



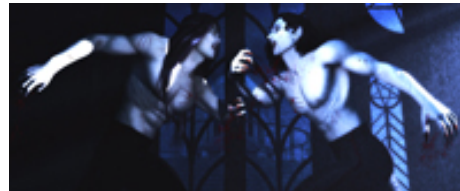
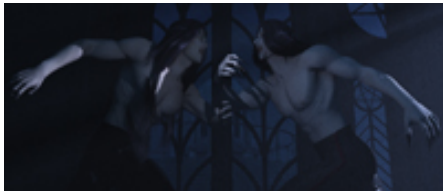
Seedydeedee's 10 Top Tips for 3D Renders

This is intended for artists within the Poser / Daz community, and others who use premade models to make character-based artwork. It's essentially a list of commonly seen pitfalls that I've managed to fall foul of myself over the past few years. I hope that by flagging them up and suggesting ways of getting around / away from them, it might help others manage to avoid them.

So you've finished your picture. Your character(s) and scenery are posed, lit and rendered. You look at the final render and think about posting it. Before you do, consider the following:

1. The thumbnail rule of thumb

Zoom right out from your image until it's the size of the thumbnail you'll probably see displayed on the web. Can you tell what it is? Does it draw your eye? If the answer is 'no' to both of these, you need to do some work! Either: re-render so that you have better composition, or use postwork to bring some focus to the picture and draw the viewers' attention. We all look at hundreds of thumbnails in passing when we're browsing galleries. If yours doesn't catch your own eye, chances are it'll be overlooked.



2. Gurning – less is more!

Is your character a gurner, or does he/she look like they've been botoxed? There's a fine line to be drawn when displaying expressions using popular premade 3D models. Too little and you end up with a dull figure that has no expression and draws no empathy from your viewers; too much and you have a proper gurner (do an image search for 'gurning' if you don't know what I mean!). It's very easy to overdo the expressions until they look over-the-top. Look at magazines and photos for reference, and try to get your expression as close as possible to the real thing. Use small nuances of expression as well as body language and scene setting to convey your characters' moods. You can also use Photoshop's liquify tool to make minor adjustments to expression when your render is done, which can work very well – when used in moderation!

3. Don't let the products grind you down!

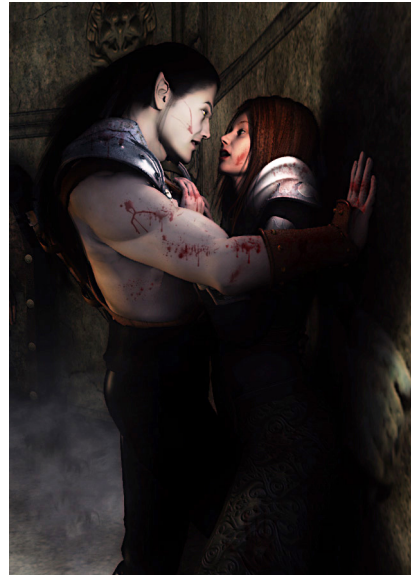
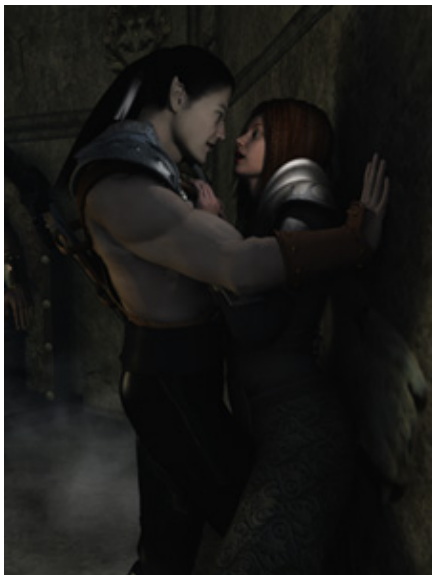
Are you just about to post render number 21 of the latest fantasy outfit? Let's face it, unless you model your own clothing and props, you're stuck with using the same finite set of clothing, armour and props as all the rest of us. You're a creative individual – otherwise

you wouldn't be making and posting artwork! Use your own imagination and inspiration to decide what you want to visualise, then use the items you've downloaded – in unusual combinations if necessary – to bring that vision to life. Don't let the latest item dictate your next piece of artwork - make something unique, and stand out from the other twenty renders of the same product.

4. Lighting! Camera! ... Lighting again!

Look at your render (and the thumbnail). Do you have a dark figure against a dark background? Is the picture muddy-looking and unclear? Is it hard to work out what's going on? Is there enough contrast? Some 3D renders can suffer from being too dimly lit - the effect is similar to a photo that's been taken in a dim room without a flash. Make them pop! Go back and re-render with better lighting, or adjust the brightness and contrast in your image editor.

