NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

BE A KILLER
COMIC ARTIST

Listen up, puddins! Learn how Marvel and DC's **Joshua Swaby** paints heroes with attitude

PAINT THIS COVER IMAGE!

10
LIFE LESSONS YOU NEED TO KNOW!
WITH ADI GRANOV

PLUS!
MASTER THE LIGNE CLAIRE COMIC STYLE
LEARN THE NEW TOOLS OF COREL PAINTER 2022
SPEEDY COMIC CREATION IN CLIP STUDIO PAINT

WORKSHOP
NEW-LOOK ZORRO!
David Nakayama reworks the iconic comic character

INTERVIEW
STEVE RUDE
Buckle up! The 'Dude' shares his art insights

FUTURE

TERRY DODSON REVEALS HOW TO DRAW & PAINT THE PERFECT COMIC COVER

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Welcome to…

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Sitting at his worn and aged desk, surrounded by books and paintings, Steve Rude lets rip. What follows are tales from decades of experiences in the comics industry, from getting his big break to reprimanding Alex Ross, one of the few artists seasoned enough to have the honour. You just sit back and listen. You can read our interview this issue. It's a reminder that we're all still learning – even Steve.

Likewise, Marvel's Adi Granov shares his advice for improving yourself. The artist has worked across all of Marvel's output – comics, video games and films – and he has the amazing art to prove it.

Both artists remind me that comics are about people as much as art. Everyone has a comic in them; these two have grabbed the opportunities and done it by their rules. Our training this issue hopefully gives you the confidence to follow in their footsteps. From mastering the European ligne claire style to Terry Dodson's advice on painting perfect covers, I hope you find a reason to get creative and make your comic a reality.

Editor
ian.dean@futurenet.com

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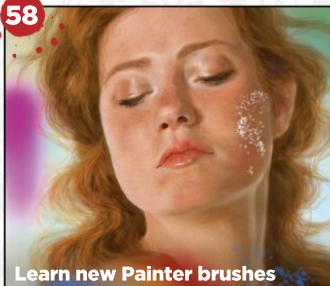
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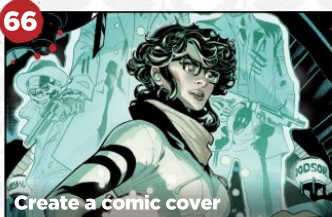
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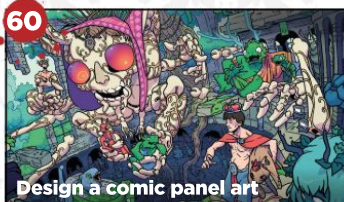
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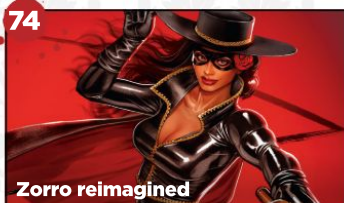
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Zorro reimagined

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Resources

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Getting hold of this issue's resources is easy.
Just visit: **ifxm.ag/comic205artist**

WORKSHOP VIDEOS
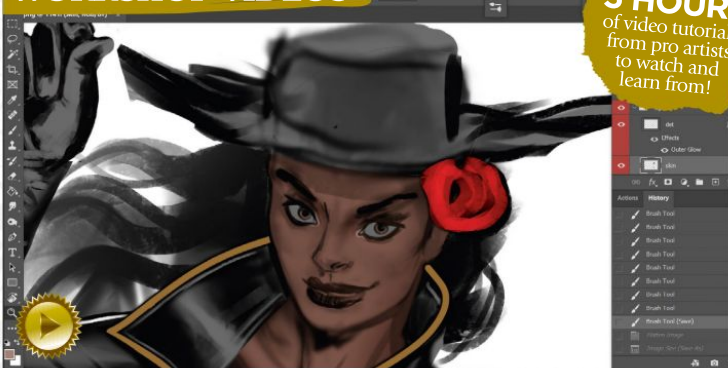
OVER 3 HOURS of video tutorials from pro artists to watch and learn from!

Bring a Golden Age comic hero up to date
See how David Nakayama takes the classic character Zorro and adds a dash of 21st century sensibilities and relevance. You can read about his process in his workshop, on page 74.

Master the ligne claire comic art style
In Igor Wolski's video the artist marshals a range of elements and develops a strong narrative while using the 'clear line' drawing style in his comic art. His workshop is on page 60.


Painter 2022 brush insights
See how Isis Sousa gets the most from her favourite Painter brushes. More on page 58.

Your first steps in WEBTOON
Stephinni Martinez Tinoco creates comics in Clip Studio Paint's WEBTOON. See page 72.

Next month in...

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
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Refresh your digital art skills!

Learn new character design techniques with the amazing **Christophe Young**
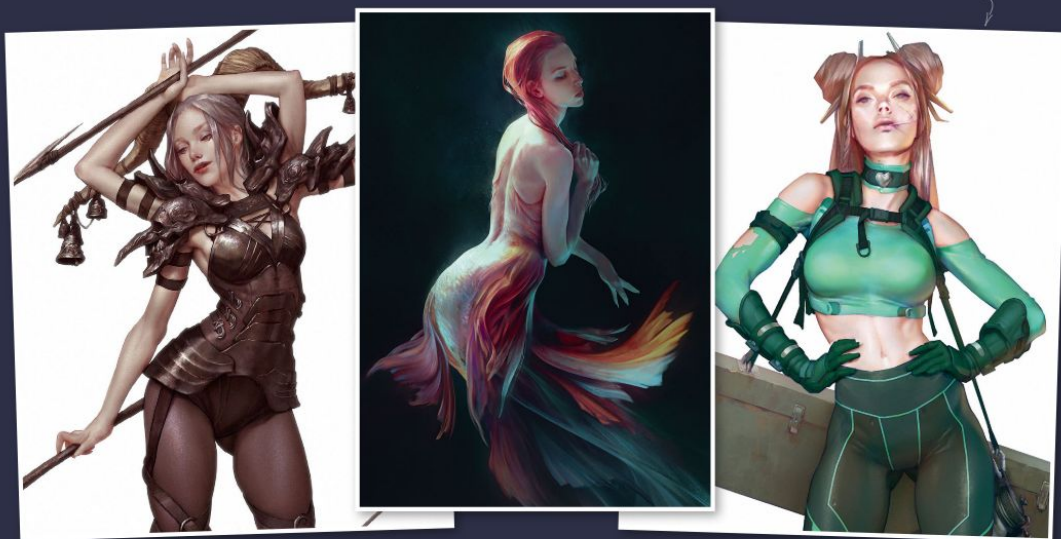
All this… and more!

New Procreate brush insights
Rafael Sarmento reveals how to paint a lively sci-fi portrait on an iPad.

Be inspired by modern fantasy
She almost gave up! Iris Compiet reveals why she loves life as a hit faerie artist.

Paint Art Nouveau
Mix traditional and digital workflows for stunning results.

Meet a digital art master
Miles Morales to Emily Carr – Patrick O'Keefe on life's colliding influences.

ISSUE 206 ON SALE 1 OCTOBER *IN PRINT & DIGITAL*

FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Dmitry Klyushkin

LOCATION: Russia **MEDIA:** Paint Tool SAI, Photoshop
WEB: artstation.com/klyushkin

Dmitry specialises in concept art, having been fascinated by the process of inventing objects. "The most appealing part of my work is to imagine the condition of an object."

1 GOY
"At the time of inventing this character, I had almost no muscular guys in my portfolio, so I decided to draw a broad-shouldered strong warrior."

2 KAYUN
"Magical child of the Moon and Earth, and Princess of the night. The image was created for a competition. Finding the character of the girl wasn't easy!"

BALLOT FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX
ARTIST
OF THE
MONTH

3 HUNTERS
"These characters were invented for a competition. The task consisted of creating opposing people who knew nature and monkeys who wanted to become human".

4 STATION
"This was created for my small project ASH. The action takes place at a busy station, where carts arrive and citizens are in a hurry. A boy, dressed in a suit with advertising, wanders by all this."

Want to submit your work? Visit ifxm.ag/getinifx

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Hyunsu Cha

LOCATION: South Korea **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** moksheep.wixsite.com/moksheep

Hyunsu is a commercial artist working in gaming and illustration. "I focus on drawing meticulously, so I pay attention to the details. I like positive feelings more than dark and serious."

1 HANGING GARDENS
"Inspired by Babylon's aerial garden. I wanted to blend cities and gardens high in the sky to convey a feeling that had never existed before."

Reuben Yeo Zhi Hong

LOCATION: Singapore **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** artstation.com/midorikeen

Reuben is a fantasy artist who likes to paint characters and scenes. "I'm usually inspired by the media I consume, although my fascination with ancient cultures, especially the Norse, and pandas seep in sometimes."
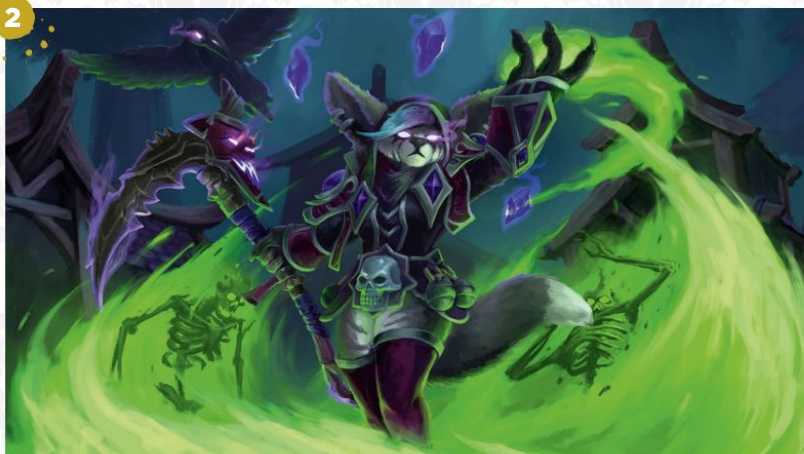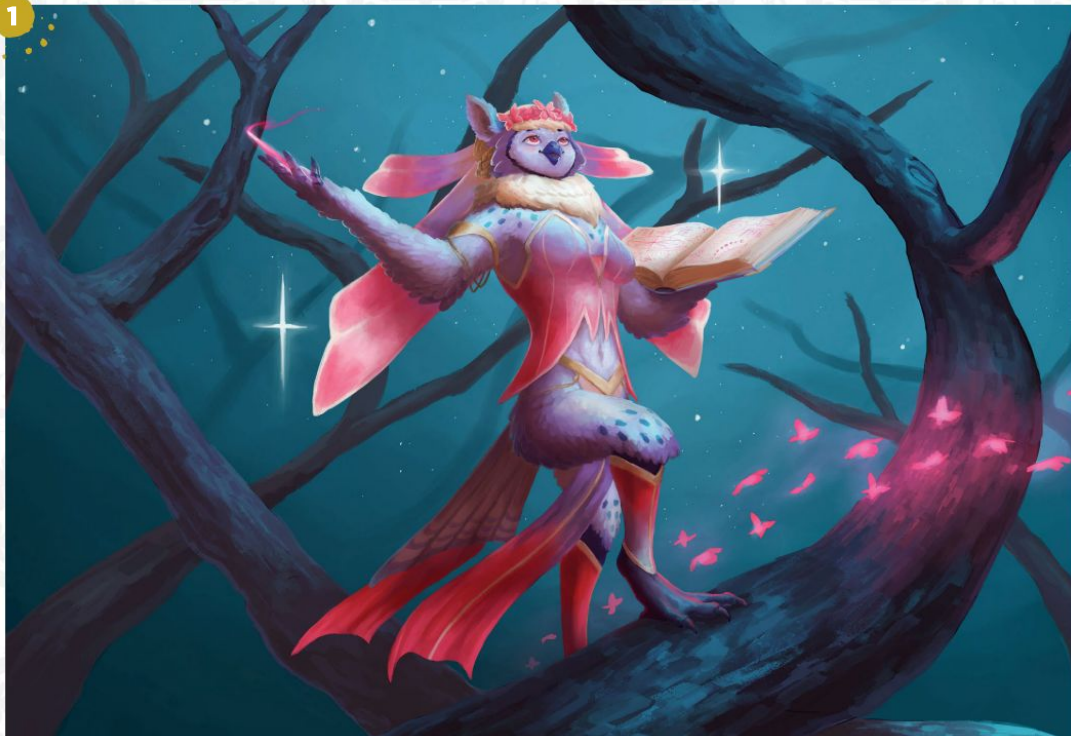
1 LUNA, STAR SCHOLAR
"A painting made for a private client. They wanted their fairy owl character studying the stars. The trail of glowing butterflies was a personal touch, as were the book inscriptions."

2 RITUAL OF ENTROPIC FIRE
"This was a piece made as a prize for reaching 1,000 followers on Twitter. The winner wanted their World of Warcraft character casting a spell on her enemies."

Mary Joy Cardaño

LOCATION: Philippines **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Procreate **WEB:** instagram.com/joyblivion

"I love using vibrant colours and experimenting with techniques and concepts," says Joy, who uses art to connect with people. "I'm inspired by other artists, nature, music, anime and fashion (honestly everything!)."

1 CHEMICAL
"I wanted to play around with different vibrant colours and this was the result of that. I added effects to make it glow and give it more flow."

2 ISOLATION
"This represents overthinking and being stuck with that sad feeling. Making this made that intense feeling mellow a bit. Looking at this now makes me feel serene."

3 FASHION STUDIES
"Drawing my characters with cute clothing makes me really happy. Also, doing the concept behind the kasa-obake is fun and makes me want to make more yokai-inspired art."

4 GHIBLI REDRAW (KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE)
"This is one of my go-to movies when I get an art block. And the line 'Stop trying... pretty soon, you'll be flying again...' by Ursula just makes you feel reassured."

傘おばけ

Want to submit your work? Visit ifxm.ag/getinifx

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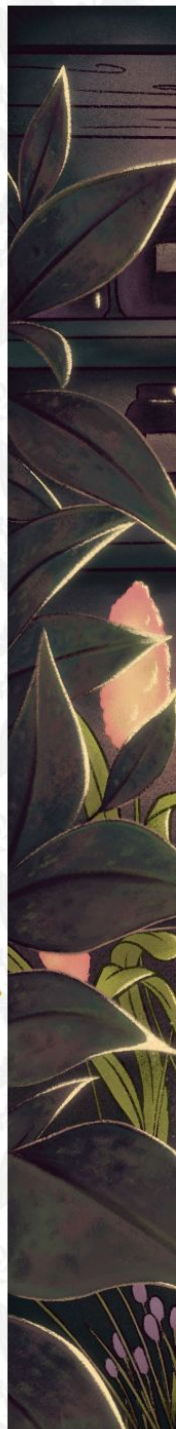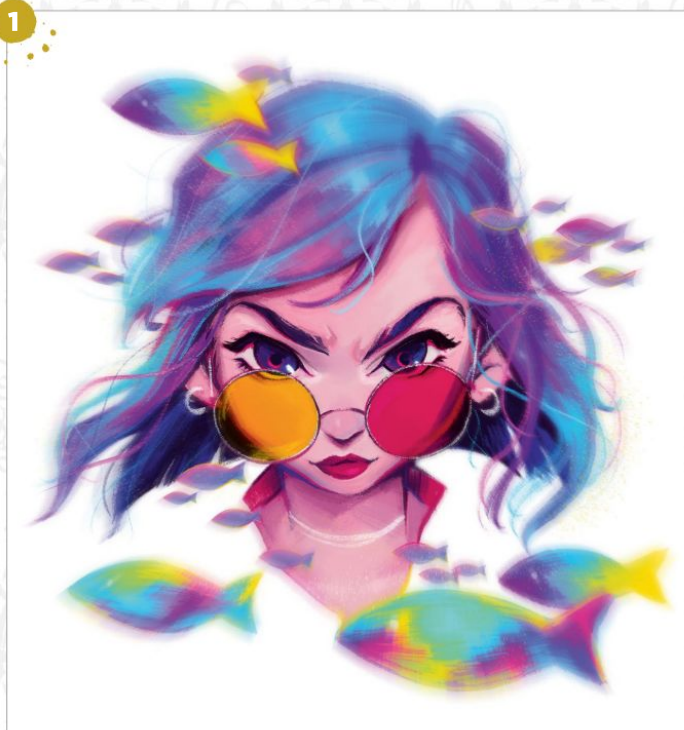
Keith Robinson

LOCATION: England MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: keithrobinson.co.uk

Keith is a professional artist who specialises in covers and illustrations for children's fiction. "In my personal work I like to explore my love of classic fantasy novels, mythology and nature."

1 FOREST BRIDE
"Loosely based on the 80s TV series Robin of Sherwood, which I loved as a kid. This illustration turned into an allegory for our connection with nature."

2 HUNTING
"I wanted to contrast loose textures with tight details. I also wanted to draw a cool female character with a huge eagle!"

3 NORTH
"Inspired by Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials'. I wanted to capture a sense of movement, adventure and the frozen north."

Iris Muddy

LOCATION: Spain **MEDIA:** Clip Studio Paint, Photoshop, Blender **WEB:** irismuddy.com

Iris is a freelance artist whose interests include life, adventure, nature and visual storytelling. "I enjoy designing simple and appealing shapes, using colours and light to express those interests with a whimsical playful flavour."

1 STRANDED LONG AGO
"The theme is time – the past, the present... it's full of interesting ideas for me, and whoever lays eyes on my art and interprets it."

