Robert Hunter talks animating his magical storybook style for a spaced out music video

The promo for Emerald Rush sees the illustrator and children's author bring his surreal and nocturnal voyages to life.

Rob Hunter – or Robert Frank Hunter, if you will – is a creature of the night.

Across sleepy storybooks like *Land of Nod*, luminescent book covers for Pushkin Press and London-centric adverts for the Night Tube and firework festivals, Robert's work often comes under the cover of darkness.

His work also tends to follow characters on excursions into otherworldly locations, whether illustrating narratives by others or ones of his own like *Map of Days*. Picture books are usually where one sees this in action, but a music video from last year saw Robert's world come to life in new ways.

We first enjoyed the promo for Jon Hopkins track *Emerald Rush* on its release last year, but a breakdown of the video just recently posted to Robert's Behance reminded us of its brilliant animation (and how the Hopkins LP *Singularity* was one of our favourite electronic albums from 2018).

But how was it for the artist to not only move into animation but the world of music promos? Turns out, not too dauntingly; Robert had previously animated the titular New Ghost from one of his storybooks for teasers made for the Hopkins EP *Asleep Versions.*

"When I did the *Asleep Versions* trailer it was just myself and 2D animator Sean Weston working on it," Rob explains by email. "I created all the artwork and composited it but it was a much

shorter and simpler project. *Emerald Rush* though needed a bigger team of 2D animators to help get all the shots done in the 10 week schedule."

"(It still) had a relatively low budget though, so I had a few roles on the video," he continues. "Primarily I was the director for *Emerald Rush* along with Elliot Dear. I also designed it, created all background artwork, filmed the practical effects with Elliot and composited a few of the shots."

[embedded content]

"In illustration, I have always been attracted to artwork that has a drawn or printed quality to it," Rob says on the difference between animating and illustrating.

"The great thing about animation is I can approach it as if I'm creating a world with depth and atmosphere rather than a 'moving print' if that makes sense. More like imagining that there is a camera in that illustrated world instead of having a drawing that moves a bit.

"It gives me a chance to adapt my work in a more cinematic way. I'm able to make use of focus, camera moves, lens flares, grain and all that good stuff that excites me about film making."

Covers from around the world for *The New Ghost*

The video for *Emerald Rush* follows a young adult who crosses over from an enchanted Ghibli-esque forest onto a voyage of the stars, illuminated by strobe effects that wouldn't look out of place on the *Doctor Who* title sequence. The trippy voyage makes one wonder where inspiration for the concept came from, and whether Robert sees the animation as continuation of his pet themes and visuals.

"The concept was a collaboration between Jon Hopkins, Elliot

Dear and myself,” Rob responds.

“Jon likes to be involved in the process and often has a few starting points. He likes to describe the sort of feeling he is going for in a particular track. Alongside that, Elliot and I had our own reactions to the music and began to individually compile folders of reference imagery.

Sketches for the video

“Elliot and I have fairly similar tastes so it didn’t take us long to arrive at a good place that Jon was also on board with.”

“I didn’t intentionally think of the work being a continuation of any of my previous work,” Rob continues, “but I guess that naturally happens when I’ve drawn the majority of the artwork.

“I think that the short deadline probably added to that notion, too. I had about three and a half weeks to draw roughly fifty backgrounds alongside all the animation draw overs and direction. So I probably got into a natural groove with it, giving it some consistency with my previous work.”

As mentioned, that previous work is steeped in darkness, imbued with dusky lights and twilight blues.

“Maybe the attraction of night or sunset is probably to do with colours,” Rob says after admitting he hadn’t really noticed his predilection for the night before.

“Avoiding midday means I can have a more dramatic backdrop of colour, or I can add nice details like stars and constellations.

Page from Robert Hunter's *Map of Days*
"I'd like to think that I set the artwork at whatever time of day is most appropriate for the project but I can't deny that I find night a little more intriguing."

What advice does he have for fellow artists interested in capturing the character of the night time hours?

"It's hard to say really," he admits. "The look of my more nocturnal images is based on my own perception of that time and atmosphere. I hope that there is enough real-life observation informing the artwork to make people get what I'm trying to convey.

"My advice would be – and it's something you can never do enough of – is observational drawing or even creating colour

pallets from things you have observed. If you have noticed it and can represent the essence of it, there is a good chance someone viewing your work will be able to connect to it.”

Page from Robert Hunter’s *Land of Nod*

To create the otherworldly nighttime visuals seen on *Emerald Rush*, Rob borrowed a Wacom Cintiq digital drawing board, something he found great delight in using.

“It seems like the perfect tool for me because I used to make my books by doing black and white drawings on an old fashioned drawing board. Then I’d scan the drawings and colour them in photoshop. So, the Cintiq would be both sides of that process in the same action.”

“At the moment I have been primarily using Wacom tablets. It’s

a peculiar way of drawing because you are looking away from your hand whilst drawing which isn’t very intuitive and takes a little while to get used to.”

Page showing illustrations by Rob for *Young Colossus*

Page showing illustrations by Rob for *The Jungle Book*
For 2019, Rob will be using his tools to primarily concentrate on personal projects, having felt last year was too much taken with commercial work.

“I’m trying to get back to doing my own thing,” he says. “I have been slowly planning a new graphic novel for a while so I may try and finish the outline for that and try to find out if a publisher is interested in making it with me.”

His plans to get back to his own passions also chimes with his desire to escape his current surroundings, much like one of his wandering characters.

“London is a great place to live and it definitely inspires me with the plethora of museums and galleries,” Rob says about

his home city. “A good and bad thing about London is that there is more of everything all at once; people, buildings, music, art, cuisines. You’re able to observe a huge variety of most things here, but that in itself can be quite overwhelming and intense.

London-centric commercial work by Robert Hunter
“There are moments where I fantasise about living in a barn in the countryside.”

Retreating to the woods, then, the place where all the drama begins in *Emerald Rush* – and where it ends, too, our hero back from space and returned amongst its trees and mysterious bugs.

Another creature of the night, at large.

https://www.digitalartsonline.co.uk/features/motion-graphics/rob-hunter-talks-animating-his-magical-storybook-style-for-spacey-jon-hopkins-music-video/