Don't be afraid to fake lighting to bring your characters' faces into focus if necessary. Add a small point light close to your figures' faces, reduce the brightness, and enable soft shadows if your software allows.



5. Does my scene look like I took a picture of some plastic dolls?

One of the main problems with standard lighting and basic render engines is that they have a tendency to give a very plasticky appearance. Even if you don't have the skills to create softer lighting, problems like these can easily be fixed with postwork. Look for that tell-tale shine that normal skin, fur and fabric items just don't have. You can fix this by painting over the shine in your image editor with a nearby colour using an airbrush / blending tools. Or, just remove the specular lighting on the item in your 3D application, or change it from white to something dark.



6. Welcome to the Realm of Shadows...

We live in one. Honest. Our world has shadows cast by objects placed in the path of light. If your figure and scenery cast no shadows, they aren't going to look real, which is a particular problem if you've rendered over a background image rather than within a 3D scene with real props. Some render engines don't even render shadows by default - you have to adjust the settings in order to get them. Characters can look like they're floating, which, unless they're actually levitating, is not good. Basic rule: look at your character's feet, or whatever part of your character is in contact with the floor / object they're perched on. Is there a shadow coming away from them / spreading out from them? No? Render again with shadows, or paint some in!



7. Feel that texture, baby!

Your scene has great lighting, strong composition and a cracking theme, but there's something letting it down...only you can't quite put your finger on it. Chances are it's a lack of texturing. Many models come ready supplied with basic textures that don't have bump or displacement maps, or even if they do, some software doesn't render them all that well, so you end up with a very smooth looking figure that might look pretty, but not very realistic. Either fiddle around with bump / displacement maps within the 3D software itself (which can give some interesting and unique results), or add some texturing in with postwork by overlaying pictures of stone / leather / smoke at low opacity, trying out different blending styles, and erasing the bits you don't want.

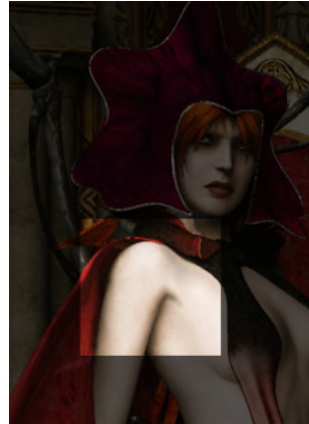
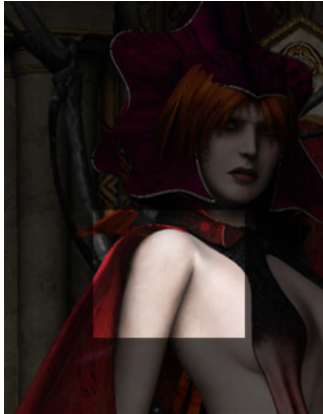
8. What's your Point of View?

You have a powerful virtual camera in your hands that moves up and down and in and out as well as side to side – not to mention the variety of lenses! Zoom in to capture that area of interest on your subject – you might find a close up gives a much more powerful impression than a zoomed out shot that shows bits that aren't important. Or, for example, take a shot from above to convey helplessness, or from the floor at your character's feet to make them seem more imposing. Little modifications like these can really help you convey the mood of the piece, and make a refreshing change from another flat, head-on shot.

9. Fancy a Joint?

This refers mainly to the primary Daz figures (Mike and Vicky), but most premade 3D figures have some sort of issue or other with shoulder joints. If your figure has bare shoulders, look at the joints when you've finished posing. Does this look like a human shoulder? Try and find a picture of a real arm in the same position, or look at your own in the mirror, and you'll very likely find that no, it doesn't look anything like a real shoulder.

Paint over it in your image editor, or consider using a point of view that doesn't show it off to such an extent, because something really small like this can potentially ruin an otherwise perfect picture.



10. All the time in the world

You're ready to post your artwork. Go away and have a cup of tea (/coffee/hot chocolate/gin). No-one's going anywhere. Come back and look at your picture. Have you spotted a mistake? A wing passing through a wall, perhaps? A foot poking through a shoe? Or perhaps in your brief break you've decided that your warrior princess would look better if she were accompanied by a herd of punk centaurs, or had a blue bouffant, or (heaven forbid) practical armour. Try it out. It might mean reworking your picture, but if at the end of it you have a piece of artwork that makes you sit back, cross your arms and nod in satisfaction, then it's all been worth it, no matter what the critics say. :)

May your wellspring of creativity continue to flow until you need waterwings.

Deedee, Sep '09

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