2 FUNGIS
"These characters embody a combination of qualities I enjoy portraying in my art: magic, mischief, light, darkness and mystery."
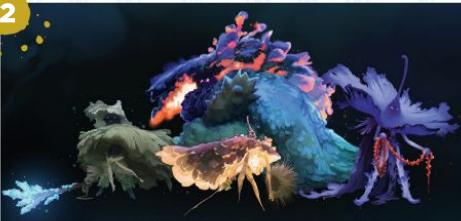
3 TYDH & SEAR
"They're meant to embody a sense of quiet power from within – another favourite feeling of mine to portray."

4 LUNCHTIME TOGETHER
Grandma makes the *best* stew!!" A slice of life snapshot celebrating simple little moments spent with loved ones.

Do you want to see your art on these pages? Then email five pieces of your work and a short explanation about each artwork, along with a photo and a few details about yourself, to **fxpose@imaginefx.com**

Tom Foster's tips for drawing Dredd: "Draw a whole head before you put a helmet on it. [Remember] Everything on the costume is a three-dimensional object. Try to figure out what the hell an eagle looks like. It'll come in handy."

Jake Lynch loves drawing Mega-City One: "It always walks a thin line between dark humour and horror. That's one hell of a playground to be allowed to visit."
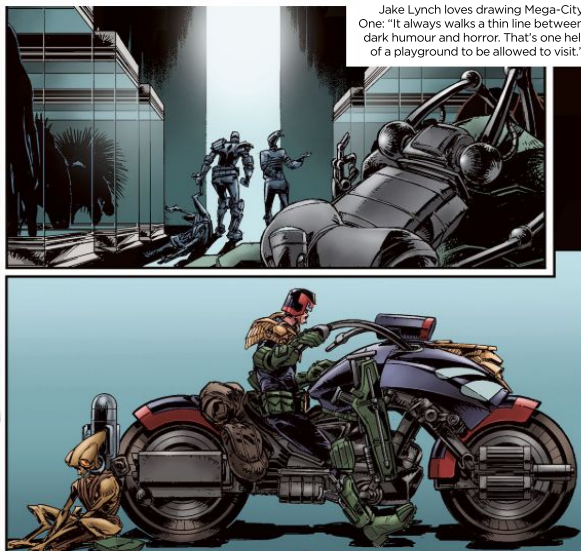
The timeless draw of Judge Dredd

Drokk! The current crop of Judge Dredd artists tell **Ian Dean** why Mega City One's famed lawman has stayed the course…

Few characters in comic's history have remained as consistently inconsistent as Judge Dredd. The late Steve Dillon's Dredd offers a realism different from Ian Gibson's, but they're both beloved. Mega-City One's hero has always been open to change. How is it to draw Dredd?

Dredd regular PJ Holden tells us, "I think it comes down to both the iconic unchanging elements and just how

All images © Rebellion

PJ Holden drew the urban vigilante Noam Chimpsky, who just about stays under Judge Dredd's radar.

amazingly flexible the design has proven, which means that you pick and choose how you want to draw him." **PJ** continues: "Hopefully over time you end with a look that's unique to you and strong enough it might eventually become one of those iconic portrayals."

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

PJ has come up with his own way to draw Dredd. He imagines there's an armour plate under the iconic eagle, enabling him to reposition the pad to create a more dynamic character.

"I also tend to push the cartoonier aspects of Dredd's world while leaving him like a big lump of realistic granite in it," he says. "Reflecting, I think, how Dredd's world is (Mega-City One, ➤➤

1 Jake Lynch
"It mostly boils down to attitude, practice, making, showing work to friends and pros, and learning to take knock-backs with good grace. Pick yourself up and do it all over again. We learn more through trying and often failing – they all have a lesson to teach us in one shape or another. Read comics, read ImagineFX: they're trying to help you and keep your portfolio lean."

2 PJ Holden
"Get your storytelling locked down! Ask someone you trust who maybe doesn't read comics, to tell you what they think is going on in a piece of your unlettered art. If they can understand the story – with no verbal help and no dialogue – you've done a great job! If they don't know what time of day it is in the story, or where it's set – that's a sign something has gone wrong."

3 Anna Morozova
"Sequential is essential! Practising storytelling skills is extremely important as comics are all about the right visual narration, pace and world building rather than just a technically good render of a single image. Comics artists pay specific attention to the body language and 'acting' of the characters, along with how you block the action in a scene. When approaching editors, showcase your best, most recent sequential art and keep it tailored to the house style of the publisher if possible."

Panels? PJ says: "Sometimes you dig into the greats (Carlos Ezquerra and Mike McMahon, to name just two) who've solved those problems and then liberally steal from them."

home to 400 million lunatics, and Dredd the incorruptible face of justice) and how I like to draw."

PJ adds that Dredd, as a strip, is unique in its pacing. With six to seven panels per page, the pacing is faster than a usual comic. "Carlos would frequently do a great Dredd shooting and person being shot right beside each other – close-ups on both – solving the perennial problem of 'Dredd shoots perp'."

FREE TO EXPERIMENT

"What makes it unique is what the creators bring to it," explains Dredd regular **Jake Lynch**, who reveals how Dredd artists are urged to make the character their own.

"2000 AD has always encouraged us to play with its toys and doesn't hoard them, demanding that it should only be done a 'certain' way. That has made for the enduring design and world-building, and some really incredible storytelling."

Jake reveals how 2000 AD has enabled him to experiment, and even make mistakes. "Some people thrive

Panels from Anna Morozova's work on Tales From The Black Museum, a regular strip in 2000 AD that's set in Mega-City One's Grand Hall of Justice.

in that freedom, to be allowed to steer their own development; other people less so. 2000 AD will give you that freedom, but what you do with it is up to you. But you'll be expected to be able to do the lot: no pencillers, no inkers, no excuses."

We ask Tom Foster why Dredd has endured. "It's a complex, pain-in-the-arse design to draw and a complex, pain-in-the-arse world to draw it in," he says. It's the intricacy that makes

66 Everything on the costume tells you something about the character 99

the character a challenge but enables artists to interpret him in new ways. From the clean suit and zip to the badges and pads, "everything on the costume tells you something about the character," says **Tom**.

The ideas that make Dredd work can be applied to all comic characters. Tom has tapped into what works in Dredd to create new heroes for Mega-City One. He says: "So one or two carefully chosen design elements can go a long way: an unusual piercing or tattoo, an underbite, crab claws… that sort of thing." Your character may be drawn by someone else too, so it's

Tom worked on Storm Warning, a series set in the Judge Dredd universe that featured Judge Lillian Storm, a powerful psychic.

Cliff Robinson's run on 2000 AD in the 1980s saw the artist's version of Dredd become one of the defining ways readers view the character.

The renowned psychic Judge Anderson prepares to face a foe from the astral plane, in Anna's artwork from the story All Will Be Judged.

important that your design can be understood and replicated.

UNIQUE COMBINATION

Artist **Anna Morozova** is new to Dredd, but her run as lead artist on Judge Anderson strip All Will Be Judged has given her insight into the character's design. "I think it comes down to a unique combination of the original ideological monolithism and the rough, raw, rebellious creativity that went into the construction of Dredd's world," she says, explaining how Dredd's ordered but vivid universe helps.

Anna explains how this has made Dredd an enduring fixture in the comic world: "It's absolutely fascinating how, while being drawn and envisaged by many different creators, the designs are always recognisable and truly iconic. The longevity of the visual design in the world of Dredd relies on a masterfully constructed blueprint that still allows space for artistic licence and a signature approach from individual creators."

As for Anderson, Anna believes she has evolved more than Dredd. "Not only has her character changed direction a few times, but she has also acquired a recurring cast of supporting Psi-Division characters that have changed the strip's dynamics.

"When I recently got the chance to illustrate a Judge Anderson story,

Unlike other comic cities, "Mega-City One can be completely invented. That has its advantages, as you never have to worry too much about accuracy. The downside is that you constantly have to design from scratch," says Tom.

I tried to keep the line-work quite organic and fluid with the hope of reflecting her psychic abilities."

Dredd continues to change, and Anna is waiting patiently to apply her talent to the character. "He has been pretty elusive in the stories I have contributed to so far!" she tells us, but we think that 2000 AD's justice-dispensing icon isn't too far from her portfolio. ●

Finding your voice

Clever art Spanish artist **Fernando Dagnino Guerra** reveals how his life experiences influenced his own graphic novel, Smart Girl

In Smart Girl, android Yuki becomes self-aware and discovers what it means to be alive. Fernando Dagnino Guerra says she's influenced by his life.

In his time, comic artist Fernando Dagnino Guerra has pencilled Superman and Green Lantern, and contributed to DC's New 52. He's drawn the stalwarts of comic heroes. But that's not ultimately who this artist is. A fractured upbringing drew him to where he is now – creating his own cyberpunk world, Smart Girl.

"I grew up in Madrid, Spain, in the late 1970s and 1980s in a booming period of cultural and artistic transgression after the long 40-year night of a gruesome fascist regime," he tells us. "And I guess pop art,

cyberpunk and comics were there, and I got caught in the explosion."

Comics were Fernando's way out. His "greatest inspiration" were the pages of a graphic novel or pulp classic. Finding their way into his collection, the artist would paw over Terror Illustrated from EC Comics, the art of Winsor McCay, and the "mind-blowing" comics of the 1970s and 1980s.

"Al Williamson, Kirby, Eisner, Miller, Byrne, Bill Sienkiewicz, P Craig Russell, Moebius, Milo Manara..." the names just keep coming. "I could go on giving names for days up to my contemporary friends and colleagues,

who are a continuous source of learning and inspiration."

IMAGINE THAT

Before comics came calling there was life in the real world. Fernando started his career in art as a graphic designer and illustrator, working for The Walt Disney Company's Imagineers. When he finally decided to leave for the less-secure lifestyle drawing his heroes there was a moment of hesitancy.

"Definitely," he says, when asked if quitting a stable job for comics was stressful. "It was one of the many risks I had to take throughout my career to finally focus exclusively on comics."

"It wasn't until Smart Girl that I decided to bet so hard on my own work and to pour it all of my artistic entrails," says Fernando.

As it turned out, life was easy. Almost too easy. The workload was tough. "Publicity was the perfect trap. I had loads of work. They paid me a lot of money to draw fast, but not with the quality I would have liked to provide," he says. "I guess it was one of those few moments where success was the problem on my way to achieve my comic book goals."

Has life as a professional comic artist met Fernando's expectations? He

"I'm a huge fan of mythology in art and literature. Mythological stories from all over the world have inspired many of my works," says Fernando.

❝ It was one of those few moments where success was the problem… ❞

jokes that not everything is as you think it will be as a child, some things like growing old and getting wrinkles aren't the end of the world. "In the same manner, making your childhood dream come true comes with a price. The dream becomes real and it's rewarding and fascinating, but also disappointing and demands great sacrifice. Comics are an industry too and many non-artistic parameters may

determine the fact that you enjoy, or don't enjoy, working on a series."

His experiences at the big comic houses haven't dented his love of the industry or the art. It also affords the chance to do your own thing in a way few jobs allow. For Fernando this has meant creating his own graphic novel, Smart Girl. A steampunk comic strip in the manner of his heroes from his childhood, in some senses it sees the artist come full circle; using his knowledge and love of comics to create something he's proud to call his own.

Smart Girl began as a short story by Fernando back in 2014. The comic itself took the artist two years to create between 2016 and 2018.

GREATER MEANING

Smart Girl is a personal project for Fernando. The artist had written some underground comics in Spain and a

graphic novel aimed at young adults, but It wasn't until Smart Girl that he decided to throw himself into something more meaningful.

We ask Fernando if he has any advice for artists wishing to create their own comic. He tells us connecting with your characters is vital. You must share a "personal rapport with them," he says, "That is, injecting some parts of myself in them so that whenever I write them or draw them, they elicit that precise emotion I need to vibrate to their particular tune."

Smart Girl describes an artificial person undergoing an emancipatory process. She's attempting to deconstruct her programmed identity and search for meaning in her life. "I couldn't identify more with any other character, " says Fernando. *Discover more about Smart Girl at titan-comics.com/c/1681-smart-girl.*

How to get noticed? Always be yourself…

First step Getting that big break needn't mean devaluing yourself. Comic art directors are looking for fresh approaches

Getting noticed can be hard for an artist. You need that one great piece that breaks through the noise of the internet and gets people talking for all the right reasons. For **David Talaski** it was his pin-ups of familiar Marvel faces.

"Going from cheeky superhero pin-ups to an official Superman cover wasn't the career trajectory I saw coming!" says the artist. His series of humorous glimpses into the everyday lives of The Avengers caught the eye of the commissioning editors at DC Comics, and soon David was drawing the Man Of Steel.

SUPER-BIG BREAK

"At the time I'd barely started doing cover work, so getting an email from DC was already a big surprise. Then realising that they wanted me to paint Superman *and* make it Pride-themed made the whole thing feel super surreal," says David. "For me it was a lot more than just getting to paint Superman; it was an opportunity to represent myself as an artist to an industry I've wanted to break into, it was an opportunity to represent myself as a queer artist, and most importantly it was an opportunity to make something special for the LGBTQIA+ comic community."

David was inspired by the classic pin-up artists and themes of the mid-20th century because, just like

"I ask myself how I would see these characters in an everyday setting. Maybe pick a mundane task for them to perform. Like how would the Sorcerer Supreme get ready in the morning?"

Superman, the ideas are timeless. "[JC] Leyendecker was the obvious inspiration for the one we went with, both for his style having that classic feel I was going for, but also as an homage to a prolific gay illustrator," says the artist.

David's cover is a sign of how the comics industry is changing, and shows the 'big two' are prepared to challenge preconceptions. David's

love of classic American illustrators and pin-up artists Duane Bryers, Bill Randall and Gil Elvgren is clear in the personal project that got him noticed and his commissioned Superman cover.

It matters, says David. "Having yourself reflected back at you in the media you enjoy is something a lot of people take for granted. When you don't have that representation it's very isolating.

"I know as a kid, the most isolating years of my life, it would have meant the world to me to see characters like myself in comics. Even with this Superman cover, the number of comments I got from people

❝ [JC] Leyendecker was the obvious inspiration for the one we went with… ❞

"I knew covering Captain America's most famous asset was sacrilege, but the thought of him using the shield to cover his stars and stripes was too perfect not to use – and it just feels so Steve Rogers of him."

saying how much it meant to them seeing Superman as an ally, showed just how important it was to people to feel seen."

That's how David views his version of Superman, as an ally. "I see him as a hero who will fight for those who can't fight for themselves; I see him as the hero who strives to do the right thing even when it's hard; I see him as a symbol of hope and potential of humanity," he tells us.

And in that moment, when Superman is rose-cheeked and smiling in a moment of reflection, what's he thinking about? "In the moment? He's probably thinking about Krypto. What a good boy."

STEP UP

That being said, comics still have a way to go to truly represent its readers and contributors. "I know personally I want to see more leading queer characters in comics, films and shows – and not just during Pride Month," says David.

Yet, it's heartening to discover that the big comic houses are opening their doors to everyone, and the best way of breaking into the industry is to just be yourself. Artists such as David Talaksi are getting there on their own terms.
You can discover more of David's art at inprnt.com/gallery and on Instagram at instagram.com/davidtalaskidraws.

SUPERMAN 32
JOHNSON • LEWIS • GODLEWSKI
BASRI • ELTAEB • ARREOLA
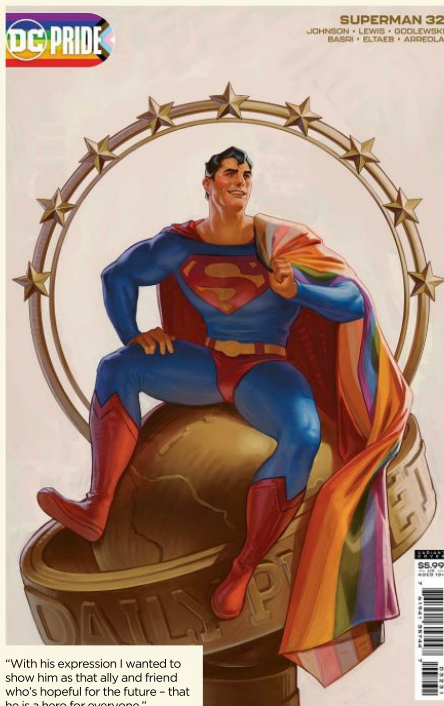
"With his expression I wanted to show him as that ally and friend who's hopeful for the future – that he is a hero for everyone."

© DC Comics

"I think humour can be found in most superheroes, even the more serious ones. [...] There's almost always an element of comedy that can be tapped into with any of these characters."

MAKING THE MAN OF STEEL

David Talaski's process of bringing a JC Leyendecker-inspired Superman to life

Finding inspiration for depicting Kal-El
"Before I drew anything I spent some time looking for inspiration. I like to spend some time on Google or in an art book to get my mind in the mood of what I want to draw. I then did a series of thumbnails exploring a couple ideas. I have a tendency to play around too much in the rendering stage if I don't."

Identifying the shapes
"When I begin the final piece, I start by figuring out the drawing. For this one I mostly defined the proportions and made sure I liked the pose. I try not to get caught up in detail at this point.

"I then put in the flat colours and start to broadly define lighting with the basic Soft and Round brushes in whatever software I'm using at the time. I think I started this one in Procreate, but then moved over to Photoshop."

Painting the face
"Then comes my favourite part, the face. I probably repainted the face a dozen times. The expression I wanted was hard to get right but it's the most important part.

"After I was satisfied with the face I moved around the picture and built out the forms in more detail and resolved everything with a lot of reference."

Using references taken from real life
"The flag was one of the last things that I did. I draped a blanket over a chair to help me figure out how the flag was going to work.

"The hardest part was trying to fit the 11 different stripes on the flag – including pastel pink and blue plus brown and black and white – in a way that they were all visible. I had to take some liberties here and there, but it was important to me to make sure they were all included."

