



*For this age group and generation, with this subject, too much too soon is unnecessary and overwhelming. We want to plant that seed of interest and to take away that feeling that the Elements have no connection to us or to our world.*

## CHARACTERS OF The Periodic Table

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The Periodic Table. It's not a subject that gets kids, adults, or even many teachers excited. If I'm honest my first experience of the Periodic Table chart left me feeling perplexed, confused, and yes... a little bored! But 30 years on from my school days, I've come to realize it's an incredibly interesting and exciting concept. I hope with my book, kids won't take anywhere near as long to see the potential of the subject. I also hope the book will give weary science teachers a renewed enthusiasm for the Periodic Table. Let me take you back to my own childhood, lost in the mists of the 70s...

Attending school in London, the stuffy and subdued science classroom was not my favorite place. I can still see the Periodic Table poster hanging off the back of the classroom door, ignored by most of the kids as they rushed past at the sound of the bell. For me, art class was where the action was to be found. Here I could lose hours creating fantastical worlds inhabited by fabulous creatures. This was the start of what has become a lifelong journey exploring comics and manga -- essentially an exploration of personalities and emotions using simple line, color, and form.

and conceptual paintings of galactic cities my art teachers were less than enthusiastic. However, after graduation I managed to convince the interview panel at my local design school that this was the way forward for illustration and yes, I would one day be employable!

Fifteen years later, I had managed to achieve my dream and was now working as a full-time artist creating graphic-based character artwork. I sold painting and prints both in the UK and internationally and licensed my images for use in the commercial field, but I wanted to do more.

Looking for a new concept to explore, I was re-introduced to the Periodic Table by a friend. It took me straight back to science

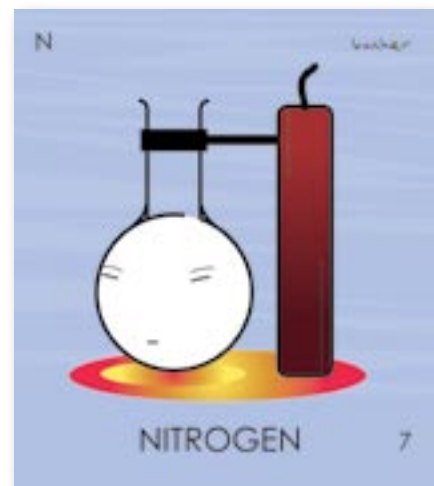


Although I was convinced there was a huge call in the job market for drawings of two-headed aliens



class and that tattered poster. On closer inspection, I realized that the Elements were wonderful subjects, but I couldn't find any available visual interpretation that came even close to conveying this. Three months, a lot of research, and a very useful introduction to a chemist from MIT who supplied some fantastically simplified information, and I had my version of the Periodic Table. The characters were inspired by some aspect of each Element — color, origin, use, or discovery. Each character was intended to work as a memory trigger for the Element it portrays. My Table looked great; everyone loved it. Just one problem — I had never written a book and I didn't know any publishers. A lot of introductions, connections, and some faith from a publishing house and I had an international





again and again. Just because this is an educational book, it doesn't mean it can hide from modern graphic design! If we were going to have a chance of connecting with today's visually advanced young audience, the whole concept had to be sharp and focused.

With the writing and design finished and our facts triple checked, we sent our baby out into the cold, tough world of modern science education.

The feedback we got back is really beyond anything I could have thought possible at the beginning of this project. Students, parents, and desperate science teachers all loved the book. Kids from all over the world have written to me with tales of whole classes drawing the characters, every student owning a copy. I've had many, many questions about where I found the inspiration for the characters. I found my inspiration in the same place that I think the students find it, and that's in the subject itself. I hope I have created a new visual language for the Elements that is friendly, fun, and intriguing.

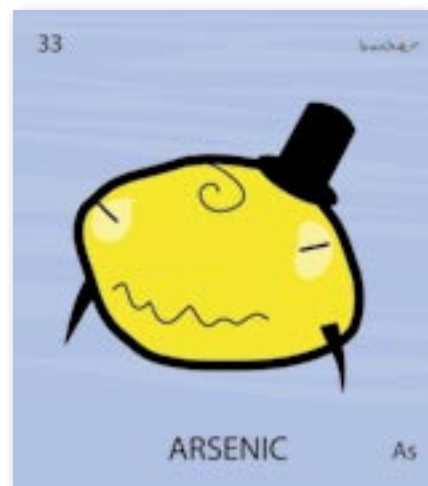
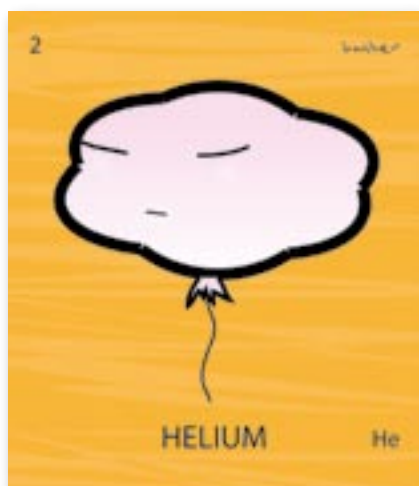
book deal. How did this happen? The Periodic Table is not meant to generate this kind of excitement!!

