Conversation with Fantasy Artist Stephanie Law

Cory: Hey there everybody, this is Cory Huff with The Abundant Artist, and I am here with the amazing inimitable Stephanie Law who I- okay I'll just read her official bio and then I'll talk for a second. So Stephanie Law started her career with fantasy gaming companies. She's done work for games like Magic the Gathering, White Wolf Changeling, Legend of the Five Rings and a whole bunch of others. She's done a variety of illustration licensing deals, has a series of books called Dreamscapes, published on watercolor technique, and exhibits original works in Seattle, New York, Los Angeles and other places. You can learn more about her at shadowscapes.com, that's her website. So before I have, we say hi and we get into questions and stuff Stephanie, I wanted to say to everybody like, sometimes when I do these interviews I know the artist in advance and I followed them for a long time, sometimes I don't know them, and sometimes I've been following their work without knowing it for years. And Stephanie is one of those artists. I started playing Magic the Gathering when I was in eighth grade, so that was- that was the alpha release, the very first release, and when I started looking at your work and started seeing what you had done early in your career I was like oh my gosh, I have owned several of your cards. I played Changeling, like there are very few people I think that have played Changeling but I've played Changeling, I played Legend of the Five Rings with my gaming buddies.

Stephanie: Yeah I really liked doing the Changeling pieces, those are some of the early ones where I was starting to get a feel of what I was enjoying doing, and having publishers that were seeking me out for the type of work that I liked doing and that was really fun for me.

Cory: Yeah so I am super excited to have you here, because I'm a longtime fan and I didn't know it until we scheduled the interview. So I am super excited to talk to you. So obviously you create fantasy art. I think you mentioned that you're a gamer. Yeah?

Stephanie: I am. Yes. A bit more in spirit. Not always in action.

Cory: Well life gets a little busy the older you get and the more successful you get. But are there any games that you've played recently that you are enjoying or have enjoyed recently?

Stephanie: Lately it's mostly online multiplayer games, it's one of the things that my husband and I do to relax and hang out. Rather than going to the movie theater we like to just pick a game and then just play stuff together. So it's kind of a fun thing that we've done ever since we were dating way back.

Cory: Nice.

Stephanie: But lately I guess I've been playing Planet of Exile, but there's not been a whole lot of others. My personality type is such that I engage in one thing all the way, I really get sucked into things. It's kind of an addictive personality which works to my favor when it comes to art, I mean you know because I start projects and it's hard for me to set them

aside and let go and move onto something else until I've finished it. It's a really good trait to have when you're working with publishers and art directors who want you to just finish stuff and they're amazed when I get stuff to them ahead of time because that's the way I was. And it won't work on my own projects though, because I get really involved in something and then I want to see it to completion. So these are kind of the two sides of it and it appears when I'm gaming as well. So I have to be really careful about that and really careful about what I'm going to invest my time into because I know that once I start on something I'm going all the way.

Cory: I totally get that. Like the first time I ever played World of Warcraft-

Stephanie: Oh yeah, that took up years of my life.

Cory: I was at a friend's house and it was actually a friend of a friend's house, it was someone I didn't know very well, and we were sitting around talking and somebody was like "Cory's never played World of Warcraft," and I was like what? And they were like "What! No, you gotta come play." So they let me log into his computer as a guest and was like "just play however long you'd like." And I was like cool! And I did like one quest and I was like oh, that probably took an hour. And I came out of the bedroom and everybody was like did you have a good time? And like four hours had gone by.

Stephanie: Yeah, the first time I played it, I was friends with a guy who worked at Blizzard and he had just- he knew I liked games so he gave me a copy of the game when it came out, and I was like okay, I don't have time for this, I set it aside for months just sitting there. And then one day my husband- at the time he was my boyfriend, he's like let's give this thing a try, let's try it out! So we installed it, and I remember the first ten minutes I couldn't stop like, I couldn't' turn the camera up from looking at my feet. I was like I hate this thing! This thing is so stupid! I'm done with it! And he was like no, do this. And then from there it was years before I was doing anything else.

Cory: That's awesome. So I just recently took a trip to Ireland, and I went way down this rabbit hole of tradition and the Ogham stones which are these vestiges of old ancient Irish language, and there's not any original versions of the language left other than these simplistic stones. And you mentioned that a lot of your work comes from this, these mythical figures or oral traditions that are not written down. Are there any favorite examples of that for you that have inspired your work?