Alien #1 cover original art that I hang in a customised acrylic frame. I display a lot of other artists' work, but I also display my proudest piece in this corner, and I can switch the art around from time to time. Although acrylic frames aren't ideal for displaying original pieces, I just love the classy and clean look of it!

Andy Brase's Yoda lithograph that I purchased from Bottleneck Gallery. Some time later the gallery approached me to collaborate on some prints. I felt like a fan boy turned into a working partner!

My wife assists me in filing all my paperwork, contracts and invoices so I can focus on drawing. She also helps me with packing and mailing out my original art and signed comic books!

I've wirelessly connected this PS5 DualSense controller to my PC so I can remote play my PS5 when I work. Is it for research purposes? Or just an excuse to play? Maybe both? You never know...

ImagineFX

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

© Marvel

For this cover of Sinister War #1 I tried to recall my visit to NYC. There are so many water tanks on the rooftops, smoke and pigeons!

Kael Ngu

Pixellated inks Creative inspiration comes in many forms, in this Malaysian artist's studio

My studio is located just right beside my living room. It's separated by a tinted glass wall that enables me to see outside of my studio, rather than having to work in a fully enclosed space.

The studio's design is pretty straightforward. On one side we have a fully extended L-shaped workstation where I work together with my wife, and on the other side there's a wall of well-lit shelves filled with books and toys. This is actually our first studio after we bought our first house, and I designed everything myself for the contractors to follow. ➦

My collectibles gallery. For some reason I like to touch and hold my collections, so I designed an open section. The downside? Lots of dusting!

A clock showing the local time in London, where my art representative lives. I'm seven hours ahead of him, so I need to know what time he's awake whenever we need to communicate.

Boxes of comic books with covers I've done that requires signatures or comments. Retailers tend to send them to me to sign and return back, so often there are piles of books on the floor.

Various original art and prints in my traditional corner. I make sure that I'm fully juiced up when I start working!

> ❝ **I'm proud of my art, and I'm always happy when I look at the results I've achieved** ❞

I've long dreamt on having an extended L-shaped working area, where I can just wheel my chair around whenever I wanted to switch from working digitally to traditionally, or vice versa. We also wanted a space for us to sit and chill on the floor when we take a break, so there's a space in the middle of the room that separates the bookshelves from our working area.

I like to surround myself with artworks from artists who I admire, particularly if they're originals. Every time I hold their work in my hand, I can literally feel their passion and

I can watch the TV in the living room from my workspace. Sometimes I wonder how I can still be productive with so many entertainment options around me, but hey – if you work hard, you get to play hard!

dedication in their craft, and that really pushes me to work harder.

I work at home like any other nerd, so it's important to remind myself that there's always someone better out there. If I can't afford to own their originals, I'll buy their prints instead. I place them mainly in my traditional corner to "supervise" me when I draw. That way I have no reason to slack!

A SENSE OF PRIDE

While I like to look at other artists' work, I also study my own pieces from time to time. I'm proud of my art, and I'm always happy when I look at the results I've achieved (while keeping my ego level in check, for sure!). When I want to take a break from drawing, I reach out to the shelves behind to flip through some art books or comics.

These days I rarely have the chance to read them, and I mainly collect books with visuals that I love. Looking

This massive 60x30-inch Kim Jung Gi lithograph hangs in my dining area, and I can stare at it while I eat. Digesting nutrients, and digesting inspiration...

through them really inspires me and usually kicks me back to my desk to continue working.

I've also started collecting figurines and statues. They serve as trophies for all my hard work, and also to make up for all those lost childhood moments when I couldn't buy what I wanted. Now that I'm able to, why not?

Kael is an illustrator providing covers for the comic industry. His clients include Marvel Comics, DC Comics and IDW Publishing. See more of his work at kaelngu.com.
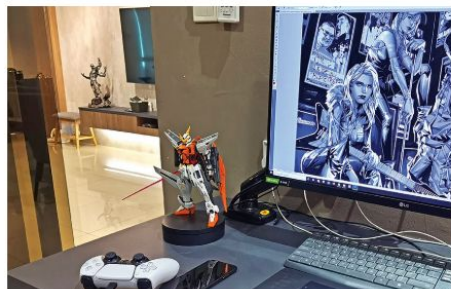
A view from my living room. I hate enclosed spaces so having a see-through glass wall lets us mentally breathe.
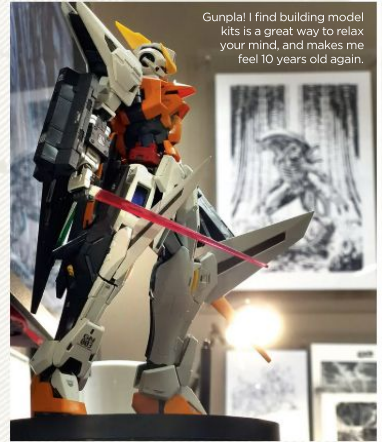
Gunpla! I find building model kits is a great way to relax your mind, and makes me feel 10 years old again.

Spawn #303 became one of the rarest convention-exclusive covers, soaring in value on the secondary market. I regret not keep more copies for myself!

I read a range of comic genres. From US superhero comics, to European, to Hong Kong manhua, Japanese manga, or even comics produced locally in Malaysia.
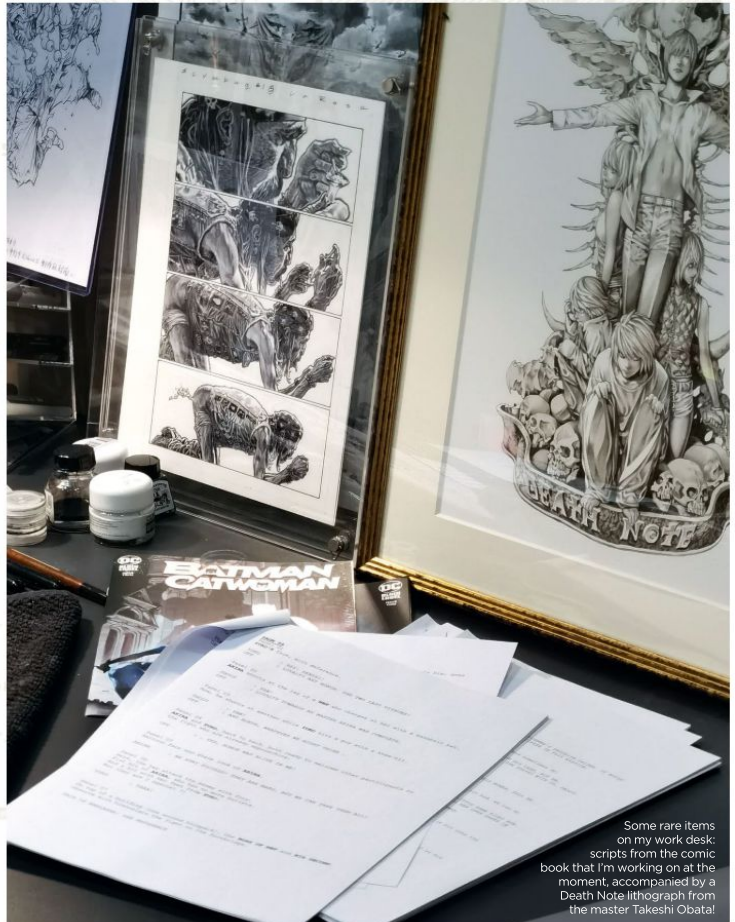
Some rare items on my work desk: scripts from the comic book that I'm working on at the moment, accompanied by a Death Note lithograph from the master Takeshi Obata!

Letters
YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS

Contact the editor, Ian Dean, on
mail@imaginefx.com or write to
ImagineFX, Future Publishing,
Quay House, The Ambury,
Bath, BA1 1UA, England

Follow us on Twitter:
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instagram.com/imaginefxmagazine

Where's the diversity?
I've been a reader of ImagineFX since issue number one, but I rarely see any black illustrators or artists. It's as if they don't exist. How about Thomas Blackshear or Ezra Tucker to begin with? I'm sure there are many more. It would be nice to see some of these featured in your magazine.
Cortrell Harris, via email

Ian replies *This is an issue we're addressing, and artists themselves are coming to grips with. Last issue Lauren Brown shared how, while growing up, she saw no one who looked like her in fantasy art. As a child she accepted it, but as an adult she's doing something about it. Expect greater diversity in the pages of ImagineFX in the future.*

My advice to our readers is to search for the artists that Cortrell suggested – they're incredibly talented.

Are NFTs over?
One thing the article didn't mention is the flawed tech of the NFT itself. All you're really buying is a URL, which could turn into a dead link or even have

DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?
Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 204 at **ifxm.ag/single-ifx**.

Are NFTs here to stay or a modern fad already on the way out? You took to our busy Twitter feed to debate the subject. Join the conversation and more @imaginefx.

Last issue Lauren Brown highlighted the lack of representation in fantasy art.

the image you bought swapped out for another. Useless.
Beth Zyglowicz, via Twitter
Hope so, thank god.
Jonah Lobe, via Twitter
They deserve to die just for the energy costs.
Seth Harvest, via Twitter

Are NFTs here to stay?
Should mint [your covers] as NFTs. Don't worry your misinformed information on NFTs wasn't accurate. Common mistake. Ask the NFT community and do some real research into it. Huge power shift coming.
Ryan Annett, via Twitter

Ian replies *Our look at NFTs and the real cost they have on the planet caused a stir online. NFTs, like all crytocurrencies, are in their infancy and will evolve, but right now our readers feel the impact is too great while others love the idea. What do you think?*

Eager to learn
I'd like to recommend, if possible, a future article for the magazine.
I'm working in an absolutely not art-related environment, but I'd love to change this some day. So I had the idea of practising by myself at home, which turned out to be quite complicated. Without clear guidance I can't decide what to learn, for how long and in which order. I was thinking that in the future your magazine could publish an article about it? Like a list of seven topics to practise, for people like me who can't go to art schools.
Daniel Nagy, via email

Ian replies *You are the reason ImagineFX exists! So firstly, thanks for reading. Every issue features a mix of art advice and training for different levels, but expect some more core art theory such as gesture drawing, colour theory and shape language in future issues.*

FRESH PAINT
New works that have grabbed our attention

Allison Reimold
@allisonreimold

Richard Anderson
@flaptraps

Ashleigh Izienicki
@missupacey

If you've created art that you want us to shout about simply tag us on Twitter or Instagram, and use the hashtag #imaginefx

Legend

THE ARTIST'S LIFE
"Being a comic artist and illustrator is the best life I could ever have, and where I'll always feel the most at home."

ImagineFX
LEGEND

Steve Rude

Gary Evans and **Ian Dean** meet the comic artist, who has lots to say about his art, his beloved Nexus and everything in between

S teve Rude has been interviewed by ImagineFX twice – once by phone and again by email. Except, you don't really interview Steve. You proffer a question then buckle up for a roller-coaster ride of ideas, advice, opinions, anecdotes and digressions – and digressions on digressions. You ask Steve about his current animation project and somehow he arrives at The Beatles signing to Capital Records via Dr Martin Luther King.

Steve is very entertaining and very enthusiastic, and that enthusiasm is infectious. He's 64 now. So he has a bit of the oracle about him, and a bit of

the bar-room philosopher. But for all his opinions, Steve takes the work seriously. He's been at comics over 40 years, worked with all the famous publishers, drawn all the biggest characters, won a ton of major awards, but his bio reads: 'Steve considers himself an art student.'

You can't really interview Steve in any conventional sense, so there seems no point trying to write a conventional article about him. What

> **❝ Steve is very entertaining and very enthusiastic, and that enthusiasm is infectious ❞**

follows is a kind of incomplete life and times of Steve "The Dude" Rude. Not really a portrait of the artist as a man, more half a dozen blurry snapshots. They're twisted parables. They're strange allegories you can't quite get to the bottom of. They're never dull, never predictable, always intriguing, funny, and warm. They're life lessons, Steve-Rude style. Buckle up.

ON FADS

Steve Rude created sci-fi superhero comic Nexus with Mike Baron in 1981. He met Mike after having his work rejected from a newspaper (a regular occurrence) in hometown Madison, Wisconsin. The editor ➤➤
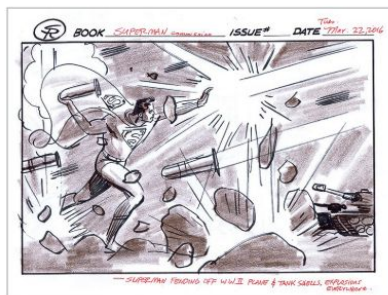
ROCKET MAN
A rough sketch for the Superman painting right, created in transparent and opaque watercolour.

▶▶ told Steve about some guy in town who wanted to write comics and needed an artist. Steve was 24 and had been living on food stamps at a YMCA, but he and Mike were "possessed of that youthful overdrive".

Steve's distinctive art style was – and still is – influenced by the stuff he grew up with, particularly Star Trek and the Hanna-Barbera cartoon Space Ghost: "Those two shows, to this day, are somewhere in the back of my mind with everything I draw or design."

Around the same time the illustrator also discovered Jack Kirby ("the undeniable Einstein of our business") and John Romita's Spider-Man comics. Later, he got into Paul Gulacy's Marvel martial-arts and espionage series Master of Kung Fu. "Kirby, Romita and Gulacy are the basic three artistic influences that have stayed with me all these decades, never too far my mind when I sit down to create something."

This steadfast taste was put to the test in the 1990s when his classical comic style fell out of fashion. "Hero's couldn't just have costumes anymore, they needed pockets, zippers, and reinforced head gear over their entire wardrobe… It took me a few years to simply remember who I was when these changes occurred and just keep trudging forward.

Artist
PROFILE

Steve Rude
LOCATION: US
FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Paul Gulacy, Jack Kirby and John Romita
MEDIA USED: Pen, pencil, oils and watercolours
WEB: steverude.com

WISE WORDS
"People rarely come to you and hand out success. You have to go out and get it. You have to make yourself the best 'you' possible on your own. And that's the way it should be."

"What I eventually settled on was simply staying true to what I am and was always meant to be, regardless of the trends."

Some artists don't like having a reputation. Steve Rude loves it. He cemented this reputation with work for World's Finest (1990), The Incredible Hulk vs. Superman (1999), and Spider-Man: Lifeline (2001).

It can be a lot of pressure being a big-reputation artist. But Steve tries to put himself in the editor's position. He asks, "what would put a smile on their

❝ What I settled on was staying true to what I am and was always meant to be ❞

face?" The answer? He sends his work in the mail.

"So editors get a packet, they get a real physical package, and they get a thrill out of that. It used to be the thrill of everyone's day, to see these big packages come in at the DC office, or Marvel's, and they would rip it open and look at these pages and they would be beside themselves. Well, nobody does that anymore. What do you think I'm doing? I'm doing what makes them happy and excited."

THE WONDER YEARS
"This two minutes of animation took me from 1988 to, I think, 2003. When I was done with it, it was like I was coming back from a war, like I was crawling from the battlefield. It

© DC Comics

BIZARRE BRAIN BOOST

Steve on his creative process and how becoming increasingly impatient has changed how he works

"When a cover comes my way, I first have to wait for some kind of image to course into me. Some of these images are immediate, some far from immediate.

Then I begin the procedure taught to me by various teachers over the years. I have to compose the picture, do some value and colour studies, all usually done quite small so I know where I'm going with things when they go full size. I used to be very good about photoshoots of models and studies that followed, but, alas, I've gotten so impatient with things over the years, sometimes I dive into the deep end and wing it.

One thing I've learned over the years to fit my changing temperament is just begin painting after the roughs are solved, rather than the usual procedure of getting everything ready ahead of time. It seems I've gotten too impatient for all that

pre-lim work. So when I'm well into things, then I'll gather the reference or do the model shoots. That's backwards to most people. But things evolve over time, and me being me, I have to deal with these odd shifts and changes.

I tend to have favourite stories I've drawn rather than recalling any particular painted cover. One illustration I recall, was painted in oil in a day and half – remarkable for me (see Next Nexus #2). I had just gotten off a week-long painting workshop in northern Wisconsin and was really feeling it. It reminded me of Bones McCoy putting on that electronic head gear and suddenly knowing how to perform surgeries way beyond what he had been capable of. And so, within days of returning from this workshop, and newly armed with this bizarre brain boost, this painting seemed to flow as we wish all paintings would."

GOING BIG
Page 12 from The Coming of Gourmando, the latest Nexus material produced in the large newspaper format for impact.

stressed me out in ways I didn't think I'd even survive."

The animation that was 15 years in the making was a promo for an as-yet unmade cartoon series of Nexus. Why didn't he quit? "The idea of not getting it done after all that time and work was unthinkable."

Steve was very happy with how this animation turned out ("very Hanna-Barbera"), but he'd self-financed the whole project, and almost lost his house in the process. So unfortunately nobody was getting paid. He ended up compensating collaborators with specially made paintings – and Steve's paintings sell for thousand of dollars.

"They were all happy about that. But when you meet crazy people that aren't reliable, those are guys that ➜➜

PEALE BACK THE YEARS
Portrait of Sundra Peale, the main female interest in Nexus. Painted in transparent watercolour.

PAINTING THE ICONS
Steve Rude's classic interpretation of Superman, painted in oil on canvas 24"x 36".

➤➤ put a wrench in everything. You find out a lot about people when you're not paying them. A lot."

ON BEING BIPOLAR

Steve spoke candidly in documentary Rude Dude: The Steve Rude Story (2014) about his problems with bipolar. He summaries these problems like this: "I was basically a happy person who also seemed to lack certain brain chemicals that would eventually put me through hell – you know, just to make life interesting."