Working with an American chemistry teacher, Adrian Dingle, and my editor, Dan Green, we set about creating the book. We separated the Elements into the correct groupings and wrote about each of them in the first person, adding humor and quirky facts. Another important area was the layout and design of the book. The Periodic Table is a design classic that cannot be improved upon, but as well as new characters, we added fresh, new colors and modern fonts. We also spent a lot of time looking at the navigation of the book. I wanted every page to work hard and I wanted the reader to have a reason to look at each page

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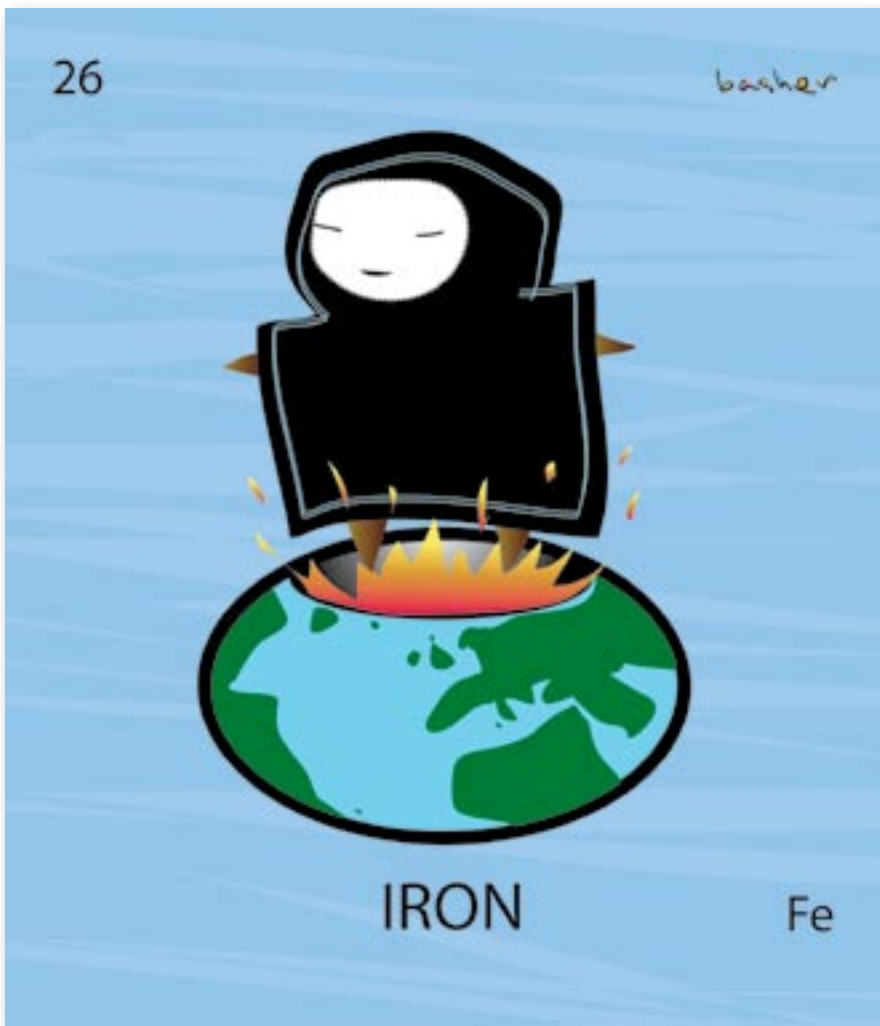


The book is meant as an introduction. It's just a taste and doesn't try to cover the topic in depth. For this age group and generation, with this subject, too much too soon is unnecessary and overwhelming. We want to plant that seed of interest and to take away that feeling that the Elements have no connection to us or to our world.

The success of *The Periodic Table Book* has made it possible for me to continue my visual exploration of science. Younger audiences can find science both abstract and detached from their lives. Creating visually friendly, attractive personalities that kids can connect with will get them excited about science in a way the teaching materials didn't when I was at school. My own *Physics* and *Biology* books have now been published, and *Astronomy*, *Rocks and Minerals*, and *Planet Earth* are due next year.

For me, it's been an incredibly fun, rewarding and educational few years. I hope that the Periodic Table Poster hanging on





the back of my old classroom door can now be replaced with a new version — I'm sure it would be a huge shock for my Science teacher to see my name attached! I hope my characters will help to trigger some new questions and ideas, and to intrigue kids about what is such an exciting subject.

**Simon Basher** is an artist and designer who has been creating artwork for over 8 years. Inspired by a love of simple line work and a rich palette, his characters blend the edge of manga with the cuteness of Hello Kitty. He is based in London and Tokyo.

*How did this happen?  
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