Stephanie: Well most of what I've drawn from is from things that I've found written. Some of them have been stories that were told to me by my grandmother when I was growing up, I remember, but a lot of what I've researched on my own because of the nature of things now is it is written, it's in books and things that I would find in used bookstores. Much of mythology and folklore stems from these oral traditions, they come from a time that predates writing, predates a time when people were, when not everyone could read or write. So the only way to access to these stories in those times to have someone tell it to you, to be sitting around and someone would be talking and telling you stories. And as a result these stories are all things that resonate with people across all cultures. You find the same themes, the same kinds of characters, the same images and goals within

these stories that are all over the world. And various cultures. And it's because these were all tales that resonated with people. You don't remember just some random little story if it doesn't echo with something inside you, right? So the long, the ability of these tales to have lasted and to endured through so much time and retelling is a testament to their meaning and what they have within them. So as a result, what I find really interesting is that if you draw from these sources you are tapping into something that is a bit of a universal language in a pictorial sense. These are all images and concepts that people are aware of on a subconscious level because it's something that we all have in common and that we have experienced in the stories and tales that we have heard, that we have read, we have seen. And this gives a- an interesting point in order to find a way of speaking to your audience. And accessing them on a level of symbols and imagery. And so that's the thing that I really find interesting about tapping into mythology and folklore as an artistic inspiration.

Cory: Yeah, there's so many layers to it. Looking at these Ogham traditions from Ireland, like this really simplistic alphabet that is basically just made up of simple slashes in stone, then when you start digging into the oral traditions that are written down now, like those alphabets all correspond to other natural phenomena in the world, and then there's a gesture or finger spelling component that accompanies the alphabet, and then all of the storytellers, the bards that come from Irish lore, they have memorized like a hundred different ways of writing the alphabets, so there's all like I can see why you would find so much inspiration for your work.

Stephanie: Yeah, and you can see these things and listen to them and find a point of contact and a resonance to yourself in your present-day from something that is so ancient. It's just this incredible thing, this incredible thread that links us through time.

Cory: Yeah. So how did you- how did you even first encounter that? Like how did you start finding oral traditions, or getting into it?

Stephanie: Well, when I was a kid there weren't so many books, there wasn't so much of this young adult YA fiction section hat had so much fantasy and magical elements to it, right? So if you're a kid at that time and you wanted and you craved that, you really wanted that, the only place that I could find it was when I realized that there were these kinds of stories in the mythological, the mythology section at the library. And I started, I started to delve into these books and read these, and I was just really drawn to them. The first introduction to that for most kids is Greek mythology, that's kind of where you get put down that path and then you realize there's this whole world of mythology and stories that have these element that you're looking for and you're craving, maybe for the same reason that people started telling them in the first place. Wanting to have these heroic characters or these stories that explain the phenomena of the world and the things around us. And as a child finding these, it was sort of this portal into a whole other world. And then as I matured I remember taking some folklore classes in college, and sort of delving down this avenue as well and really understanding you know, how these stem from oral traditions and from people's desires to really understand their place in the world, and all these unexplained elements that the celestial elements as well as the

	things around us in the world. And how these stories are ways of explaining that and addressing those elements.
	I remember going to all these used bookstores in you know, the early nineties, and diving through the stacks and finding just trying to find these older books and these things that would tell stories that I hadn't seen or hadn't heard of before. And it was just something that I loved doing.
Cory:	Yeah. I went to the Trinity College Library and I saw the Book of Kells. Which for those who don't know is this, oh my gosh. It's unbelievable. It is this book that is an illustrated copy of the four gospels from the New Testament, written in roughly 800 A.D. and then in the library you know, on top of like the Book of Kells being there, they have literally like a hundred thousand books that are a hundred years old or more. So there's so much to be found by digging through that history.
Stephanie:	The Book of Kells was an enormous visual inspiration to me, I remember first seeing it in art history classes and just being utterly fascinated by what was a visual, a meditation visual form is what all the art pieces in it are, these pages that are just so incredibly intricate, and it's mind blowing that these monks would sit there and draw and paint these without the use of any digital aid that we have now that helps simplify, but even then, even now even if you used the digital aid to create something like it it's incredibly hard to do. To imagine someone having done that with no other aid except for rulers and pencils. It's mind blowing. But the art, the pages in the Book of Kells art is just so incredible, and it's one of the things that really inspired me from the first moment I saw it.
Cory:	I was like, oh I'll pop into this exhibit real quick for like twenty or thirty minutes in here. I was there for like three hours.
Stephanie:	Yeah you get sucked into that meditation. When they were creating it their mind was in this space probably, where that's all they see and that's all they're thinking of and it's a prayer in visual form and you sort of take that in and see it when you look at that and you experience it as well.
Cory:	Yeah, a prayer in visual form. That's a great way to put it. It's really beautiful. I want to talk about something else from early in your career- in a couple of interviews you mention that UC Berkeley didn't want you to get an art degree. That you- what was the quote you said? You mentioned that the computer science and art department gave scathing retorts at the prospect of any kind of combination.
Stephanie:	I have bitterness there.
Cory:	What happened? Because this is a theme that I hear from a surprising number of artists, like we had Jolie Guillebeau on a couple years ago, and she's good at academics so her high school and college teachers would not let her like take art classes and major in art. So it happens, like this happens a lot. So tell me a little bit about what happened there.

