1)Dear Nicholas, please introduce yourself: What's your name? Where do
you live? How old are you? And so on…

My name is Nicholas Cloister, and I live in a rural area in a house in the west of Sweden, by the
lake called Fryken, together with my lady of choice and a young daughter. I'm 41 years old, and
apart from art and fantasy, I also have a great interest in mysticism, meditation, music, and I
thoroughly enjoy taking slow walks in Nature. I'm your typical long-haired, bearded, semi-
intellectual with a taste for progressive metal, and obscure ale. I was 37 before I could find any
reason to get a driver's license, and I always keep the speed limit.

2) Please tell our readers more about your project "Monsters by
Email". What is it about and how does it work?

That is the name of the project in which I'm currently investing all my energies and creativity. It is
$2.50/month digital creature subscription, which unlike your average bestiary will feature only
professional-quality, print-resolution images, and all original creature designs. With these comes
RPG-adapted creature descriptions, system-free stats, and suggestions on how to use the creatures
in your campaigns. To flesh out the experience further, I also include commented step-by-step shots
of the design process, which will serve as "miniature" art-school for those interested in drawing and
designing creatures by themselves. On top of that, subscribers acquire the non-exclusive rights to
publish half of the creatures received from Monsters By Email, which will be 4-6 per month. I
suggest taking a look at free sample files at monstersbyemail.com to get a better idea of what's
coming. So far role-players, artists, publishers, and general creature fans are signing up.

3) How did you get the idea and what made you do it?

I suppose my mind was working on how to make a living from what I enjoy doing the most, and
this idea just showed up. I thought it was worth pursuing, and the response has been very good, so
far. I'm now in the position, where I intend to go from gathering interest, to starting the subscription
for real.

4) What inspires you to create such wonderful forbidding and
alien beings?

I'm not sure where the inspiration comes from. At a very young age I found myself drawn to tales of
dragons and knights, rather than those set in contemporary society. In my early teens I came across
traditional role-playing games was quickly submerged into them. As a GM I was tempted to give
"flesh" to the imaginations of the game-table and I started drawing characters and creatures. As an
artist I find it positively challenging to make a thing of fiction "come alive". The dynamic process
of going from a blank canvas, without ideas, to a new creature is simply very interesting and
rewarding. I typically don't know where it's going to end – hey, that's an adventure right there,
though the chance of getting killed is fairly small.

5) Which software do you use for your work and why?

I have tried various ones, but prefer Adobe Photoshop, and that's usually all I use. It is quicker, and
more logical to my mind, than its competitors. With CS5 and CS6 Photoshop introduced something
called mixer brushes, which, though I rarely use them when I paint creatures, took the software to a
new level of digital painting in my opinion. When painting interior or exterior architecture, I have
occasionally used Google Sketch-Up for sketching, and I also use InDesign and Dreamweaver for
publishing purposes. I have tried my hands at Zbrush, which is a fantastic program, but so far I
much prefer painting to 3D modelling.

6) How did you come to draw?

I'd say that mainly fantasy role-playing games are to blame. I also spent quite some time being unemployed in the early 90:s, which gave me the opportunity to develop my skills to the level of working for a role-playing games producers, and soon after, getting into art-school. I then spent about a decade doing only non-figurative art, before I was inspired back into the fantasy field.

7) Do you have a formal education (e. g. academic studies) with
drawing or are you a "selfmade illustrator"?

I did four years in a traditional art-school studying painting, drawing, and print-making. I had some skills drawing before that, but painting was something I learned during those years, which also offered a lot of time to practice. I was not an extremely gifted person in the field of art, and have had to learn it (I still do) through many years of work.

8) Earning enough money as a fulltime illustrator is sometimes
difficult. Is it a fulltime job or a sideline for you? What else do
you do for a living?