He remembers doing one of his "happiest" covers, for Moth#1, while going through one of his worst depressions. Steve says bipolar never seemed to affect his art: "Good old bipolar – is it the chicken or the egg?"

Steve has noticed in recent years more people in his industry and in the public eye talking in interviews about mental health. These people appear to have it all: "Suddenly, rich or poor, we all become as one – just plain human. It reminds me of one of my favourite art adages: reveal, don't conceal. Things that you try and bury have a tendency to burst forth many times worse if gone unacknowledged for too long."

MORNING ROUTINE

"When I make a decision, any decision, I'll know if it's the right one the next day. If I wake up feeling good about it, then it was the right one."

Steve's daily routines at home in Arizona looks something like this: protein shake, upstairs to his studio, then he critically looks over the
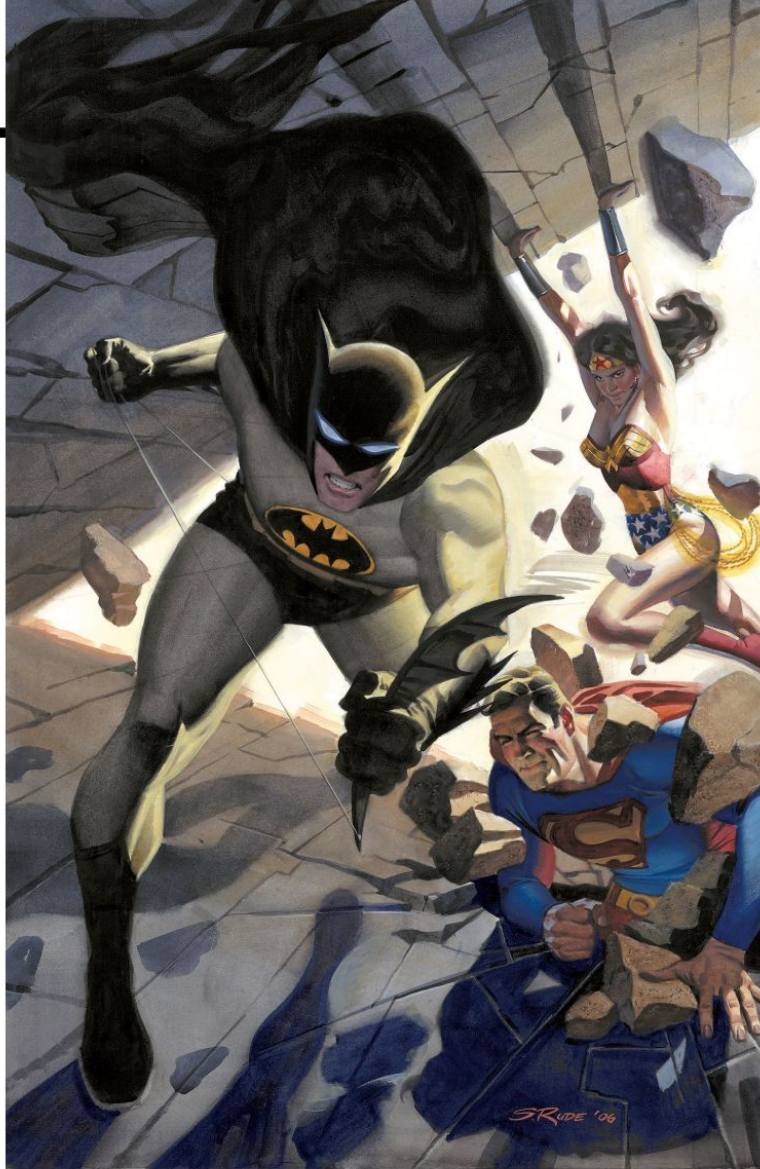
WINNERS CIRCLE
Steve is an eight-time Will Eisner Award winner. His take on DC's iconic trio in opaque watercolour recalls the heroes' Golden Age.

previous day's work ("often shocked at some mistake that I've made in misaligned eyes or body proportions"). He figures out how he's going to fix those mistakes and move on. Drawing and painting are brain work. Problems that appeared hopeless the day before often become manageable in the morning.

Steve was taught to start with "the knowns". These are the things that

❝ When I make a decision, any decision, I'll know if it's the right one the next day ❞

definitely have to go into a piece. This gives "the unknowns" time to resolve themselves. The older he becomes, the more this whole process feels "amorphous."

"This life that I have is incredible; it's the most fulfilling life I could ever imagine. I get up every day happy and excited. I don't know what's going to happen that day and I don't know what good pencil is going to do. I have it all planned out in thumbnails, but the things that come in moment to moment as you're drawing these pages… it's almost like it's a supernatural experience. You know, where did this come from?"

© DC Comics

UP, UP, AND AWAY
Steve won the Kirby Award for best comic artist in 1986, and continues to push his painting skills and art style.

TACKLE THE UNKNOWN IN THE NAME OF ART

Always up for a challenge, Steve reveals why he thinks artists shouldn't always play to their strengths

"I'm told that challenges are good for the soul. When a new road-block comes up – and they always will – what does one do? I suggest trying to cushion your hesitation or fear, and remember why you were driven to pick up a pencil in the first place. Of course, every new piece will challenge you, often in uncomfortable ways. My teacher, Mr Kampen, was the first to talk to me about inertia, and that overcoming it, along with hesitation or fear, can scare the best of us.

All of these painted covers I've done over the years were challenges. One thing I've always believed in is not catering to an artist based on his preferences. If one is known for drawing dinosaurs, give them a story that requires skyscrapers and people in tailored business suits. If you're out of your element in something, well, I'd just go to the library and research it, or find the real thing and take pictures or do sketches.

Is this hard? No harder than anything else in life or, say, taking time to answer the questions for this article. As wisdom might denote, ignoring challenges doesn't work, nor does burying your head in the sand. I knew nothing about motorcycles or sailing ships, for example, but one of the stories demanded it, and I had to do something about it.

Learning to overcome ourselves is a life-long pursuit. Dealing with really difficult things seems to be part of the contract we sign at birth. Try and make it count."

SOME LIKE IT HOT
Steve Rude used Marilyn Monroe as reference for Nexus's girlfriend, Sundra Peale.

So most mornings start with a search for the knowns, with a flick through his sketchbook. For Steve, there's no discipline involved in sketching regularly. He has 35 sketchbooks and believes he could exist without sketching: "It's like breathing air."

Steve's outlook on life remains pragmatic "I've decided that by the

HULKAMANIA RUNS WILD
There's nothing more 1980's than Steve's homegrown hero Nexus going toe-to-toe with wrestling's Hulk Hogan.

time you get into your 60s you need to know exactly how you're going to spend the rest of your life.

"Most people live their lives trying to be safe… I make it a point to not live like other people."

STAYING TRUE TO NEXUS

Nexus has over 100 issues and was previously published by Dark Horse Comics. It's now under Steve's own Rude Dude Productions, and that's where he intends to keep it. "And that was a great feeling to realise that, you know, you're not wrong and anybody else you're not complaining to some big company.

"I'd have to say that the work on Nexus has always been the most important to me. The stories in Nexus is something I'll pursue for the rest of my life, so much being left to tell of these unique characters.

"I have to be right there at the drawing board doing exactly what I know I have to be doing, because no one's going to cancel my book. Now that I'm self publishing, nobody can cancel me. Yeah, I'm totally in charge of what's going to happen from now on. It comes out of my brain and out of my hand. For the rest of my life."

Sketchbook

Stan Manoukian

Also known online as grograou, the French illustrator's depictions
of grumpy fantasy beasts are sure to bring a smile to your face

Artist PROFILE

Stan Manoukian
LOCATION: France

Stan's been drawing comics, and designing for advertising and cinema in France for 30 years. In 2007 he started the project of drawing a monster a day. This exercise has led him to developing a fantastic universe filled with them. Now internationally recognised, his works have been the subject of several books and exhibitions in the US, Japan, Australia, France and Europe.
instagram.com/grograou

SWAMP CREATURE
"I've always been a fan of Bernie Wrightson's Swamp Thing. I wanted to make a swamp creature, but this one is probably more inspired by the Davy Jones character from Pirates of the Caribbean."

MONSTER GANG
"I really like Maurice Sendak's art – it was the inspiration for this drawing. In the end I mostly followed his style of drawing the snouts and capturing the expressiveness of his characters."

BAT
"A melancholic bug inspired by a bat. I wanted to give him an expression that makes us doubt his intentions. Nasty or nice?"

BALOOR
"Here is my grumpy 'monster' version of Baloo. I always use a red pencil to make my pre-sketch, as you can see here."

MUD MONSTER
"A mud monster inspired by Clayface, of course."

BUTTERFLY
"A horned feline, inspired by the beast of the film Beauty and the Beast by Jean Cocteau."

❝ I have periods where I like to draw feathers, others the hairs or aquatic creatures ❞

OWLEEWOOD
"Another sketch of an iconic creature inspired by an owl. I have periods where I like to draw feathers, others the hairs or aquatic creatures... And many more things!

THREE SKETCHES
"Research on horned felines. The middle one will become a large drawing. The cloud creatures represent the emotions of my monsters."
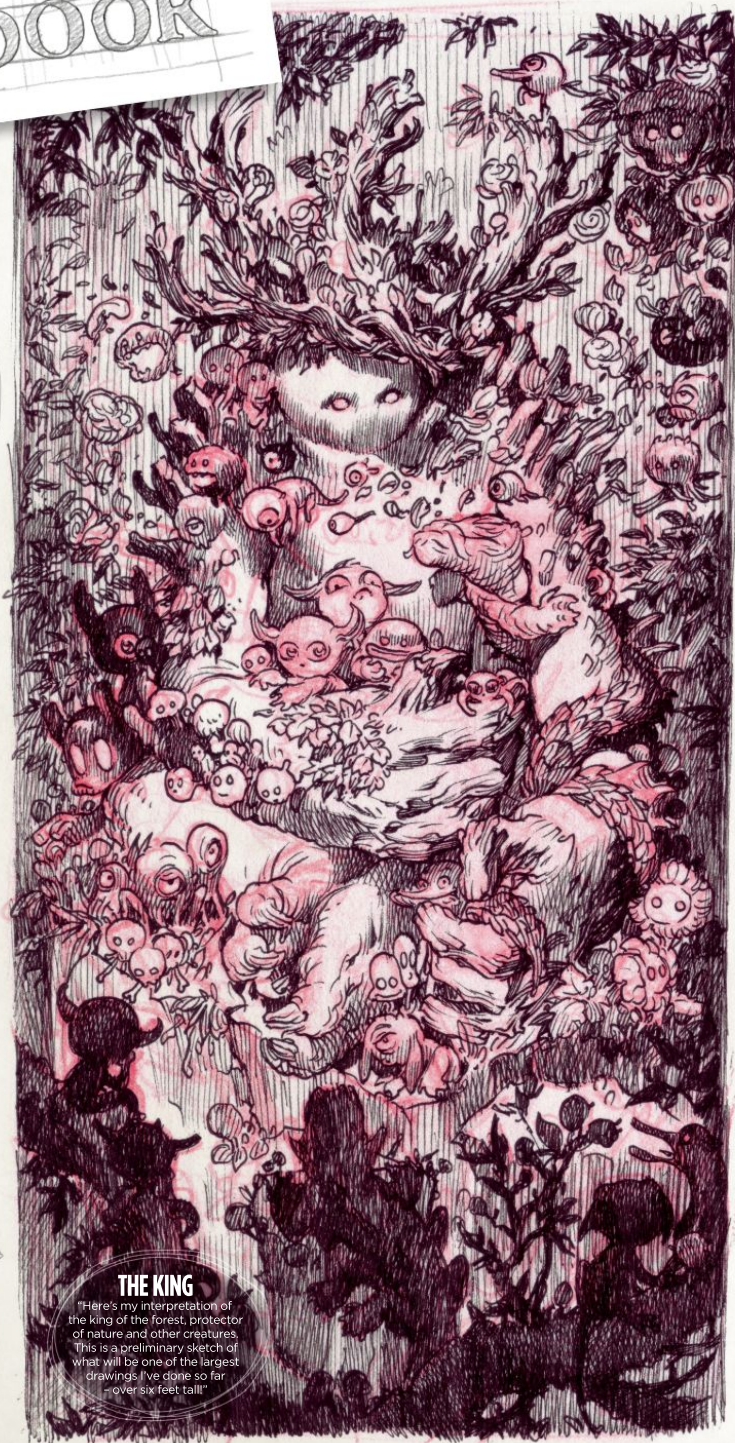
THE KING
"Here's my interpretation of the king of the forest, protector of nature and other creatures. This is a preliminary sketch of what will be one of the largest drawings I've done so far – over six feet tall!"

DEATH MASTER

"My putrid monster version of death. She sends out flying eyes to look for new victims."

❝His horns attest to his rank and serve as a nest for other creatures❞

THE BARON

"A noble of the forest. His horns attest to his rank and serve as a nest for other creatures. He's also accompanied by an eye creature – a scout that allows him to observe everywhere."

APPEARANCE OF THE RAIN

"A preparatory sketch for what will become a large drawing. The idea was to delineate the different planes and depth by representing the rain with a majority of vertical lines."

Do you want to share your sketches with your fellow ImagineFX readers? Send us an email with a selection of your art, captions for each piece and a photo and bio of yourself to **sketchbook@imaginefx.com**

LIFE LESSONS

From experimenting, to knowing when to stop, Marvel legend **Adi Granov** shares his advice on becoming a better artist

SWINGING IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD
The webslinger takes aim at the reader in Adi Granov's variant cover for Spider-Man: City at War #1.

Few artists have had as much impact in the whole of Marvel's output quite like Adi Granov. He's best known for his work on Iron Man: Extremis, but he's also found time to contribute to the biggest Marvel Cinematic Universe movies – Iron Man, Black Panther, Avengers: End Game – as well as video games, including Marvel's Avengers and Iron Man VR.

"It was all an extension of the same thing for me. I never really planned to work in comics specifically, it just happened. I wanted to draw and paint science fiction and action art, so whatever allowed me to do that, I was happy to jump into," says the legendary artist.

Adi tells us his art style translates well across all forms of media, and this was a deliberate decision on his part. "I loved films, comics, games and toys, so never wanted to limit myself to just one," he says. "I've worked in games a lot longer than comics, and have now spent more time on movies than I ever did on anything else, but because comic work is more immediate – from my desk straight to the readers – it's the thing which is most prominent."

STORIES BEHIND THE ART

With such an exhaustive portfolio, does Adi have one cover he covets above all of them? "Not really…" he tells us, but some stick out for personal reasons: "The Galactus [cover] I'm very happy with as he's one of my favourite characters from childhood and I feel like I did him justice. The Wolverine on the motorcycle feels like my definitive depiction of him – all power and fury. The A New Hope cover was very exciting as I got to do spaceships and then George Lucas bought the original painting, which is very cool. So, yes, there is a story behind many of them which gives them life beyond just what you see in print."

The artist counts Jean Giroud among his inspirations. Hints of the French icon's style can be seen in Adi's best work. Syd Mead and Hajime Sorayama are also in the artist's DNA, as well as Drew Struzan and Richard Amsel. "I started studying their work in college as I got more interested in using airbrushes," he says.

His influences and workload are diverse, which means Adi never relies on one art form to get the job done. His comic covers are all rendered in mostly acrylic paints, while film and video game designs are done digitally in Photoshop, "unless I get bored and do an occasional traditional piece".

Traditional, digital, or sculpting in ZBrush, Adi approaches his work with a sense of freedom. If you want to achieve a career in comic art that's filled with the variety and opportunities as Adi, then follow his advice…

1 THE SECRET TO SUCCESS

"I see success as something in the past, while I tend to view failure as a challenge to do better in the future. I suppose I'm driven by the concept of success as well, but I always tend to focus on things I could do better. Nothing ever feels as if it couldn't have been done at least a little bit better, which is probably a good thing as it keeps me motivated to keep learning and improving."

STICKING THE LANDING
Boba Fett channels his inner Iron Man, in Adi's Star Wars #1 Forbidden Planet variant cover.

AND… FIGHT!
Adi's depiction of Iron Man taking on Iron Monger appeared on the cover of The Art of Iron Man.

3

KNOW WHEN TO WALK AWAY

"I find that with experience you learn that art is like an elastic band and you can keep stretching it until it breaks, so the trick is knowing where that sweet spot is to leave it under as much tension as possible, but not going overboard. Over the years I've killed a lot of paintings by overdoing them, so I try to judge the limit, but it's always a challenge."

2

TAKE THE TIME TO LEARN A NEW SKILL

"I've always found sculpture more natural than drawing and painting, so I'm really enjoying ZBrush. I'm not sure I could claim that everyone should do it, but there are also no drawbacks to learning new skills. For me, the most difficult part was just learning the interface and all the various tools and ways of achieving what I want. The actual sculpting part has been really fun."

DON'T LOOK UP
Galactus is one of Adi's favourite comic characters – he portrayed Marvel's planet-eating villain for the variant cover of 2015's The Amazing Spider-Man #12.

UNEASY RIDER
Adi spent time making sure his depiction of Wolverine's motorbike was accurate, in this painting created for Sideshow Collectibles.

5 **EMBRACE DIVERSITY**
"A lot of my heroes in movies, music and sports looked different from me and as a kid it just seemed natural. Of course, I was naive, but it wasn't until I moved to the US that I realised all the socio-political issues surrounding race, gender and sexual orientation. My groups of friends have always tended to be very mixed, so it was always natural that all should be represented respectfully. It's not something that I've had to force, but it is something that I've tried to embrace."