Stephanie: So this was back in 1994-98, first of all. So the internet has really changed the landscape for artists. It's really opened a lot of opportunities, and made what was mostly inconceivable very within reach for many artists now. It's lowered the bar of entry and it's removed a lot of the gatekeepers from access to art as a career in various forms. And so I was told throughout high school when I went to the career adviser, I remember they made us take those personality tests, you know ENTPINTJ, whatever. Meyers- Briggs it's called I think? They made us do that, and then at the end it would filter you down into these boxes with various career choices. And surprising no one, mine ended up as artist and when I went to talk to my career advisor after, cause they would talk to each kid after we filled out our survey, and she took one look at it and I remember her shaking her head and said "you should pick something else." Which- my jaw just kind of dropped, and I was like "but you just made me take this big long test that says I should be an artist and now you're telling me that what my personality has dictated says I should pick something else because it's just not gonna work out, it's not conceivable," she says "yeah because the majority of artists are below poverty level so you should really pick something else." And so I had this you know, going forward, and so I enjoy working with computers. There is an element of my mind that is very methodical, and so working with programming is something that actually does appeal to me. Not as much as art, but it is a part of my personality as well. It's probably a part of that addictive element that I mentioned earlier in that drive to see things to completion when I have code in front of me that doesn't quite work, I really have to work at it as a puzzle and solve that puzzle. So there's that element within me, and so when I went to college I went as computer science, because this was I guess the second most interesting thing to me. And I started to take art classes on the side because I couldn't imagine not doing that and it ended up that I took so many art classes that eventually I had enough for a major in that as well, and so I decided to do a double major even though at this point I was firmly believing that computer science was my career and that there wasn't any possible route with art.

But as I started doing more, I started thinking well what If there's a way for me to meld the two, if there's some sort of compromise that I could create within using both computers and art? And in college half of the computer science people studying computer science, they all wanted to be working in game companies, you know you have a bunch of computer nerds and everyone's like yeah we want to work in games so it was sort of a natural place for me to start looking as well initially, because I was thinking well I could do art and computers, then maybe I could make these both halves of me happen and I could find some sort of happiness with that. And there was opportunity to create some sort of independent study classes of your own, if you could design them within the computer science department, and I attempted to craft something and I talked to them about it, but they were not very supportive of it as an idea. They told me you know why don't just do the computer science side, they told me just do computers because it's much better. You know, you shouldn't even bother trying to work art into it because that's not going to go anywhere and the art side, because this was pre 1998, digital really was not in the picture for most people, and it was seen as just the computer doing stuff. And even now I've had conversations sometimes

where if I use any sort of digital element, people ask me "oh so there's a button that you push and then something happens, or you just type in you type in "bee" and suddenly a bee happens?" I'm like no this is not how it works.

Cory: What do people think computers do?!

Stephanie: It's a tool, like anything else, it's just like a paintbrush except it's on a screen and you have a stylus instead. But at that time this mentality was even more so, people just really didn't understand how computers could fit in. And honestly, you know at the time I was, when I first started out I was using Windows Paint. So. That belief is, that incomprehension of how computers can actually fit into create art has some validity. I started using Photoshop 1 at that point as well, in fact I was on Design Painter, which was the original name of Painter I think now it's called. But yeah, Photoshop 1.0 came out then and I started using that, and I was really excited about the prospects for it, which was why I started having these ideas about maybe finding some way to meld things. But they were not interested in that. And I struggled to fit in with the art department as well, because my own inclination was for a much more illustrative style. And the program at Berkeley, because I was not seeking Berkeley initially for the art, I was seeking it out for the computer science program, and art was basically what they had on offer, whatever they offered, that was what I was able to do and take. So if I had been seeking a school specifically for my art, I would have sought out something that had much more of an illustration program. As it was, Berkeley's program is very fine-art oriented, and they were uninterested in a lot of what I loved to create and so I had to reshape myself during those four years of taking art classes. And I look on it as a good thing though, because it was a chance to broaden my own scope and to really explore beyond what my own instincts wanted me to do in terms of creativity. And expanding my horizons on that front, because I'm very much inclined to zero in on very fine details and get completely absorbed in that, and in a more realistic depiction of things, whereas the program there was more about you know, take a bucket of paint and throw it out the window and see what happens on the splatter down below two floors down. So it was very much the opposite end of the spectrum as far as my comfort level in terms of creating.

