

Welcome to the Draw Steel Art Description Guide!

If you use alt text or image description, you may notice that the way we approach it with *Draw Steel* is a little bit different! If you aren't familiar with image description and alt text, this is a great time to learn about it and consider [implementing it in your own social media!](#)

WHO is this for?

Alt text and image description is generally for people who use screen readers to access content. This is generally the blind and low-vision community, but also can include people listening to media because they are driving, folks with visual or spatial processing issues, or even people who want to improve their descriptive skill sets as storytellers in non-visual media like tabletop games or podcasts.

Image description can also help you discover new elements within an image if they are ambiguous, blurry, unfamiliar, or framed in an atypical way.

In short, this is for anyone who wants to use it, but the descriptions have been written primarily for, and with the consultation of, the blind and low vision community,¹ using best practices and descriptive techniques centered around blind and low-vision experiences.

WHAT is different about how *Draw Steel* describes its artwork?

Well, there are a few things that *Draw Steel* is doing differently.

1. We're using a new style based on art museum descriptive text that combines short alt text with longer, more experiential art descriptions
2. Our descriptions follow a standardized format and directional flow
3. We use a searchable, iterative glossary instead of describing the same thing over and over

First of all, *Draw Steel* is using a brand new format for image description. This was designed based on best practices from museum art description techniques used at the [Smithsonian's Cooper Hewitt Galleries](#) and the [National Gallery of Art](#), as well as image description techniques from several other specialized fields like architecture, science, and cartography.

Secondly, the descriptions follow a standard format. (We'll get more into the specifics in a bit.) This has a few benefits. It allows you to choose your level of immersion with the piece. You can either listen to (or read) a brief alt text overview description of the image and move on, or stay with the piece for a longer, more immersive, evocative and experiential description which may discuss art styles and techniques, more detailed description of the clothes, buildings, creatures, or landscapes, etc. These descriptions often are more visceral and tactile, using metaphor or other poetic devices to help translate the experience that someone looking at the piece visually

¹ We worked with MacDowell Fellow, California Center for Cultural Innovation Grantee, the 2024 Helen Keller Achievement Award winner from the American Federation for the Blind winner Marilee Talkington, an artist, creator, performer, and consultant working in the arts, who is also the first legally blind actor to be cast in a principal role on Broadway.

might have into an equitable experience in a non-visual format. Think of it as translating the language of visual experience into words the same way someone might translate from French to English. By the same token, although significant effort has been made to translate the images as directly as possible, the complexity and scale of some of the art does necessitate interpretive prioritization within the image.

One way we achieve this is by following a standardized order with every image, unless there is a specific need for an exception. This allows you to get to know the typical flow used to describe a piece, whether it's order of description, direction of movement around the frame (unless the piece specifically dictates an alternate motion), and approach to description of sapient creatures.

Finally, instead of describing creature types, ancestries, weapon and armor types, and iconic heroes every time they occur, we have a searchable glossary. This includes descriptions of the typical appearance of these things in the worlds of *Draw Steel*—height, aesthetics, even specific clothing or armor that typically recurs. This glossary also includes descriptions of art styles which may be mentioned in the descriptions. (In short, if you aren't sure what something looks like or means, search the glossary!) This glossary is iterative, meaning it can be updated as needed to include new content

WHERE can I find these descriptions and the glossary?

The art descriptions are embedded in the images, and will be read by screen readers. You often can also see alt text by hovering over images with a cursor.

The glossary is located at this URL:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1hzvkSV6q-NAiJNOuFMrkNSSKr1Py2LjGPMxKa3W83bw/edit?usp=sharing>

WHEN did this all happen?

This new art description format launched with the publication of *Draw Steel* in the summer of 2025.

WHY move away from just using short alt text?

Brief, 15-word alt text is great for quickly conveying information about an image, and remains very important in tabletop RPG (TTRPG) books. But as the art in TTRPG books has developed, it has felt like a disservice to both the blind and low-vision gaming community AND the talented artists who pour their hearts into this work not to accurately convey the scale, detail, and creativity in these beautiful works of art.

So, HOW does this all work?

A typical entry begins with an approximately 15-word alt text description. This is often in an incomplete grammatical format and generally does not end in punctuation. This description gives an objective perspective on the content of the image, and typically will not dive into any physical features, specific details, or complexities of the image. If you are using a screen reader

and doing the digital equivalent of flipping through the book or searching for a specific image, you can move on after this description.

The long description following the alt text ranges in length based on the complexity of the image, but typically is around 70 words. This description uses the following directional flows when approaching an image:

- **Left to Right**
- **Top to Bottom**

For more complex images with several figures or objects, the flow, unless otherwise specified is either:

- **Clockwise, beginning from the Twelve O’Clock position at the top-center of the page**
Or
- **In rows, starting from the top, from Left to Right, followed by the row beneath, from Left to Right, and so forth**

For creatures, unless the image dictates a different flow, the typical structure is as follows, omitting any irrelevant elements or editing for length:

- Individual physical appearance (Coloration/skin tone²³, species, and body type⁴⁵)
- Clothing and armor, generally described from head to toe, innermost layer to outermost layer
- Any items (worn or held)
- Stance or action
- Surrounding area

Typically, the art in *Draw Steel* is, unless otherwise noted, in the style of contemporary fantasy. However, it often references classic works from art history or plays with genre and medium, with the allusions noted whenever possible.

We hope that this creates a new, more inclusive and accessible way for everyone to experience *Draw Steel*.

Happy Adventuring!

² When describing skin tone, we use typical museum skin tone descriptors (light, light-medium, medium, medium-dark, dark) for human as well as non-human skin tones. When the term appears alone, assume it refers to a human flesh tone range.

³ We avoid the use of food-based descriptors for human skin tones entirely (more: [Writing With Color’s Skin Color Description Guide](#)), but in the case of some non-human shades, particularly green, yellow, and red-purple, they are often the only accurate descriptors of the colors in the image. While this may seem like a ridiculous note to make, in a world where humanoids are treated equally, we need to apply the same standards to description whenever possible.

⁴ We use the term “fat” as a value-neutral physical descriptor (more: [Dictionary.com’s history of the term](#)).

⁵ Per the Cooper Hewitt guidelines, unless the gender of a specific character is known or gender performance is essential to the image, we default to gender-neutral descriptors.

Useful Links and Resources

Accessible Social's Guide to Image Accessibility

<https://www.accessible-social.com/images-and-visuals/image-accessibility>

Cooper Hewitt's Recommendations for Image Description

<https://www.cooperhewitt.org/cooper-hewitt-guidelines-for-image-description/>

The National Gallery of Arts Collection Image Description Guidelines

<https://www.nga.gov/visit/accessibility/collection-image-descriptions#:~:text=Image%20descriptions%20must%20be%20concise,sentences%2C%20not%20phrases%20or%20fragments>

Art Beyond Sight's Guidelines for Verbal Description

<https://www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/acs-guidelines.shtml>

Perkins School for the Blind's "How to Write Alt Text and Image Descriptions for the Visually Impaired"

<https://www.perkins.org/resource/how-write-alt-text-and-image-descriptions-visually-impaired/>

Image Description Training Tool: Poet Image Description - How to Describe

<https://poet.diagramcenter.org/how.html>, <https://tink.uk/text-descriptions-emotion-rich-images/>

[Dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com)'s "When Did 'Fat' Become an Insult?"

<https://www.dictionary.com/e/how-should-we-use-the-word-fat/>

Writing with Color's Skin Color Description Guide

<https://writingwithcolor.tumblr.com/post/95955707903/skin-writing-with-color-has-received-several>