4 # LOVE YOUR HEROES
"Jean Giraud [Moebius] changed my life. He was my first true hero and he was very versatile with a massive imagination. His work is what gave me the idea that I can do many different things as he worked in comics and movies and in different styles and even under different names. It felt like he was always pushing and exploring. He also did one of my favourite Marvel stories, Silver Surfer Parable, with Stan Lee."

AGAINST ALL ODDS
Keyframe art that Adi created for the film Iron Man 2, that shows a suited-up Tony Stark and War Machine battling against multiple Hammer Drones.

Adi Granov

6 KEEP AN OPEN MIND

"If there's one theme to my life as an artist, it's that I'm obsessed with learning and absorbing as much as I can from anywhere I can. Otherwise it feels like I'm short-changing myself. I always try to advise young artists to keep their minds open to everything around them, but sometimes it's hard to convince people that the specific interest they have will only be helped by broadening their horizons."

IT'S… COMPLICATED
A tender moment between
The Vision and Scarlet
Witch. Adi's art appeared
on the variant cover of
Deadpool #13.

8

LEARN FROM PAST ERRORS

"I never go back and
work on a painting
once it's done, but
I do look at them
and try to learn from
the things I see as
deficient and improve
on the next one."

7

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

"I really enjoy doing layouts more than I ever did
before. Lately I'm having huge fun just sketching
ideas. I try to be a future friend to myself as I'm the
one who will have to paint them, but I still take
pleasure in coming up with challenging layouts to
push things beyond the ordinary."

FLYING HIGH
Captain Marvel soars in variant cover art from Infinity Countdown #1.

RED-LETTER DAY
For the 600th issue of Daredevil, Adi teamed the blind crime-fighter with the assassin Elektra.

9

CHOOSE GOOD COLLABORATORS

"I've done so few collaborations with writers that my experience is limited, but as with anything, working with the right people is important. It's crucial that the styles gel and there's an understanding that for it to work, there has to be collaboration."

STRIKE A POSE
Keyframe art created by Adi for 2012's film The Avengers, with a US super-soldier leading the fight against an alien invasion.

10 FOCUS ON THE FOUNDATIONS

"Make sure that the structure of the layout and the drawings are solid and worked out. You don't want to be fighting poor foundations after you start rendering. Much better to spend the time early on to get it right, especially in multi-character pieces where there will be a lot of anatomy, posing, perspective, lighting and so on."

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French artist Moon's bold cover art kicks off our illustration issue, which features workshops on how to control detail, paint with shapes and bright colours, and speed modelling. We also examine the NFT phenomenon.

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This issue:

DEPICT THE ICONIC HARLEY QUINN

Join **Joshua Swaby** as he shares how he creates this month's stylish cover art, featuring the Joker's right-hand woman

Artist PROFILE

Joshua Swaby
LOCATION: US

New York-based Joshua is a freelance comic artist and illustrator whose clients include Marvel, DC Comics, Entertainment Weekly and Marvel Studios.
instagram.com/sway_art

When editor Ian Dean emailed me, offering me the chance to do a cover for ImagineFX, I was flabbergasted. This is something I didn't expect so early on in my career. After all, I only started freelancing a year ago.

I wanted to be in ImagineFX ever since high school. I used to buy it and learn from many of the featured professionals and illustrators, hoping one day I'd get my art in this leading magazine. And now here I am – my wish has come true.

For this workshop, I'm painting Harley Quinn. She's fun to draw, because you can do so much with her. She's a witty and vibrant ant-hero – even though she's a psycho! For this cover I want to combine those traits, and add her unique punk style.

When I create digital art comic covers, I like to keep things fairly simple: sketch, line, flats and colour. I always start by finding reference that supports the idea I have in my mind, and to help me see where the concept is going. I then go on to do thumbnails of my concepts, trying to capture the feeling and mood I want to pursue in the final piece.

I like to keep my line-work loose, but well-defined. I achieve this by using a brush that has a traditional-like feel of a pencil or charcoal. Then for greys, I use mid- to dark tones to help me flat individual areas and avoid unwanted spots to help myself ease into my colouring phase.

For colouring, I use hard and soft brushes to help render certain areas and textures in the skin and fabrics. I'm able to work quickly with both of these brushes – ideal for meeting tight deadlines! Finally, editing the colours and using filters gives my art greater vibrancy and balance.

I've used this process for many of my covers, and I hope you'll enjoy this ride that I'm taking you on…

1 Get hold of reference
Before I start a project or a drawing, reference is an important part in figuring out what I want to do. For this Harley Quinn piece, I want this cover to be very punk, very stylish and *fun*. I ask an amazing model, StitchedSpade, to help with the poses that I'm looking for. This, in turn, helps me when figuring out the ideas for my thumbnails. Good reference is invaluable.

2 Sketch thumbnails
After studying the reference photos, I start drawing thumbnails. The references of the model are helpful in bringing out my ideas for the cover. Across my three thumbnails I want to bring out the energy of Harley's punk-ish, carefree character. Note that thumbnails should be loose and be free of detail. ➡➡

3 Produce the final sketch, ready for painting

Once one of the thumbnails is approved I create the final sketch that will help me with my line-art, using a default Photoshop brush set to red. I never draw with black: I need my final sketch to be a lighter colour because I'll be laying down my lines on top of it.

4 Work up the line-art
Next, I reduce the Opacity to 50 per cent and start work on my line-art layer that's on top of the final sketch layer. My line-art is crucial to my art style and process. It's present in my final stages of my work because my line-work is loose, yet refined. The main brush that I use in all of my art is from Ilya Kuvshinov's brush set. It's called Forme echantillonne, and has an amazing traditional feel, much like using pencil or charcoal in real life.

5 Introduce a grey tone
Once I'm satisfied with the line-art, I create a layer underneath it for my greys. Here I use a default brush and the Lasso tool to colour the figure. The grey is my base tone before I start flatting individual areas, to highlight any gaps, contrast with background layer, and helps me keep in mind the depth of the character. It'll also assist with my next step, when I'll create a clipping mask over the greys to start flatting the image without having to clean the outer areas of the line-art.

6 Start flatting
Now that I've finished with the greys, I can start flatting. Before you start flatting, create a clipping mask over the grey layer using Alt+Ctrl+G. It's a helpful trick to colour over a layer that's locked, and enables me to paint freely and not have to worry about going over the lines. Work smart, not harder!
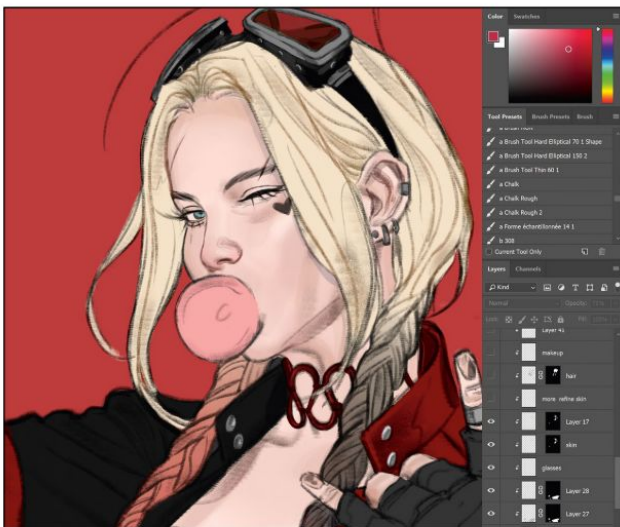
7 Rendering Harley's face
Before rendering the face I set up a layer called skin over my flats that's been clipped to my grey layer. Then I mask it by selecting the skin area (Layers>Mask tool) from the Quick Selection tool. Once masked, I now can render using a brush also from Ilya called Hard Elliptical 70 1 Shape, and this tool is super-useful because of its Pen Pressure setting. ➤➤
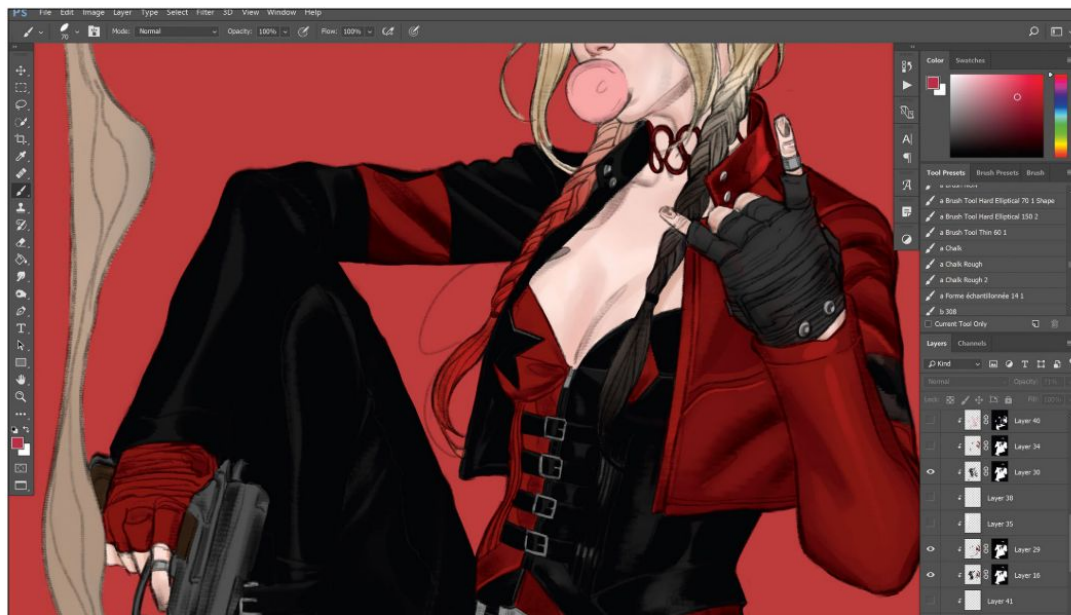
8 Painting the different fabrics in the clothing

I repeat the earlier step when rendering Harley's clothes. I select areas of her outfit and mask the layer before painting. I use the same brush that I used for my line-art, because I want the piece to have a traditional feel. The brush is also ideal for depicting leather and latex.
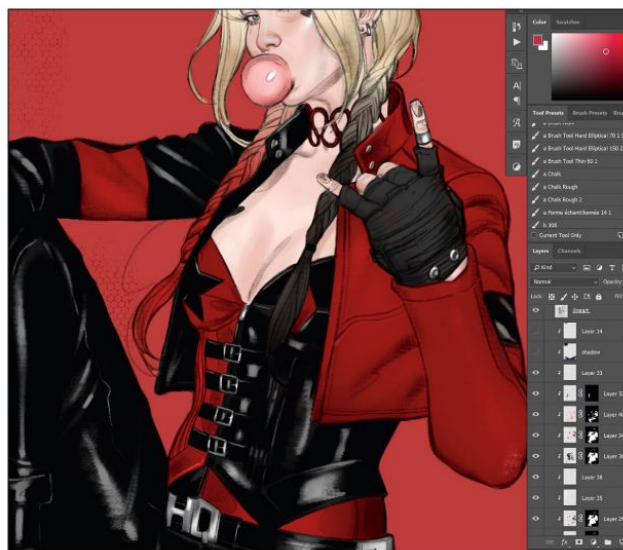
9 Apply highlights using Color Dodge

I go back and use the same Forme brush to bring out the highlights. I use lighter greys and whites, add Pen Pressure to the brush and reduce the Opacity to 60-80 per cent. I also change the brush mode to Color Dodge to help intensify the highlights. I recommend playing around with the brush's mode during this stage.
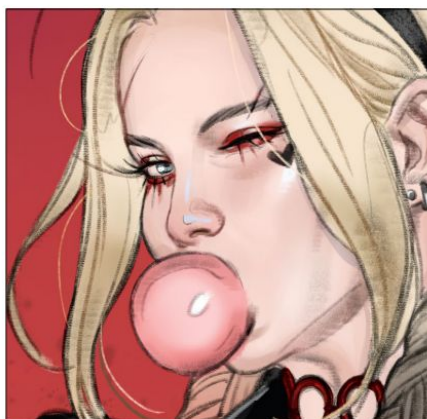
10 Add makeup to the character

Painting makeup is my favourite part, because I love looking at avant-garde, high fashion makeup styles. I always try to bring that into my own work. For this stage I create a new layer and use a soft Airbrush tool (the NISS Airbush by Ilya Kuvshinov) that produces a red, grungy look that Harley has in the films. Then I lower the Opacity to 53 per cent, which reduces the intensity of the colour so that it doesn't look like she's bleeding. Then I add another layer on top and paint in light green highlights to complement the strong reds.

11 Background detail

ImagineFX's art editor Daniel Vincent suggests adding a brick wall in the background, which helps to emphasise Harley's gritty and rough surroundings. I set the layer of bricks to Multiply, to make it feel translucent with the strong red of the background. I then add more texture to the background using a splatter tool from Ilya. I also want to light Harley with a heart-shaped spotlight. I use the Airbrush tool set to dark blue on an Overlay layer to bring in some purple mid-tones. For Harley's cast shadow I simply duplicate the grey layer from earlier.

12 Detailing the scene

I continue to render more of Harley's features, by adding more hair, more blush into her cheeks and also rendering the gun that's resting against her leg. This stage is primarily about building up the piece and making it feel more solid. During this stage I also brighten some of the reds in Harley's jacket.
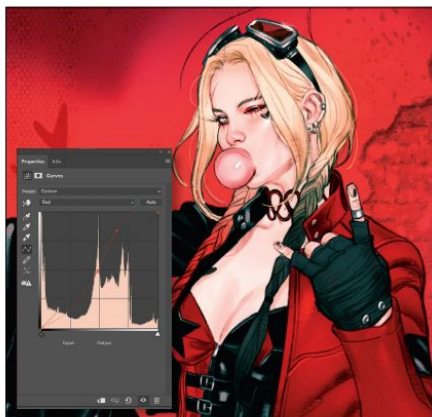
13 Adjusting the colours

Once I'm done with my rendering and have refined certain details, the fun begins. The Curve tool is ideal for helping to make certain colours look right or for capturing the mood you're going for in your work. I want to accentuate the reds in the piece, so I move the wavelengths, and then add another Curve tool to further play with the wavelengths using blues and more reds. Then I lower the Opacity and Fill to 34 per cent. This stage is about personal preference and finding out what's good enough – and what's a little too much.

14 Final edits and filter adjustments

To finish, I like to add a shade of another colour to bring my colours together. I use a strong cobalt blue and set that layer on Saturation mode. Be careful, because the colour can become a little too vibrant: you just want enough to bring out some elements in the textures. Set the Opacity to 60 per cent and Fill to 45 per cent.

Core Skills: Painter 2022 – Part 1
GET MORE FROM YOUR BRUSHES

Isis Sousa reveals her favourite Painter 2022 brushes and shows how you can use them to create unique digital art

Artist PROFILE
Isis Sousa
LOCATION: Norway

Isis is an art director, a Corel Painter Master Elite, a Xencelabs Artist and indie filmmaker. She also teaches and speaks at CG events.
isissousa.com

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

Many beginner artists who are new to Corel Painter 2022 can find themselves overwhelmed at the amount of choice the program offers.

So if you're just starting out, what are the best Painter brushes to use and for what purpose? In this workshop we'll follow the classic creative maxim "less is more" and put together a group of five essential brushes that can meet your artistic requirements in a variety of creative scenarios, ranging from producing early sketches, to paintings and polished illustrations.

More experienced artists will be aware that you only need one brush to produce art. Other times, combining the results of two brushes will bring a little extra pizzazz to the finished piece. However, some of Painter's tools possess characteristics that are a combination of two distinct brushes or techniques, thus increasing their potential and usefulness. Handily, Painter 2022 has a refined brush library with new categories, varients and previews to dip into, as well as a new Favourites option to group together your preferred brushes in one place.

Let's get to know this selection of versatile tools and discover how you can get the best from them!

By increasing Stroke Jitter you can use the Airbrush to add some grain to your art, as well as emulating skin pores or freckles on a portrait.

You can build-up colour density, by painting several times over the same spot. This naturally forms a gradient.

For colour gradients, you can repeat the same process over one or more layers if you prefer. This Airbrush naturally layers the colours in a smooth fashion.

① Airbrush: set this to Soft
The Airbrush is great for fine illustrations, concept art, and realistic or stylised work where a polished style and image clarity is key. The tool creates both soft and sharp edges, and its most remarkable characteristic is the 'clean/CG look' as well as soft transitions in gradients.

Speckle Diffuser

If you keep pressing and moving, for example in circular movements, you also blend and smear the colours.

If you just dab and drag over the area you want to add the effect, it'll look like a quick, painterly stroke.

Either copy the image or parts of it on to a New Layer to apply the brush or, on a new, empty layer, select Pick Up Underlying Color.
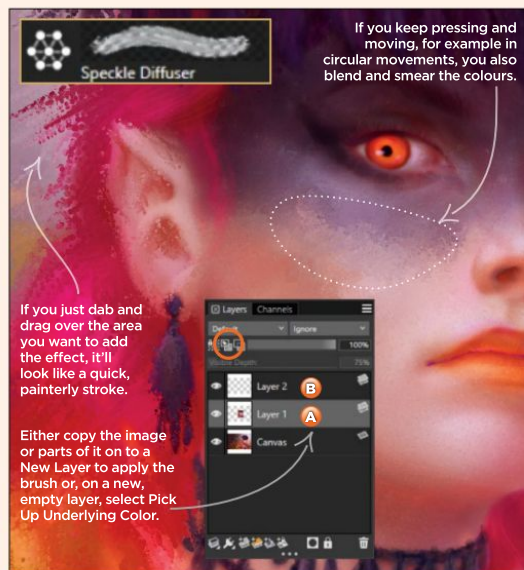
2 Blenders: Messy, Speckle Diffuser
Does your work look too clean and you want to give it a bit more expression? This brush can help you! It diffuses the image or brush strokes underneath it in a painterly way. The effect varies, depending on whether you apply it at a small or large size.