But I look on it as a really good thing, because it allowed me to explore those elements and actually, these days when I'm creating I find that I'm constantly trying to find this balance point between my own desire to really just clench up and tighten on the details and to focus on something to a point where sometimes you lose the art of it, right? And then this other side of me which is just throw that bucket out the window and see what happens. And I have this balance now where I 'm constantly trying to use the chaos of randomness that paint and my various mediums create on my canvas on my paper, and finding my own sort of order, my own sense of order of that and finding beauty in that chaos and that creation process. So it's something that I really tie back to that time and those years of exploring and really trying to push outside of my comfort level and what I thought I wanted to create. Having someone else say well no, create something now that you enjoy but don't use any of the methods or the ways of approaching it that you would normally do. So while at the time it was frustrating, frequently, and also had to

fight to make my way into the department, a department where for the most part they accepted anyone who applied into the major, but for some reason initially I was rejected because I was too representational and I had to argue and fight my way into it, and they did allow me in eventually.

Cory: That's so interesting. Yeah.

Stephanie: Like I said, the program initially was, if I had been thinking at the time of seeking art as a career, this would not have been the type of program that I would have sought out, because it was not on that in that time period, and on the surface suitable for what I wanted to do and what I wanted to create. But like I said, on the other hand it did broaden my horizons because if I had chosen what I wanted to do then I would have just locked myself into this path and not even explored these other options. So I look on it all as beneficial overall. And even the computer science, when people ask me like do you regret that you spent 4 years studying programming and then two years actually working in software, I can't really look on that with regret either, because that time period positioned me ideally with the right skill set and the right knowledge to be able to really launch my art on a platform that most artists weren't even aware existed yet as the you know the internet was just starting out, and this was the dot com era, and the dot com stuff was just as big for artists as it was for everyone else, for pet food and groceries and everything else, you know? And because there was no other artists or very few artists that were online, the only other artists that I knew from that time period that had websites with an online store were basically artists like me that had shifted over from another career or those who had spouses that were working in computers or tech, and gave them access to the internet in that way. So there were not very many of us doing that yet, so being in this position was really vital to an early launch of my career. And to make something possible that prior to then as far as all these career advisors are concerned was completely impossible.

Cory: Alright, cool. So you've had this career since you know after you figured out college and graduated and transitioned into being an artist, like you've done all this work for fantasy gaming companies, you show original work, you sell prints, you make all kinds of stuff. And you've done everything from like digital art to oil, watercolor, a bunch of different types of stuff. One thing that you have also leaned on- you haven't just like, you've leaned on your audience I guess is the way to say it, because you've done these crowdfunding campaigns that have raised like a couple hundred thousand dollars for your work. And then to the point that you've even created a Kickstarter training program. So tell me about you approached your crowdfunding campaign and why you decided to create a crowdfunding guide.

Stephanie: So I have been self-publishing and pushing my work out there from the beginning. I've been doing it pre-crowdfunding, I've actually put out about three major art books and then a few minor little sketch book, another three sketch book books as well over the years. And this was all well before Kickstarter and IndieGoGo and these other opportunities came around, and in those times, if you wanted to put out a book, if you wanted to publish a book yourself you had to shell out money ahead of time and you

had to be confident enough of your salability that you could sell your thousand-plus copies that you had printed and sitting around now. So it was a lot more risk involved for the artist, self-publisher in that setting. But I would do pre-sales and I would do other things to offset things, but still you still have to have that initial confidence that you were gonna be able to sell your work, because the last thing you want is a garage full of books that nobody wants to take off your hands. So I had done that for a while, and I think by the time I got the third art book, people had been sort of talking about Kickstarter and I heard about it from a few other artists who had given it a shot and tried it and been successful, and so I decided that maybe you know with my next one it might be an option that I should try. Cause prior to that, I'd heard about it before, but it didn't make sense to me initially, because I'd been doing all these self-publishing projects already, and looking at it as just a ways of getting funds, if I looked at Kickstarter as just simply a way of getting funds, it didn't make sense for me, because I knew I was able to do that and I knew I was able to sell books. So why would I pay 5% to a platform in order to do the same thing?

Cory: This is such a good question, I was gonna ask you this question. Why are you paying an extra 5%? Yeah.

