skull is a very important thing for me.”

Giger describes with similar enthusiasm a recent museum exhibition in Zurich, an exact reproduction of Tutankhamen’s grave. “Everything was reproduced to the last detail,” he says.

Perhaps inspired by the exhibition, he talks excitedly about a “Giger urn” he has been creating - a stylised version of the sort of thing that stores cremated ashes. “He looks a little bit like the little man in the bowling centre, what do you call it? The pin. I don’t know which material it should be though - maybe aluminium, maybe polystyrene.

“You close it by turning the top, like a skull. You turn the head to open it. The eyes go right the way around the urn, and also the eyeglasses and the nose, so you have seven noses and seven glasses and so on. And a bunch of teeth.”

PROTOTYPE URN
One of Giger’s latest creations, a stylised urn for holding the ashes of the cremated.

“If you want to do something really good, something effective, you have to travel and work with the film makers to get a good result. I realised that and so it’s not for me any more.”

SEEDS OF MEMORY

The same, it seems, applies to video games. In 1992, he collaborated on an adventure game called Dark Seed, which sported unmistakeably and very impressive (for the time) Gigeresque graphics. It’s intriguing to think of how his visions could be interpreted with today’s graphic capabilities, we suggest. But Giger isn’t interested, and indeed doesn’t seem to remember much about Dark Seed at all.

“I didn’t have much to do with that,” he claims. “That was done without my real involvement, they just used my name. I didn’t create any new stuff for it. I wasn’t very pleased with that...”

Giger has said he was “painfully shy” as a boy, and in some senses that still appears to be true. He does what he does because he’s fascinated by his subjects and enjoys creating them. “I’m sorry I can’t say much about my work... it’s somehow very simple,” he apologises endearingly. “I can’t invent new stuff. What I’m saying to you I’ve said already, a long time ago. I’m sorry, you’re probably a little bit disappointed...”

“It probably goes without saying, but nothing could be further from the truth.”
BIOMECHANICAL RIFFS

Electric guitar manufacturer Ibanez asked Giger for a licence to reproduce his artwork across a new line of guitars.
From tattoo art to interior design, the artwork of HR Giger exhibits a lasting influence to this day.

As Ruedi Giger’s influence as an artist spans far beyond that of his peers. His dark, otherworldly creations stretch further than the cinematic platforms of Alien, Poltergeist II and Species, penetrating popular culture like no other sci-fi artist past or present.

Giger’s visions have become totemic in their cultural influence, adopted by fetishists, occultists and swathes of hard-rock and alternative-culture tribes.

From tattoo artistry and motorcycle paint jobs to custom guitars and even interior decoration, Giger’s distinctive style has transcended sci-fi art to become...
emblematic of his legacy as an artist. Giger himself has encouraged and often guided the infusion of his style into contemporary design and more widespread culture. He is, after all, an artist whose work spans mediums including jewellery, sculpture and product design.

Take, for example, his necklaces, rings and pendants - all of which are available from the official Giger webstore. There's a sense of commercialisation to Giger's work, but it stems from the artist himself.

"Giger is an artist who creates these pieces of design," says Giger fan and collector Richard Fursdon, whose love of the artist has so far cost upwards of £5,000 in memorabilia and artwork. "No matter what it is he makes, it has the Giger feel to it, and that's what makes his work so collectable. Each piece you can buy [from the website] is an original Giger design - unlike the piles of crap you get on eBay pretending to be Giger originals. He makes chairs because he wants to see and feel his internal visions..."

"He makes chairs because he wants to see and feel his internal visions..."

ROCK ACTION
Giger's influence has led to many commissions from those outside of sci-fi and fantasy art, who appreciate the Giger-esque for its style rather than its legacy.

When the crossover rock band Korn broke into the mainstream in 2000, lead singer Jonathan Davis commissioned Giger to produce a custom-built microphone stand for the band. The resulting design mixed Giger's trademark biomechanics, surrealism and hyper-sexual female forms.

According to Jonathan - quoted on Giger's website - the singer had always been a Giger fan and after sending him some Korn albums was elated that the artist accepted his commission. "I've always liked the dark, vile, biomechanical stuff he creates, but then I got into the erotic side of his art," said Jonathan. "All I did was ask him to make a functional piece of art. So later, he sent me a bunch of drawings and I approved the design of this really sexy, vile, mechanical creature."

Through this exposure, Giger's popularity grew with fans of the band, and guitar manufacturer Ibanez asked the artist for a licence to reproduce his artwork across a line of their guitars.

The popularity of the range came about precisely because of nu-metal bands such as Korn, POD and Slipknot, according to Ibanez, who admit that such bands broke into the mainstream at the same time, playing a similar sort of music and referencing the same artwork. Giger was clearly a big influence on them all.

TATTOO YOU
While Giger's work gained popularity through the nu-metal bands of the early part of the decade, these influences in turn were picked up by tattoo artists and fans.

"People often come in, point at a piece of artwork for reference, and don't even know it's a Giger hanging on the wall," says Florida-based tattooist Mike 'Pooch' Kib, tattoo artist at VampireFreaks.com.
MAN MEETS MACHINE

Barringer Fox Wingard III's work is heavily influenced by Giger's dark compositional style.

SURREAL SEATING

Giger's visionary work has also extended into the realm of furniture design. These chairs feature in the Giger Museum.

LEVI'S JEANS

Even the world's most pre-eminent denim name craved the Giger look for one of its adverts. Pucciarelli. “Everyone knows Alien, but not everyone knows that that style of work - that dark, metallic and sexual look - is pure Giger. They'll say they want a skull and point one out from our books or whatever and it'll be a mechanoid head from Giger.”

A SECURE LEGACY

Mike believes Giger's style is popular among hard-rock and tattoo fans because it's dark without being clichéd, and presents a style that hard-rock counter-culture naturally gravitates towards. But an artist in any other trade, leaving such a cultural legacy, would be far more widely celebrated. Giger isn't in the Museum of Modern Art, has never been feted with touring exhibitions or lecture series, yet his influence is as perceivable as that of Warhol or any number of popular modern artists.

But Giger's legacy as an artist is certainly safe - and not just due to his groundbreaking Alien work. His style has permeated mainstream culture, from Levi's ads to record artwork, and been assimilated by tattoo artists and interior designers. What's more, his reputation is ever-growing, as those he influences in turn inspire the next generation of artists and designers (see Barringer Fox Wingard III's mini-interview, left). Giger's legacy is so much more than facehuggers and biomechanoids; it's a legacy that redefined and then came to stand for contemporary surreal art.

ALIENS EVERYWHERE

Cover artist Barringer Fox Wingard III, aka Bif, reveals the influence Giger has had on his artwork.

"When I saw Alien, I was hooked. I drew Giger's aliens everywhere, from drawing pads to schoolbooks, even on a wall or two... All kids my age were a fan of Alien, which clearly shows what this man has accomplished.

In many regards, HR Giger created dark, and erotic fantastic art. Much of the sci-fi art you see today reflects imagery from his paintings, whether directly, or simply the moody, sensual feelings that his work projects on the viewer. Giger has a way of bringing you into his world. For better or worse, appalling or alluring, there is always a connection with the viewer.

I've always leaned towards the dark and creepy, and HR Giger has had a big influence on my creative path. I'm a fan of biomechanical engineering in character design, and Giger leads the way with his melding of bodies and environments.

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