Sargent

This brush's main features are its default blendability, hard edges and slightly fractal-like blended strokes.

The lower the Resaturation and higher the Bleed, the more it blends with underlying colours. Remember: not all brushes in Painter have this setting.

Media
Resat: 0% Bleed: 100%

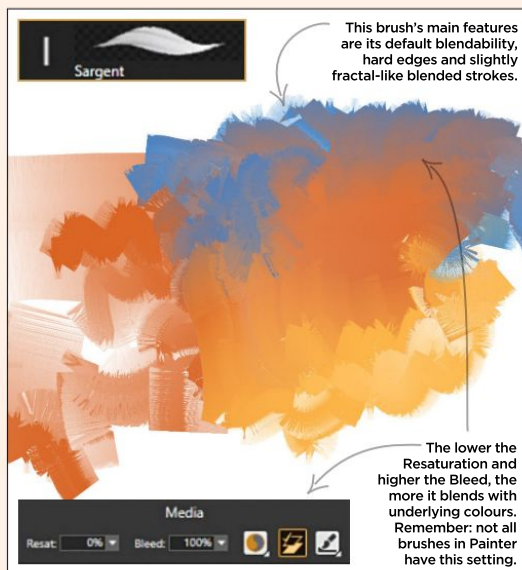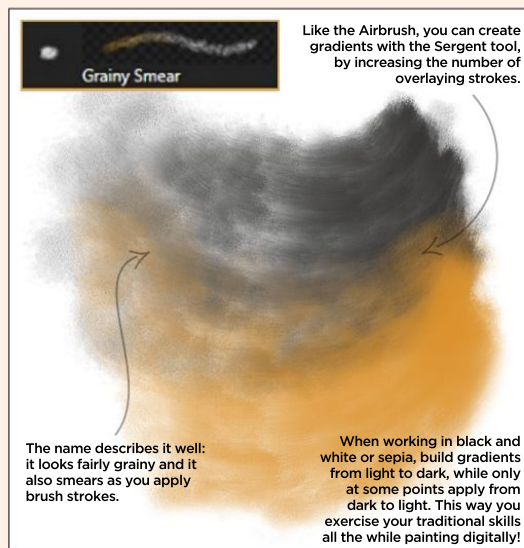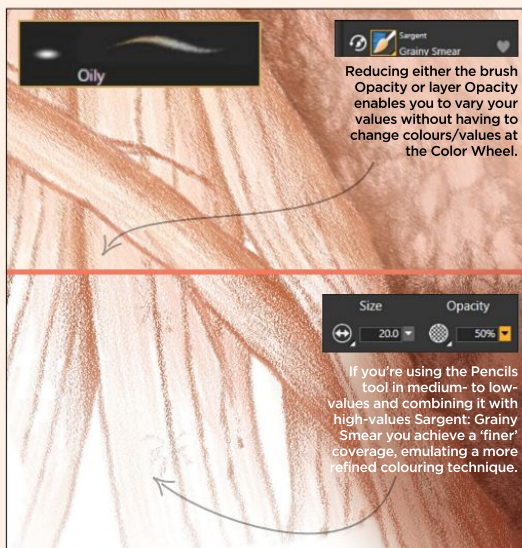## 3 Sargent brush: pick the Sargent setting
The Sargent brush achieves a balance between painterly oils and a digital look. I use it to create realistic art, because it renders colours in a photographic way compared to other brushes. I also love how it blends colours in a similar fashion to traditional wet media.

Grainy Smear

Like the Airbrush, you can create gradients with the Sergent tool, by increasing the number of overlaying strokes.

The name describes it well: it looks fairly grainy and it also smears as you apply brush strokes.

When working in black and white or sepia, build gradients from light to dark, while only at some points apply from dark to light. This way you exercise your traditional skills all the while painting digitally!

4 Sargent brush: set this to Grainy Smear
With this brush your art will look like 'oily' charcoal or oil paintings. I use it for fine drawings while working in monochrome/greys and sepia. In colours, it's capable of beautiful luminosity and vibrancy levels – great for creating impressionistic art.

Oily

Sargent
Grainy Smear

Reducing either the brush Opacity or layer Opacity enables you to vary your values without having to change colours/values at the Color Wheel.

Size 20.0 Opacity 50%

If you're using the Pencils tool in medium- to low-values and combining it with high-values Sargent: Grainy Smear you achieve a 'finer' coverage, emulating a more refined colouring technique.

5 Pencils brush: set it to Oily
This brush closely resembles using a fine art pencil – not only in the looks and texture of the brush strokes, but also on 'how it feels'. It's ideal for sketching, fine drawings and colouring. Choose a rougher pen nib to recreate the traditional pencil-paper experience.
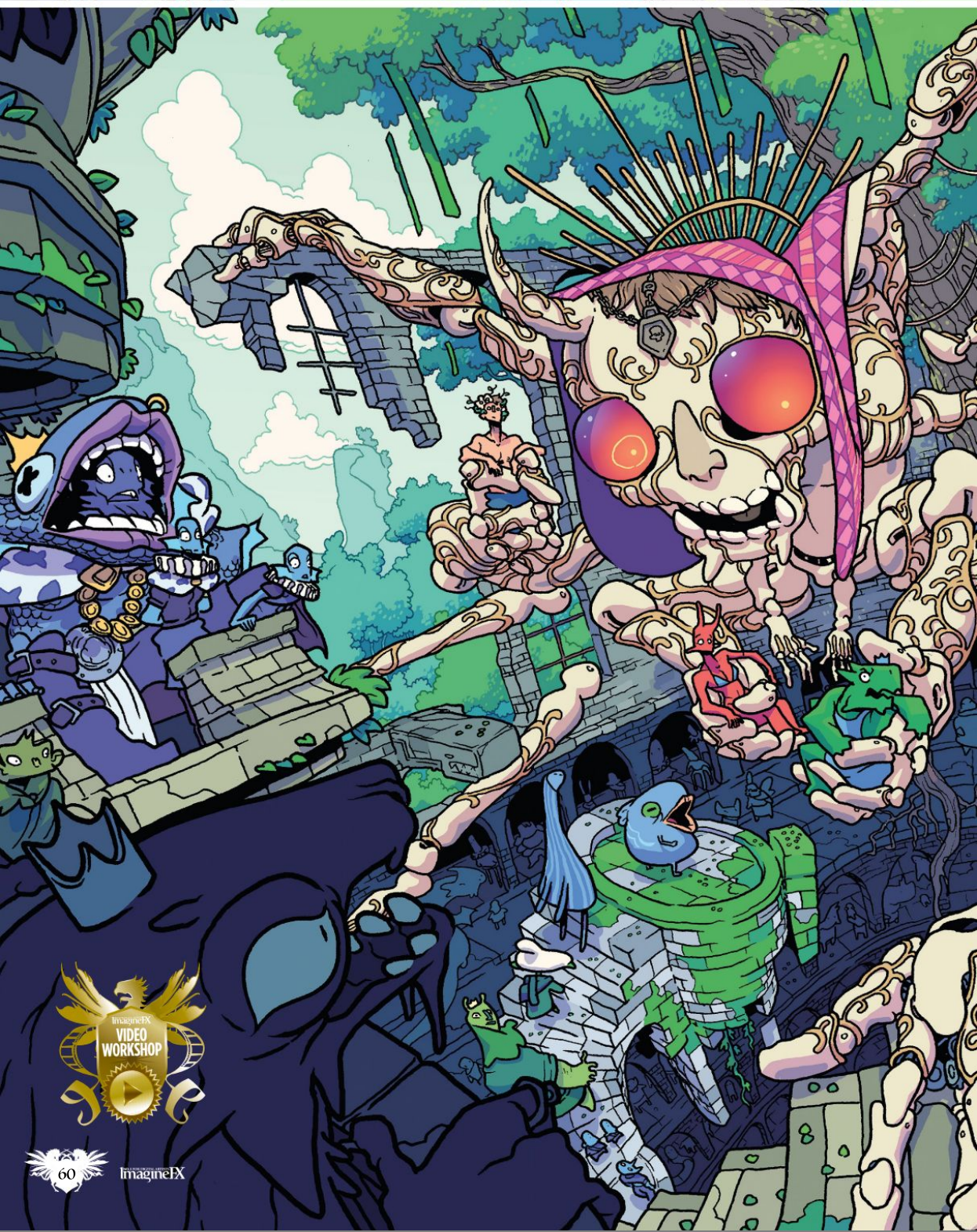
Photoshop

DRAW STYLISED
COMIC PANEL ART

Igor Wolski orchestrates a range of characters to tell a story in a busy, detailed scene, done in the ligne claire style with dynamic perspective

Workshops
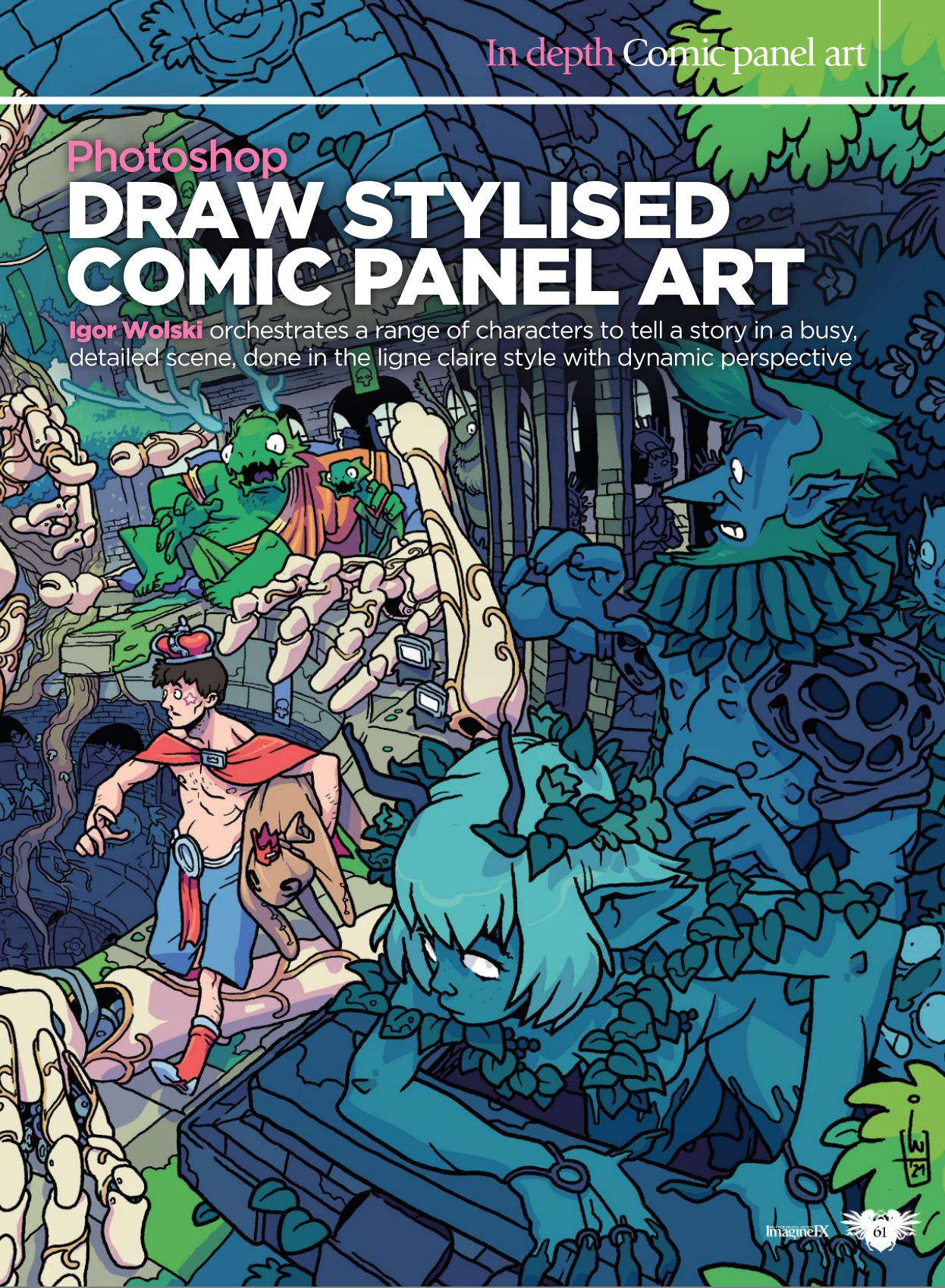
Artist PROFILE

Igor Wolski
LOCATION: Poland

Igor is an artist from Gdańsk. He has over 10 years of experience in the illustration and comics industries, but has also worked on mobile games, film production, board games and commercials.
igorwolski.com

The process of creating an artwork is a little like writing a story. While I never sit down with a blank piece of paper without an initial concept, the actual idea of what I'm trying to show is only fully formed once the sketch is done.

During that process a character's position or expression might change them from a protagonist to a villain, or the location moves from inside to outside, because a pillar looks better as a tree. I love going on these imaginative trips, because I never know where I'm going to end up (sometimes it's nowhere special, but that's also okay).

When cramming information into one frame, you have to think about how the viewer's eyes are going to travel across it, what's going to pop and what's going to be subtly hiding in the background. Every element might be just decoration, but can also be a piece of information for the viewer to pick up on.

In this workshop I'll try to break down my process of how I usually go about drawing anything, whether it's illustrations or comic panels. Both of those visual mediums have an ability to tell a story – that's why I focus on that aspect in the tutorial. Here, I want to also point out how important it is to be creative not only with the designs, but also with composition and space.
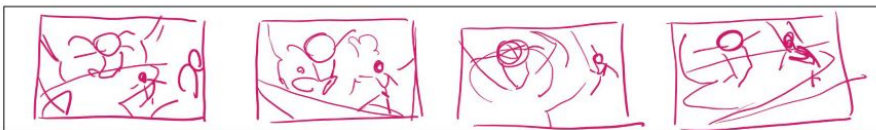

1 From brain to paper
When it comes to creating bigger pieces, proper planning is key. Once I have the idea, I start brainstorming with super-quick sketches, just to find the initial composition and the point of view to bounce off of; these are very rough and often unreadable to a bystander. It's almost like I'm writing in my own secret language.
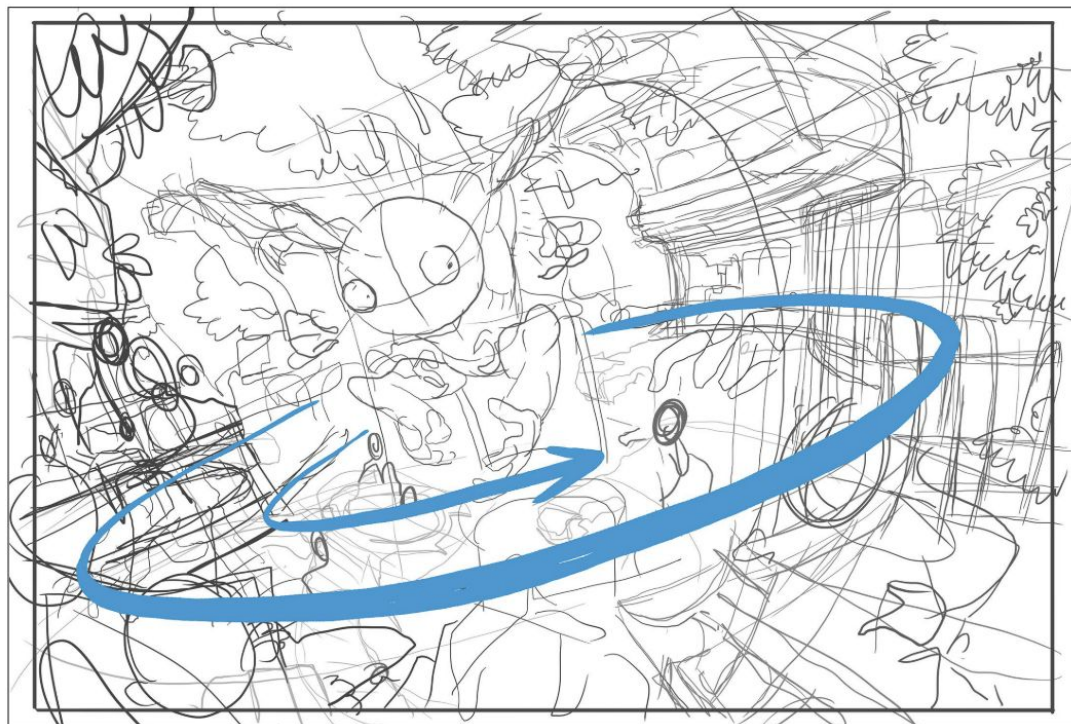

2 Fleshing out the concept and adding details
After finding the rough composition, I place it at the bottom of the layer stack on a low opacity and start adding details over it. Here I plan the position of the characters and objects. I also put everything in a form of a spiral, from the bottom-left corner to the character in the middle.
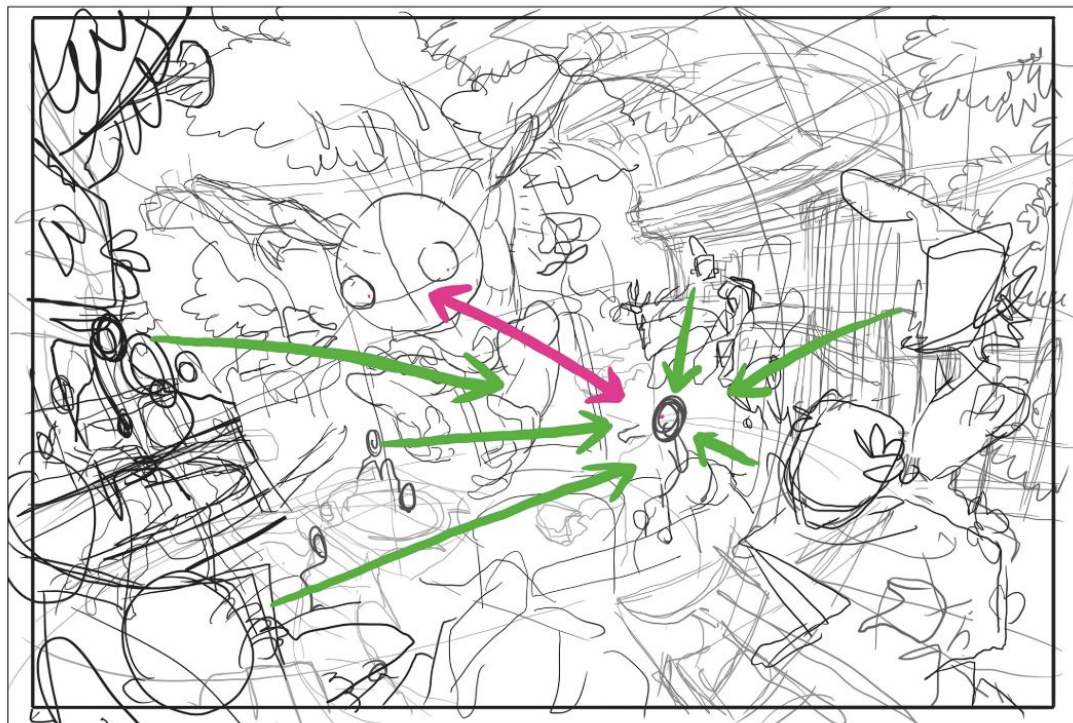
3 Develop the storytelling in the scene

I believe the story in an illustration is told through the expressions and sightlines of its figures, so I check where the main and secondary characters are looking. Our hero has snuck into an event and has been discovered, so while he looks at the spotter, everyone else looks at him.