Stephanie: But what I saw then with another fellow artist of mine, it was one that I've been doing conventions with for many years, he put out a book, and he had also been doing the self-publishing thing for a long time, in fact he was the one who published one of my first books early on, Larry Elmore, but he had a Kickstarter, and he's been in the industry for a really long time, he's sort of an icon within the fantasy pen and paper gaming community, because he was one of the very early artists doing that thing. So he put out, he did a Kickstarter, and as I said he'd been doing all this self-publishing before and putting out the money on his own and just selling it, and having no problem with that, but he decided to do this crowdfunding and he raised $400,000 with his Kickstarter for his book. And this sort of opened my eyes to see that Kickstarter was an opportunity not just to raise initial funds for a project, but it was a major way of reaching out to a much wider audience than you normally would reach, simply because of viral elements and the way that social media works and connects people. And excitement builds. And so looking at Kickstarter then and seeing that 5% not as them just enabling the initial funds but them as seeing it as a promotional platform then, and as a way of expanding your audience, that was when I suddenly started looking at it in a different light and thinking okay, now I can see the sense of using it, if you already have the funds, if you know that you can sell something, then what is your other reason for using crowdfunding? It's this other reason, it's this other wider way of having broader impact, of getting excitement and hype out there, of reaching people that you otherwise wouldn't simply because of this hype that's surrounding it and the viral element then that just then expands from your main, your base audience. The people that would buy from you originally, right? You're suddenly reaching others that you wouldn't have before. And this is what the platforms enable, and so that is what I see the 5% as going towards.

Cory: It's marketing costs.

Stephanie: It's a marketing, it's a marketing and promotional cost. And that's what it is. It's the advertising.

Cory: I often wonder with you, you already have an established audience, right? So you have some advantage when it comes to pre-sales or crowdfunding. For artists who are just getting started, do you think it's worth it for them to do crowdfunding at all?

Stephanie: Yeah, there's various ways that crowdfunding can be useful. For a person in my position, this was the primary advantage that crowdfunding offered me. For someone in a different position, different point in their career, it offers other advantages. It offers you a way to start building up a dedicated audience that is interested in what you're creating, because the other thing about doing a crowdfunding campaign is that it is very much an interactive experience. It's very much drawing your audience within your process, behind the doors of your- not just the creative, the artistic creations, but the physical creation of your products and how all of that happens. And it's something that people are really interested in, and that they want to be involved in, they want to be able to say that they took part in that and that they assisted and helped in making that happen. That's what the whole crowdfunding energy is, right? It's like you know we helped make this thing happen, we helped bring this thing into the world together. And so there is this element, but for someone who's starting off and earlier, you know this audience is someone that, this audience is made up of people who are very much engaged and very much interested in what you're making and wanting to bring more of it into the world. And so they are a really good core audience for someone to have. And even if your project is small and your goals are modest, this is an audience that you can start to build, because once you have a Kickstarter audience, these are people that you can reach out to on further projects, future projects that you're creating, and tap into that again and again and have them continue to be a part of your creative family. The community that you're creating around your creations and around how you're creating and putting things out into the world. So yeah, I think it's got benefits for people in various stages of their careers. And you have to look, if you are interested in doing a crowdfunding thing, you have to look at it and see what is it that I want to get out of this? Because if it's just for the money, there are other ways to do it. And it's not going to be as successful if that's all you're looking at. It's about the community and it's about building that up.

Cory: Yeah. So earlier this year we did-The Abundant Artist, we thought about doing a crowdfunding program where we would help a group of artists do their own crowdfunding campaign. And one of the things that we discovered is the math of crowdfunding is really important. To note, it doesn't work the way that people tend to think it will so there's this great blog post, and we'll put a link to it in the show notes here, a great blog post called [Kickstarter Math is Weird](). And this musician that we found put together this amazing spreadsheet where you can plug in your numbers and the formulas in the spreadsheet will help you figure out like, okay if I sell this many pieces at this price, and here's my costs, like how profitable will I be? And it also factors in 5% for Kickstarter and shipping costs, so we'll throw some additional resources into the notes.

Also, you have this Kickstarter training program for artists with [Make Your Art Work.com](), is that still around?