I have received, and still receive, enough offers to make it a full-time job, should I want to, but since I live in Sweden, I have declined all offers paying less than ordinary jobs here in Sweden. Good offers have been rare, and so for a long time I have chosen instead to work as an art- and media teacher, and accepted only some offers, from book-publishers and a few rpg and browser games producers, willing to pay decently (from my perspective). Recently I have been sort of lazy with contacting potential clients, because I have been occupied with my own projects. If you live in a low cost country fantasy illustration can be a very good business, but if not, you must reach the very top before you can make a good living from it, and I do mean the very top. Working for a major computer game house is probably the safest way to make good wages doing fantasy/sci-fi/horror art, but if like me, you are reluctant to move, applying for such positions is not really an option.

9) What advice would you give our readers who also want to become a
professional illustrator? What are the bottlenecks in your opinion?
What are your experiences with this?

There is really too much to say, to barely begin in this context. First of all though, make sure you actually enjoy painting, not only for an hour or so now and then, but 40+ hours a week, every week. Then make sure you can deal with erasing the favorite part of the painting, and adding things you don't think fit the picture at all, because art directors do not always share your opinion. In short, work on your skills, mental endurance, and communication skills. Learn English really well, and conjure forth a good portion of self-motivation and patience. Draw, draw, draw... and draw some more. Then put all your best work in as many online portfolios you can handle, and send out emails to as many potential clients as possible, but adapt your portfolios to their specific field. Actually, I will recommend a video by freelance artist Clint Cearley called "Breaking into the Art Industry". He has done more freelancing than I have, but I share his opinions, and many of his experiences, in these matters. (Though I very much recommend going to art-school, because studying art that way tends to expand your mind.) http://vimeo.com/57349573
I personanlly landed my first gig by sending out emails to Scandinavian book publishers. One of the big publishers in Sweden wanted a new cover for a translation of an English fantasy title, and for some reason, they liked my portfolio and contacted me. Soon after that I was contacted by Paizo to do some creature work, and by Fantasy Flight Games to do some card art. This was some years ago

by now, and my skills as an artist, and a freelancer, has improved greatly since then. Now why would these established game publishers invite a by then fairly inexperienced freelancer to do art for them? You will have to figure that one out for yourself...

10) Tell us more about your projects besides „monsters by email",
ideally with relation to roleplaying? Which one did you enjoy most and
why? On which projects are you working presently and what have you
planned for the future?

I have this blog called RPG-Creatures which is a free online bestiary containing about 45 creatures, with stats and descriptions. (http://rpg-creatures.blogspot.com) >From that work I have also published a PDF bestiary eBook which holds another 9 book exclusive creatures. You can find it through the blog. Working on the RPG-creatures blog have been great fun, and I have learned a lot while doing so. The bestiary blog is used by role-players throughout the world, and I find it really rewarding to know that my creatures take part in all kinds of campaigns all over the place. Now I use the blog as an information channel for the MonstersByEmail project, but all the original creatures are still there, so please, use them and enjoy them.

11) Do you have a website where one can have a look at your work?
Please share the URL with us.

My official portfolio is http://cloister.se but you will find more of my work at
http://cloister.deviantart.com

12) Are you working alone at „monsters by email" or this there someone
lending a hand to you?

Yes, it is a solo project, but I hope to be able to put my full focus on it. If things go well, there may be interpreters and guest appearances involved in the future, but for now, I wield all the swords involved. A substantial amount of those who have reported their interest in subscribing have helped spreading the word about MonstersByEmail in various fashions. For this I'm truly thankful, because even with a good product, it is very hard to reach out by yourself. Thank you also, for engaging me for this interview.

13) How many subscriptions are there for „monsters by email"? How do
you advertise your project?

I'm not giving you the specifics, but I can let you know that hundreds of people have "signed up" for it, and it looks as if it will start rather soon. I advertise the project by releasing example art on Deviant Art, Facebook (http://.facebook.com/RPGcreatures), and some other forums. I also run a few ads now and then, but I have a very limited budget, so all help is greatly welcome.

Thank you!