HORIZON TOP TO BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT
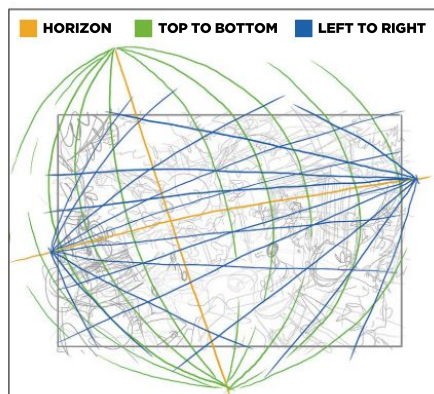
4 Perspective and a fish-eye view

I draw perspective lines based on my sketch. I start by identifying the horizon and then working out where the middle of my composition is on it. From there I add the vertical and horizontal lines, by estimating where they should be by looking at my sketch. Note that it doesn't have to be very precise.

5 Models and references

I try to use references as much as I can, to help expand my visual library. For people I either just search online for what I need or take a video of myself or my family. For clothes, architecture or other objects I like to include accidental online finds, which ensures that something unexpected ends up in my art. ➤➤

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

DEFAULT BRUSH: ROUND BRUSH

I use the basic, Round brush in Pencil mode (without anti-aliasing), which nicely mimics real-life pens.
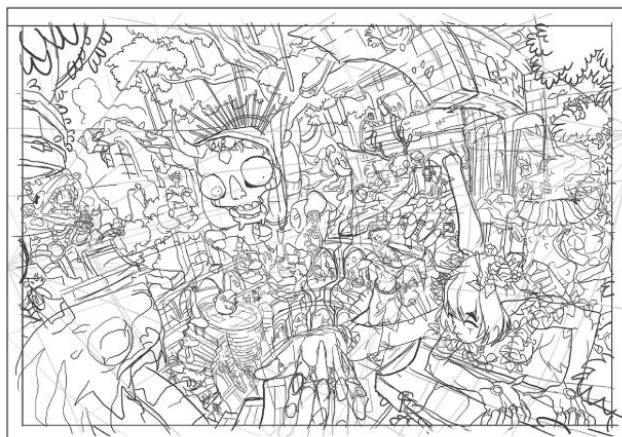
6 Finishing up the sketch
Now I finish up all the details. I like my drawings to seem very cluttered, so I try to never think about any one thing as a standalone object, but more as big clumps of many objects. I usually achieve this by always having my characters and items placed on multiple levels, often sitting or stacked on top of one another.

7 Printing out the sketch
Because I still like to do a large chunk of my work traditionally, at this point I print out the finished sketch on paper in a very light blue colour. Carrying out this stage on paper doesn't give me any advantage over doing it digitally – it's just my personal preference.

8 Inking my line-art
For line-art, I use Uni PIN Fine Line black ink pens, ranging in size from 0.05 to 1.0mm. The only rule I follow here is that the closer the object is to the viewer, the thicker the line. If I make any mistakes I'll fix them later in Photoshop; I like to write small notes on the side of the paper to remind myself.

9 Back to digital
I scan the image in at a high resolution (usually 600dpi) as a black and white bitmap. This creates hard, pure black line-art without any anti-aliasing. It may look rough, but it gives the image a unique, gritty feel. Next, I fix any mistakes I've done on paper, following my notes.
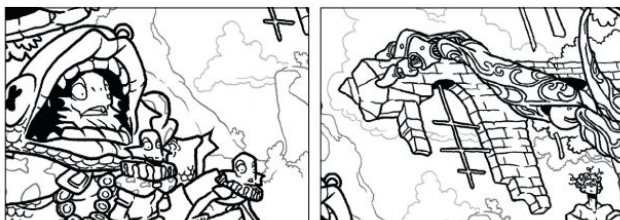
10 Dividing the lines
The last thing I do before colouring is to divide the lines that I want to colour from the black ones I wish to leave intact. This means everything in the background, any light sources or patterns, or anything that would benefit from a smoother line. I select the lines I want to separate and put them on different layers.

11 Grouping colours

To see if the initial colour palette I have in my head even works, I divide the image in large colour groups, based by their position and role in the illustration. Even though I change a lot of the initial ideas throughout the colouring process, this helps a lot with enhancing the clarity of the entire piece.

12 Applying flat colours

Finding the right colours is always a challenge. I mainly use flat, simple colours without any gradients or textures, to balance the complex nature of the line art. Especially with crowded pieces like this, I try to keep everything in a similar colour palette and reserve any contrasting colours for either the main characters or key objects of interest.

13 Adding shadows

I create the shadows as a flat colour on a semi-transparent layer, without any form of special colour mixing. The best colour for shading is usually the colour on the opposite side of the colour wheel, but since it's not always that easy, sometimes I have to just try a bunch of options to see what works best.

14 Making some finishing touches

Almost there! At this point I look through the picture and think of what else could benefit from last-minute tweaks. This can include any special effects, some patches of light or deeper shadows. After this, I like to leave the piece for the night to look at it one more time the next day with fresh eyes, and we're done!

Traditonal art skills & Photoshop
PAINT A DRAMATIC COMIC COVER

Veteran comic artist **Terry Dodson** shows how he develops a strong narrative in his cover artwork for the comic ADVENTUREMAN

Artist PROFILE

Terry Dodson
LOCATION: US

Terry's been a professional creator since 1993 and is known for his work on Harley Quinn, Spider-Man, Star Wars, Captain Marvel, Wonder Woman and the X-Men. He's now working on ADVENTUREMAN with Matt Fraction.
terrydodsonart.com

Over the years I've created over 500 covers for comic books, so this issue I'll be giving you a look into my tried and true method for doing this. I am working on the cover for ADVENTUREMAN #7, so will be revealing the processes I go through to create this cover.

The idea for this cover is to create a moody, spooky, adventurous feel. The cover features the main character, Claire, in the New York subways with gangster ghosts appearing behind her. What I'm looking to do here is set an eerie atmosphere and a heightened sense of drama to create the feeling of an eventful cover without any real dynamic action occurring in the scene itself.

There are some key rules to consider. For example, I know the main character needs to be forward-facing so we can see her emotions.

To add movement I decide to do place the ghosts sneaking up behind her in a crazy manner, having them rising above her to create a dynamic image. This way the viewer can see them clearly even though she can't, and this adds a sense of narrative to the composition.

I've found that not doing things exactly as they occur works better on the cover than the literal event. It's the idea of the event as opposed to the actual scene itself that works.

1 Quickly sketch out ideas
After I've grasped the concept for the cover, I think of all the possible ideas to convey it. The first thing I'll do is get my sketchbook to quickly draw my initial thoughts. One of the great things about putting down these initial sketches is that they spawn further ideas. Sometimes they take me off in a new direction and since I'm doing them so quickly, I don't feel the need to perfect the drawings. This leaves me in a creative state as opposed to getting bogged down finalising one drawing.

2 My idea tools
I'm a big fan of animation and I always liked how the animators draw in coloured pencils. I found that after years of drawing with blue pencils and grey pencils for my daily work – both in my sketchbooks and on my comic pages – things got a little dull. But inspired by animators, using a different coloured pencil in my sketchbook was really appealing. I enjoy the look and feel of the red, orange and purple pencils. So when I'm drawing for fun or conceptualising, I use a red pencil to put down my ideas/concepts/designs, with my final work created with blue and grey pencils. It's kind of a subtle sign that this is sketchbook work, not the final work. ➤➤

3 Keep things small for speed

I try to keep the idea drawings as small as possible in order to be as loose and spontaneous as I can be, by cutting out the details. The size of the sketches are approximately 2x3 inches. I find that when I work small and fast I can get my ideas down quickly. Then more ideas pop into my head, and I can get those ideas down on the paper because I'm working fast. This is really the best way to visualise my ideas, which in turn leads to greater creativity. I'm producing better covers that I would never have conceptualised before drawing!

4 Working small for dynamics

By working small I don't get caught up in the details of the drawing – I'm able to focus on the big shapes and ideas. And it's really easy for me to sit back and see what's working. In this particular piece I try pushing the camera to below, tilting the composition and varying the sizes of the subway signs. All of a sudden it's a more dynamic piece that still conveys the initial idea.

6 Eye-grabbing value

Now I need to establish the values. Sometimes I do this before I refine the sketch with the small pen in the previous step. I use Copic warm grey markers to put all the values of the piece in quickly. This easily enables me to set the values I'm after in the finished piece: five primary values (white and black plus a light, middle and dark value). Those five values are pretty much true for any type of image you do that's rendered in colour.

5 Redrawing for clarity

After I have my initial ideas down so I know where I'm going next, I use a small black pen to capture, or as my old art teacher would say, "Find the drawing again." Most of the covers I do are viewed at this concept sketch stage for approval before I go to a final piece. This is the cover that I show to people in other parts of the world, so what's happening in the scene needs to be crystal clear. My priority is an interesting design, and the editor needs to know exactly what I'm going for.

7 **Highlights for focus**
This is the part where you separate the drawing and help the reader to focus on where you want them to look in the art. I use a white-out to capture striking lighting and the highlights, but also to help separate the foreground from background elements. It's a necessary step when the piece is at a small stage like this (for all the times these drawings need to be shown to people who are just going to see other emails, like my editors).

8 **Digital tidying up**
At this point I have a bunch of ideas in my sketchbook, but now these drawings need to be sent to editors for approval, or my coworkers for input. In this case to Matt Fraction and Turner Lobey, who are going to give me their feedback and hopefully approval. I scan my drawing in full colour at 400dpi and then bring it into Photoshop for a clean-up.
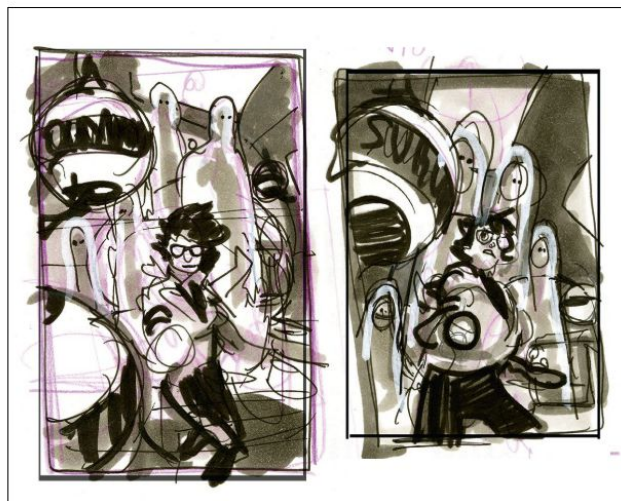
9 **Time-saving proportions**
Once I have the art in Photoshop, the first thing I need to do is to make sure that the drawings match the proportions of the final printed cover. I use Photoshop to alter the drawing so they're at cover proportions. I try to keep in mind the logo while I'm designing the covers initially, because it's at this point – once the proportions are correct – that I make sure the art can accommodate the logo. Bear in mind the UPC/barcode code or pricing or whatever details that need to go on this cover and make sure there's room for these elements at this point, too.

10 **Try colour schemes in Photoshop**
Because the values are already set, I use the Pencil tool set to Color to turn all my grey values into colours. I also set a flat colour underneath the drawing on a new layer. I then brush on top of the flat colours so the cover takes on that hue of that colour, so the whole thing feels blue or orange, or black or purple, or green or yellow, depending on what mood I have in mind. ➤➤

11 Work backwards for success

Once the drawing is approved I work on it at full-size (13x19 inches). I'll usually take my approved drawing and convert it to that size, and then turn it to blue and print that out on that paper. Then I start working quickly to get the drawing figured out and nailed down. A great way to make sure that your drawing is working well is to flip the art over and look at it on the light table, and then make any corrections on the reverse of the paper.


12 Striking black

I like to scan in the almost completed pencil artwork to add in the blacks freely, not worrying about the drawing itself and thinking abstractly. When I've done the sketches for the cover, I know in general where the blacks are, but it's nice to really nail them down at the stage when I can work freely and not worry about messing up. I then print that out and trace those black parts. This makes me feel confident that I've put enough blacks in the piece.
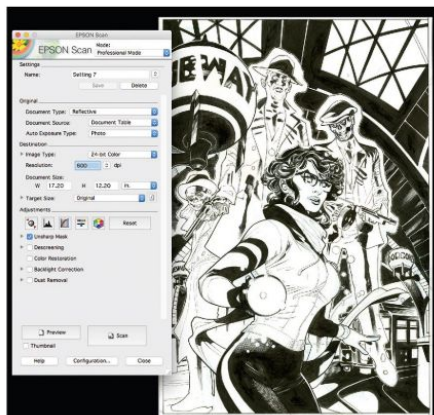
13 Mood enhancement

I find that if I can decide what the colour of the mood is for a piece, then I convert the entire artwork to that colour. I then use that art at 100 per cent or 10-20 per cent, just to get the gist. Often, when developing the mood for the art, I'll set the entire temperature colour to a monochromatic and then work back into that colour, so that one colour remains throughout the entire piece. For this cover I know I want it to be green-blue to convey a cold, dark and scary mood.
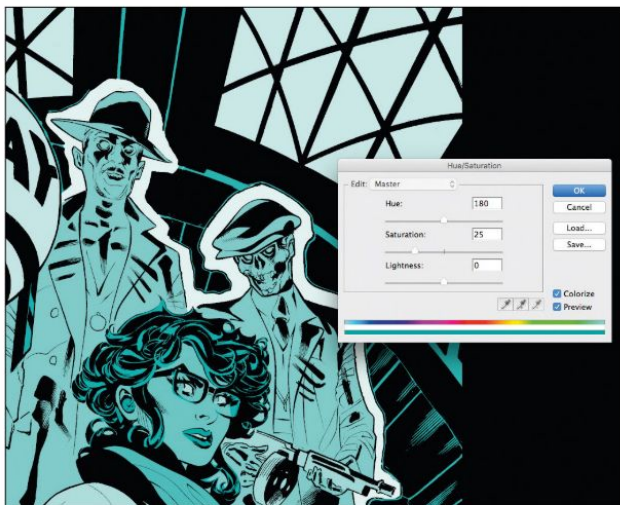
14 Quality scanning

I scan the final line-art in at full colour and 600dpi. I remove the blue and convert the artwork to grey. I adjust the levels to make the blacks black and the whites white. Next, I adjust the threshold which removes more noise and finally convert to bitmap. After I clean the art, I change the dimensions to print size but keep it at 600dpi. The art is now is clean and ready to be coloured in Photoshop.

15 TAKE THE LINE-ART FROM BLACK TO COLOUR
When the art is coloured I'll convert the black line-art to coloured line-art


A Colouring the line-art
I find that this step gives the artwork the appeal and feel that I'm going for. I always loved cell drawing in animation where the line for the skin is painted with matching colours, for example. I began applying this technique on my covers as soon as I had figured out how to do it!

B Identify the areas that need colouring
I convert all the main areas of line-art that I know will be coloured line-art. This would be areas of skin, the places where bright light hits the line art, and the background. Once I establish these initial line-art colour changes, I go in and select those areas and adjust, push and blend in even more.
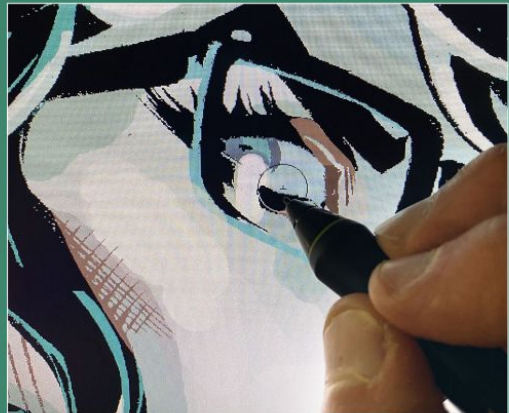
C Pushing the foreground forward
This approach works tremendously well with the background because it naturally pushes the foreground element forward as there's more blacks in them and the backgrounds recede with the lighter colours. This final step pushes the dynamics of the piece by contrasting dark values with light values, warm hues with cool colours, and so on. This is the point where you can really polish the artwork and make it read clearly.