Stephanie: It is. Yes. It is, it's an online class program, run by Make Your Art Work. So they approached me about doing this, because after I was at a physical workshop last year in Nashville I had given some talks about the math, actually, of Kickstarters and I remember bringing my spreadsheet to show people and I had it on a projector, and I pulled it up and I was like okay, these numbers, I hope that they don't scare people, there are gonna be a lot of numbers I'm talking about. We then proceeded to spend about two hours talking about all these numbers, and people just had so many questions because they, they're fascinated by it and the ability of just having a spreadsheet where you can just change something and figure out your projections and see what to expect. That's a huge part of it, you can't walk into a Kickstarter without expectations running from really basic all the way up to you know, crazy success, because there have been instances where people have had crazy success and then they didn't know what to do. They didn't know how to deal with it and how to proceed once they got to that point. They celebrated and then they realized oh shoot, now I've got to actually fulfill and do this stuff. And if you're not prepared for that then you have a problem and you then run into all kinds of issues where you're going to be losing money at that point. And you think it's something to celebrate about, you know, when you first see the numbers, but then you realize no, it's going to be all these other costs and things I hadn't anticipated. So anticipating that is a huge element and it's something that I see many artists unaware of, or guessing at. The worst thing is guessing at these things and guessing at the numbers. I remember when I was first setting up the numbers for mine and trying to figure out how much shipping costs, you know even something like that, you know shipping, and just off the top of my head trying to think about stuff, and then I asked a few other people who had done Kickstarter what they had done, and the answers were mostly "oh I just guessed it, or I'd take this number and I tripled it" and I was like no you can't do that! So I sat down with pencil and paper and figured it all out and plugged those equations into my spreadsheet and then I had it all there, and it took out all the guesswork. And then you can dedicate your time instead of worrying about that, that element, you could, you can then dedicate your time and energy into the community building aspects of the Kickstarter and running that in a successful way and really engaging your audience and drawing them in to be a part of your process. Rather than having all these other distractions of numbers that can easily be settled and put out and you know, put into a different slot and dedicate your mind and your energies into these other places.

Cory: Yeah. Stephanie, who's on your team? Do you have a team? Do you have like a studio assistant or employees or anything like that?

Stephanie: You're looking at it. I do-

Cory: So how do you manage it all?

Stephanie:	I have a hard time delegating. It's probably not the best thing, and I've realized this many times over the years, but I just haven't really gotten away from myself enough to do that and to let loose. So yeah, it's not the recommended way of working.
Cory:	Yeah. I mean, it's obviously working for you to a large extent, and there's always things that we can do better, so I'm always curious to talk to artists and see you know, some people just take the I do it all approach and you just, you know paddle as hard as they can, and try not to take on more than they can handle, and some artists will build up a team but that comes with like a set of problems, right?
Stephanie:	Yeah, I do it all myself, I do all my website coding myself still, even though in this day you can, there are a lot of options out there for creating websites and shopping carts and things, and all artists can do this now, but this is something that I coded and created from my early days because it was actually very similar to what my job was as a programmer, what I created in the software package that I was writing. And so it was very easy for me to transition that into my own system as well, but the benefit of having this custom-made system that I've done is that it integrates my entire business into it. It's not just the shopping cart and the website, but it's my whole, it's everything that my business is based off of, it's all my expenses, it's all my you know, when tax time comes around I just go to this one page and spits out all the numbers for me and I have it there. So having it all in one place and something that I customized like this is really easy and it's hard to let go of it even though I think that the time is approaching in the next decade where that's probably going to transition at some point, where the ease of using something that's ready-made is probably going to outweigh the benefits that I have in my custom thing that I have to constantly update and do myself. But for now it's still kind of on this special-
Cory:	We had Jesse Reno on the podcast a few weeks ago, and he's got a similar thing. He's got a custom built website that manages all of his inventory and profit and loss on the back end, so more props to those of you who have the solutions built. It's great.
	So one thing I wanted to touch on before we wrap up in the next fifteen minutes, is do you still attend a lot of conventions?
Stephanie:	Actually not a whole lot. I do a few, I do maybe four of them a year, usually there's, well there's Illuxcon in Pennsylvania which is very much dedicated to artists selling original artwork, and I really enjoy this one because it's just so much of the fantasy artist community is there, sort of my fantasy artist family. So it's a big gathering, and I love going to that show. So that's one of them that I do. I was doing Dragoncon up until very recently, and most, so most of the other ones that I do to fill in the rest of the year are conventions that I've been asked to come to as a guest. But over the years I've had to cut down on conventions. It was where I started. It was what I did originally when I was getting my career off the ground as an artist. I was going to about 12-15 per year in the very beginning, which was a lot.
Cory:	Exhibiting at 12-15 a year?

Stephanie: Yes. And many of them, there were about half of those would be local around here in California. There's a lot of little smaller shows here, which can be very profitable to go to, because you have no expenses when you do a local show. So if there's a good audience at those, good audience for your work, and you don't have to pay for a motel or travel or anything else. Then it's a lot easier than having to travel from California to Atlanta for example. And so ones I traveled to were ones that were where I knew would have a lot of impact. So I was doing Dragoncon and Gen Con which was the big gaming convention I did something in Germany which was this enormous gaming convention about four times as big. And a bunch of others that I would just travel to. And I had a really good time, I really enjoyed doing the conventions because there were so many people that I would meet at these shows, not just the fans but also fellow artists and people that I could relate to that I didn't have around here in my personal life here as an artist, which can be very reclusive and solitary. And so it was a chance to really get out there and socialize. And get that element, that, those urges out. So I had a lot of fun, but it came to a point where I had to really assess, you know how much I'm making at a convention versus if I stay at home and just create more art. And also, then I had when I had, when I became a mother, when I had my daughter, this became another element that I had to factor in, because I can't travel so much since every time I go away, my husband would need to take some time off, maybe a day or two, not necessarily the whole time, but a day or two here and there in order to deal with childcare things. And we like to go on vacations together as well. So I have to weigh in that element as well. How much do I want to go to these conventions, is it going to impact my career in such a positive way that I can't turn it down, or do I want to instead use that time for relaxation and family time and to enjoy myself with my daughter and my husband? So these are all the elements that came into play. Over- I guess at this point I'm in a place where I enjoy the conventions, I do still like going to them, which is why any time I'm asked as a guest I accept, I go to those. And there are a few that I still like I said, Illuxcon and Dragoncon up until a couple years ago I was still doing that, where I would go to them because I really need this connection with my community. My community as an artist and my community of fans and people that want to talk to me and see me and interact with me. So I think it's important to still do that and still get out. But I definitely cut back a lot.

Cory: Makes total sense. So for an artist who is just getting into the fantasy world or illustration world and wants to potentially attend some conventions, do you have any tips for those artists on how to have a profitable experience, and then I want to talk about the relationship building aspect to, but let's talk first about how to be profitable at your early shows. How do you do that?

Stephanie: Well if you've never been to one first of all, seek out some local conventions. Just look up online, see what you can find that's within your area, cause as I said there can be a lot of them and within my own area I was going to five to seven conventions that were all within an easy drive around from where I lived, where I would not even need to have a hotel for the night because I could just come home. So there's all those, and these can be anywhere from five hundred to two thousand people, occasionally you can find some larger ones that were like five or seven thousand which was unusual for the small style

of conventions, but there are some depending on where you live. But if you can find something that's relatively local that's definitely the best way to start and just begin to experience it. And if you can, get an artist alley table. Generally those don't cost very much, and it gives you a chance to really see what being at a convention is about. That's how I started. I started going to a couple of really small ones, I think the first one was like a seven hundred person convention, and I found out about it simply because I don't remember exactly how I found out. I think someone, I started selling my work online and someone just emailed me one day and said have you been to any conventions? And I said I don't even know what that is? What is that? She said well come to this one, it's in a couple months. It's called Silicon and it's just down here in San Jose, and so I got a table there and I went to my first convention, and I was really excited about it. I didn't even know that this world existed. And so I brought my portfolio, I brought some prints, and I made money on it because it cost almost nothing to get in. So it's, you start small, alright? Just get- explore what's around you, figure out what is available, and really get to see what that community is like and how to sell your artwork, bring some prints and bring some of your work, and I made a lot of contacts even, just those first few shows that I started doing. So at that first show then someone came along and said well there's this bigger show that happens in May right around the corner over here, would you like to come to that too? And so I said yes, and I went to that one, and between these two little conventions I made a bunch of sales, I made a bunch of commission contacts, and a couple of actual a couple of game companies actually gave me my first few commissions from these two little conventions that I went to. And from there I sort of, every time I went to one of these conventions someone would say well there's this bigger one, you want to come to this? Eventually I made my way to Dragoncon and Gen Con. Gen Con is the biggest pen and paper style gaming convention out there, and that was where I got a bunch of other commissions and contacts within the gaming publishing industry and started down that path, started down that road, really. But yeah, as you go you just start to meet people at these things and you just open yourself to the opportunities that are available. And just be aware of things that are happening and be ready for them when they happen.

Cory: I can hear some of our audience saying "But Cory, Stephanie, I'm an introvert and I hate talking to people and I'd rather just sit at home and draw!" So what do you say to those "I don't like to talk to people" artists? And how do they have success at these conventions?

Stephanie: I say to them that I am an "I hate to talk" person. And it was hard early on. It was definitely something that had me in terror when a convention would come to me and say would you like to come be a guest? And you'll have to do these talks and you'll have to do a few panels and maybe a solo talk, and I would just panic. And there were at least two that I said no to early on because I couldn't even deal with the thought of doing that. And I guess over the years I've gotten practice. And I've expanded my comfort level with that. It's always about diving into those areas that are outside of your comfort zone. Just as it is with art, this is just another level of that. And I'm a person who was absolutely terrified of giving speeches. I remember when I was in a speech class in

seventh grade, I was throwing up every day before speech class, I was so terrified of this. So I'm that kind of person, and I understand it, and one of the things that has made it a lot easier over the years, just practice, first of all. Just doing it. Finding little ways to dip your toes into it, doing panels at conventions are actually a really- they might sound terrifying initially, but they are actually a really easy way of getting up in front of people and starting to do that- starting to become more comfortable with it. Because when you're on a panel you're up there with four or five other people. And if you're not the moderator, you know, you don't have to answer something unless the moderator asks you a question and then usually it's something that you know something about, because that's why you're on the panel in the first place. And it becomes an easier way to slowly introduce yourself into those kinds of settings. Talking to people at conventions when you're at your booth, and this is another thing you just, you're there because, and people are coming up to you because they enjoy what you're doing. They want to talk to you. You are the expert there, because the art is, it's your art. There's no other expert beyond you. So this is the place where you should set aside your fear because people are coming up to you because they see value in what you're doing, in what you are presenting. And that should be validation in itself. That should tell you that you are worthwhile, and that you shouldn't have to be shy about this, because they're approaching you. You're not going up to them and shoving it in their face and saying "look at me look at me," they're saying "tell me about you."

Cory: Yeah, that is nice to have people be like already thinking that you're great and already liking you. That takes a lot of the terror away for sure.

Stephanie: Yeah, so if you're at a booth then try to remember that. Remember this and keep that in mind, that your art has value and that people are coming up to you because of that. And so let loose you know, that introvert that's inside, you can set them aside temporarily. You know, try to move beyond that. And it does take practice. Another thing that really helps me is realizing, is this understanding that so many people are this way, you know? Half the people out there are introverted. They are the same and they feel the same way that I once felt, they feel this terror and so it's gotten easier for me knowing that everyone feels this. Everyone senses this. And then to be able to realize that you're not alone in that, and that you don't have to be terrified about talking, because we're all in the same boat.

Cory: Alright, well as we wrap up, I had a couple of quick questions for you. Are there any videos on the internet of you flamenco dancing?

Stephanie: I don't think so.

Cory: Well, if there are I will find them. I want to talk to you more about flamenco dancing but we're just about out of time. I'll try to find a video. And then the other question I had is do you have any favorite books that you would recommend on myths and legends? Some of the stuff that's inspired some of your work?

Stephanie: Oh, I'm really bad at remembering random titles and things. But one of the ones that was really influential for me early on was the, this book, it's a translation, but it's the

Laio-Chai, they're seventeenth century Chinese stories that were written by P'u Sung-ling, and it's- you'll have to find translated versions which is what I found, and it was at one of these dusty used bookstores in San Francisco early on. They are these spirit and ghost stories, Chinese spirit and ghost stories, fox spirits and ghosts of loved ones and they are, they are, they're not based- they're not actually from the original oral traditions that we were talking about earlier, but they were written, they were re-written by this scholar and I think he was actually a failed scholar initially and he turned his energies into writing these stories, and he's sort of like Hans Christian Anderson or the Brothers Grimm where he took a lot of these stories that came from these oral traditions and backgrounds, and he wrote his own versions of them. He created his own fairy tales, in a way, based on these very ancient stories and folktales and finding his own, his own way of crafting them into a tale. So, but they're based, they are very much based within these older traditions. And it was a book that really drew me in when I read it. The way that it depicted this spirit world that was just sort of adjacent to our own and the way the characters interacted, the humans interacted with them, and it was very natural. It was as if all of this was just around us and that we didn't really pay attention to it or see it. And this is something that resonates with me for my art in general. This sense, not necessarily of physical spirit sort of things, but just that there's more to the world than most of the time we see or notice. These things that are, that because of the way our lifestyles move around so quickly, we don't pay attention to or we don't notice the patterns and the beauty of growth and decay and cycles and all these little elements that are things that are there, they're always present in our world, and we just don't really pay attention to or see. And that's something that I weave into my artwork all over, it's one of the themes that I try to draw in with everything I create.

Cory: I love it. I love it. Well we'll see if we can find a copy, an English copy of that book or of those stories somewhere as well in the show notes. So Stephanie, thank you so much for taking the time to visit with me and to chat and share your wisdom. I love everything you're doing, and I can't wait to see whatever is coming up next!

Stephanie: Thanks Cory!

Cory: Yeah absolutely, and if you want to know more about Stephanie you can head over shadowscapes.com. Have a great day!