Core Skills: Clip Studio Paint EX
GETTING STARTED IN WEBTOON

Stephinni Martinez Tinoco offers a tour of Clip Studio Paint's Webtoon features for creating digital comics

Artist PROFILE
Stephinni Martinez Tinoco
LOCATION: Bolivia

Stephinni has been using Clip Studio Paint for six years, focusing on character design and original projects, including web comics and illustrations.
www.stephinni.com

WEBTOON is a platform where you can read and upload comics in a vertical scroll format. There are original series created by official WEBTOON artists, such as Lore Olympus, True Beauty, and The Remarried Empress. The important bit for us is WEBTOON CANVAS. This offers you the freedom to create your own comics with your own story and characters. Scrolling allows the reader to dive into the story, so the way you draw the panels, use of colour palettes and the correct tools are important to keep the attention of the reader. The tools I will teach you today are going to accelerate the drawing process.

I know starting is not easy, but thankfully these kinds of webcomics are ideal for beginners. You just need to learn the basics and get creative.

Here you will learn how to create the canvas and use the export features, panel creation, speech bubbles, using 3D materials, and Clip Studio Assets. You can download more materials to work in Clip Studio Paint, too. Artists set up their own tools, materials and brushes and share them in the Assets page. There are free and paid resources, you just need to find the one you need. Now, let's get creative…

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

You must press Browse to create a folder for your comic, where all the pages and divisions will be saved.

WEBTOON format.

Recommended size

Recommended settings.
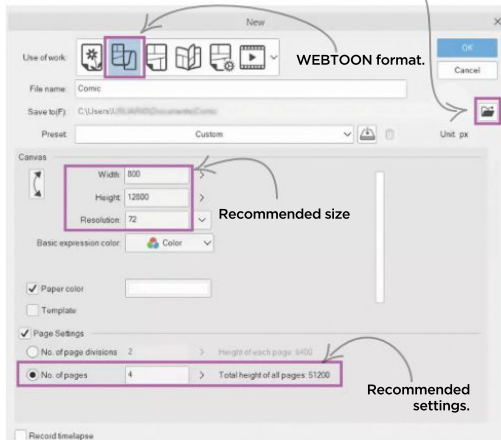
Exporting is easy. Go to File>Export Webtoon. We already set the size up earlier. In Divide Vertically write the height 1,280 pixels for each division…

You can check how the canvas looks on a smartphone screen by turning on the [On-screen area (Webtoon)] option.

1 Canvas: creation and export

You need to make sure to use the correct canvas properties. This is very important when working with the Webtoon format, because this is going to define the export setup at the end of the project. For the canvas size I like to use the same for all pages, that way I keep the layers and folders in order and it doesn't affect the computer performance. Depending on your preferred upload platform, you may want to set the size to a multiple of the maximum file size, in the case of WEBTOON CANVAS this is 1,280 pixels long. Keep the resolution to at least 72dpi for screens. Be aware that there are two ways to create the canvas: Long pages or Divided pages. To optimize the reading pace and get creative with panels and backgrounds use the long page option. If you need the divisions from the start for your storytelling, use the divided pages.

The Frame Border tool is ideal for creating panels. This one is made for comics, so this is the main tool to use for your webcomic. Just take the rectangle frame and adjust the size you need on the canvas.
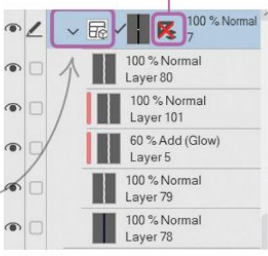
Frame in canvas

The Figure tool is helpful for panels that feature content that extends outside of the panel in your story.

Example using figure tool.

In the layer section you will have something similar to a folder, with two layers: A background Paper layer and a regular layer to draw on. Everything you draw will stay inside the frame as the outside is masked.
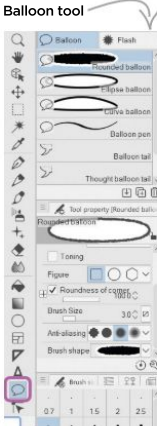
② Creating the comic panels

You can use the Frame Border or the Figure tools. Here are my tips: Change the size of the frame by using Operation tools>Object. If you need to create frames above the thumbnails you already did, just hide the background Paper layer. Name your frames and/or folders with numbers to count the panels.

Balloon tool

Make sure to use a legible font! Some artists prefer to write in capital letters. The Webtoon format gives us the chance to tell stories using our drawings; it's not necessary to create long dialogue between heroes or explain everything with text.
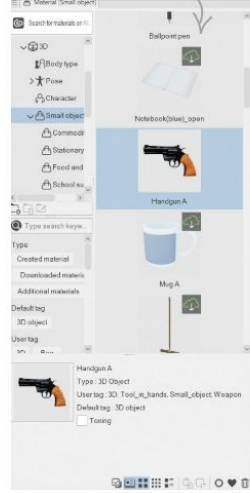
For the balloon tail, set the Bending mode to Spline, which gives the tail a natural curve for the speech bubble.
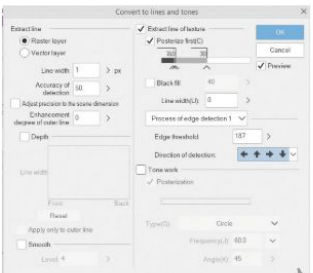
③ Speech bubbles

Ellipse and rounded balloons are very similar and can be used for a conversation. Make sure to choose the correct balloon tail in case you need to add a thought for the character. Curve the balloons in case you want to create a shape or you can draw your own if you want to give a handmade look to your speech bubbles.

Go to Material>3D. There you will find plenty of 3D materials like backgrounds, objects, characters, poses and body types that you can use.

The secret for backgrounds and objects are the settings. Once you get the position you would like to use go to the layer and right click to the 3D object layer. Then select Lines and Tone conversion of layer (EX Version only). Activate the preview and change the settings until you have solid lines. The background or object will stay in the position you need and it now has a natural look to paint over or use the linework directly.

BEFORE

AFTER

④ Using 3D materials

Clip Studio Paint has a very strong feature for comics, the 3D materials are extremely helpful, not only to use them directly on our panels, but also for references and guides. You can alter the object to match your drawing style. ●

Photoshop
REIMAGINING A COMIC HERO

David Nakayama explains his process of redesigning and drawing a modern and culturally relevant new version of Zorro

Artist PROFILE

David Nakayama
LOCATION: US

David is a Honolulu-based freelance illustrator, concept artist and art director. He's best known for his Marvel Comics cover art of Spider-Man, X-Men and Deadpool, and Hasbro packaging art.
artstation.com/dna

GET YOUR
RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

Created in 1919, Zorro (Spanish for 'fox') is a classic pulp character who's appeared in books, comics, TV and films over the decades. His story includes a secret identity, a hidden base of operations, and many other tropes that would go on to inspire modern superhero characters such as Batman. However, in recent years, the popularity of Zorro has been less present in popular culture, so perhaps it's time to reinvigorate the character with a reinvention.

There have been many versions of Zorro over the years and many characters inspired by him as well. But for this exercise, I like the idea of creating a legacy character who would take up the mantle of the original. That's always fun and always feels fresh. So how about a female heir to the original? ('Zorra' perhaps, since that's the female form of the word in Spanish?) And while we're at it, for a change, I like the idea of her being noticeably Latina in skin tone and facial features. She'll have a slick, modernised outfit that still has the iconic hat, cape, and sword, but with everything streamlined.

Let's go through the steps now, shall we? And in the end we'll have a full illustration worthy of a modern cover.

1 Create a range of possible costume designs

I always start by sketching the expected thing first, to get it out of my system (in this case the Antonio Banderas film costume on a female figure). Right away, I feel like the large cape would be a hindrance, so I shorten it. Then it's a matter of balancing form and function: she needs to look simultaneously agile, powerful, beautiful and modern. I settle on something that's form-fitting and has colour pops to add interest.
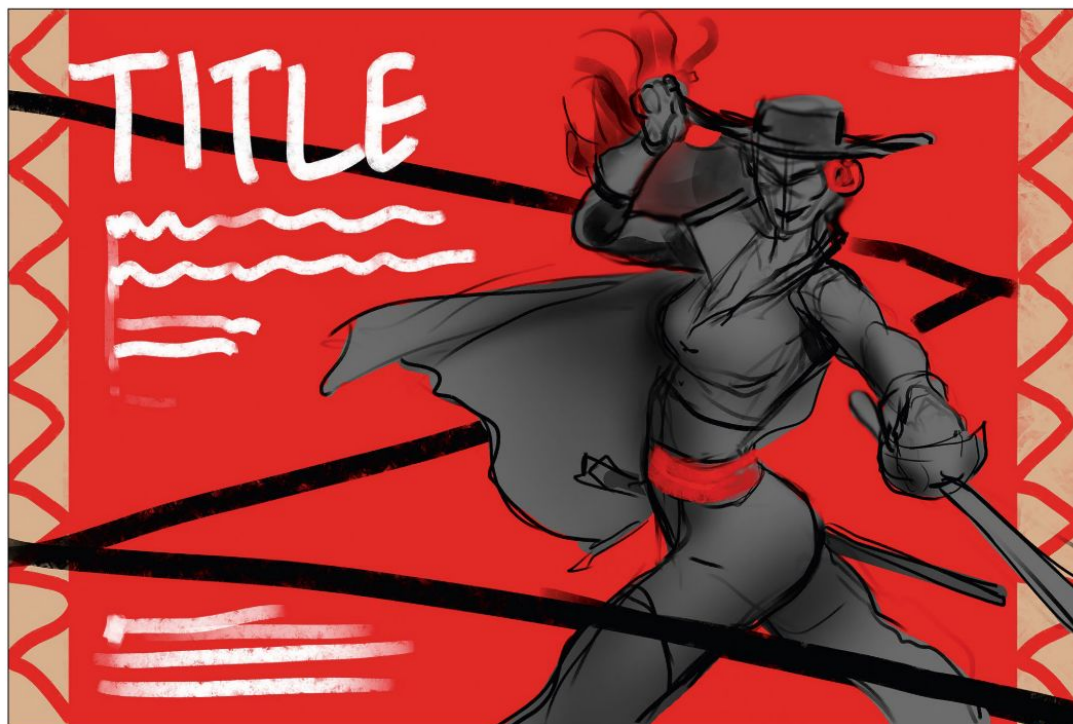
2 Developing the cover composition
When designing a cover-style image, it's important to lead the eye through the space, highlight your central figure, and show off the character's special attributes. Here, I make use of Zorro's iconic 'Z'-slash to lead us from left to right while framing the character. I deliberately make the art tiny on my screen, forcing myself to focus on the overall picture and not the details. I also leave plenty of space for text and titles.


3 Blocking in values
Now I can start to focus on the figure itself. It helps to use an all-white layer to hide everything else. Using a blocky textural brush as well as a soft Round for overall gradients, I work in greyscale trying to figure out the general placement of lights and darks across the full figure. I'm thinking about both core lighting and also bounce lights that'll help me read edges.

4 Proportion check
Now it's a good time for that old illustrator's trick where you flip the image left to right in order to expose proportional mistakes. I notice little things that bother me throughout the image and use the Liquefy tool to push them into the correct place. I'm also starting to separate skin, leather, ribbing and other materials into their own layers for easy editing later.
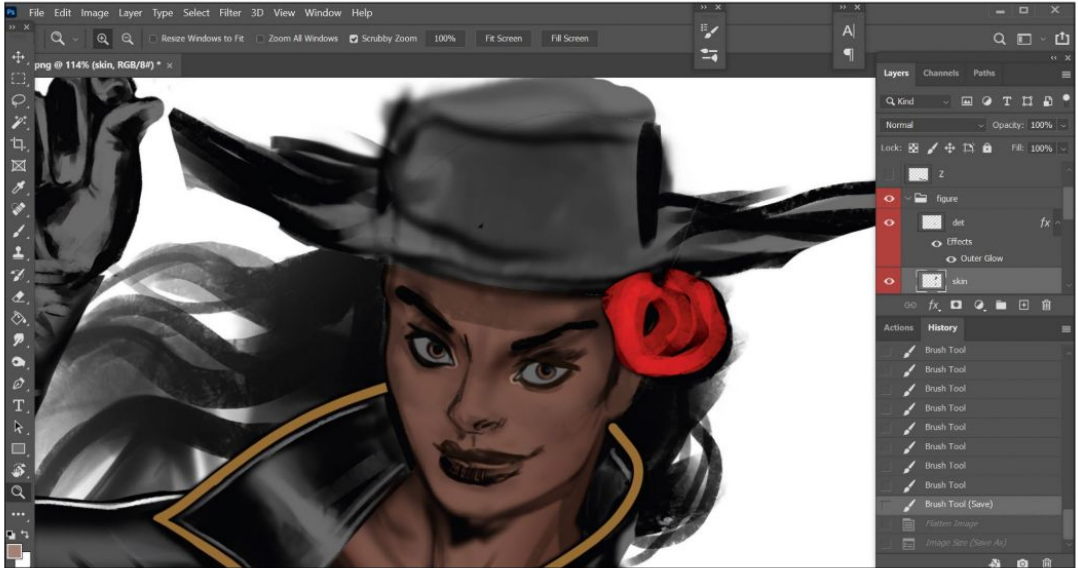
5 **Making sure the face grab's the viewer's attention**
I constantly ask myself, "What's the worst part of this drawing?' in order to decide what to render next. This helps focus my time and attention on the big picture instead of obsessing on a particular detail. The face is the most important part of any figure drawing, so I zoom in and start to focus on individual features, expression and overall tones. It helps to have a few reference faces on your screen while you do this.


6 **Seeing the bigger picture**
It's important to keep moving around at this stage, roughing in elements all over the image to make sure everything's working together. After I make some progress on the face, I build up detail on the cloth wrinkles, hands and overall sheens. I start to drop in some rim lighting where I know it's going to be necessary.
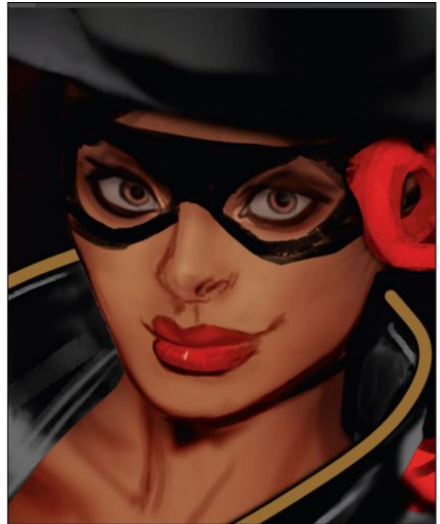

7 **Time to focus**
Once the entire image is 50 per cent detailed, it's time to start rendering the finer details in individual areas, starting with the face. I find internet reference for the skin tone I want and sample light, shadow and warmer cheek colours while I work. I use separate references for the shape of the facial features. ➤➤
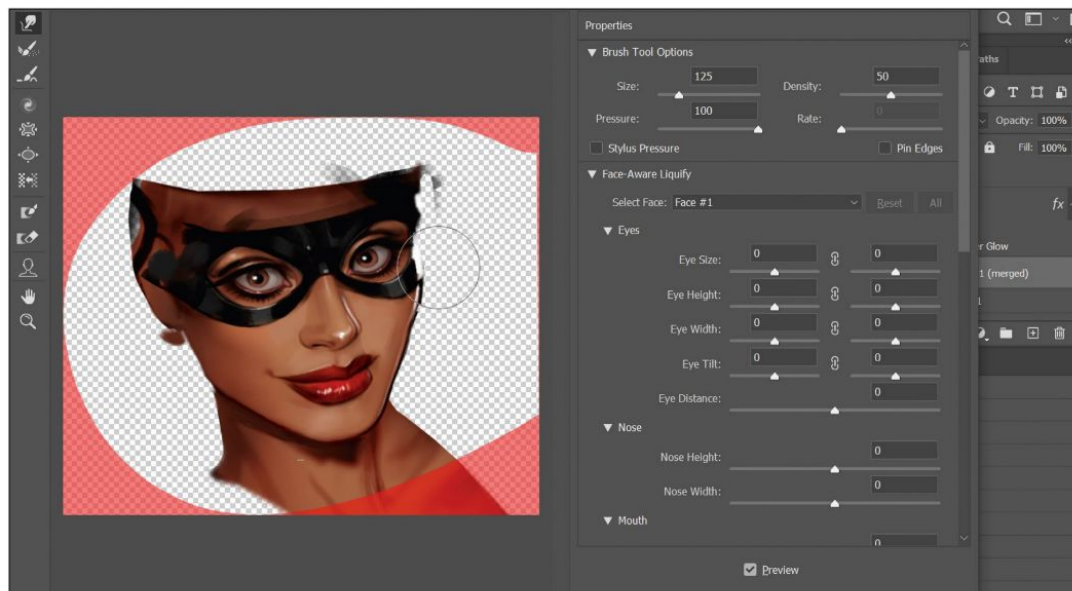
8 Finesse the fine details of the face
I use a harder edge textural brush to block in shapes and a soft Round brush or the Blur tool to soften edges. Now I focus on details like specular white highlights, lit edges, subtle rim lights, eyelashes and warm (cheeks, nose) versus cool (chin, orbital bones) areas in the skin.
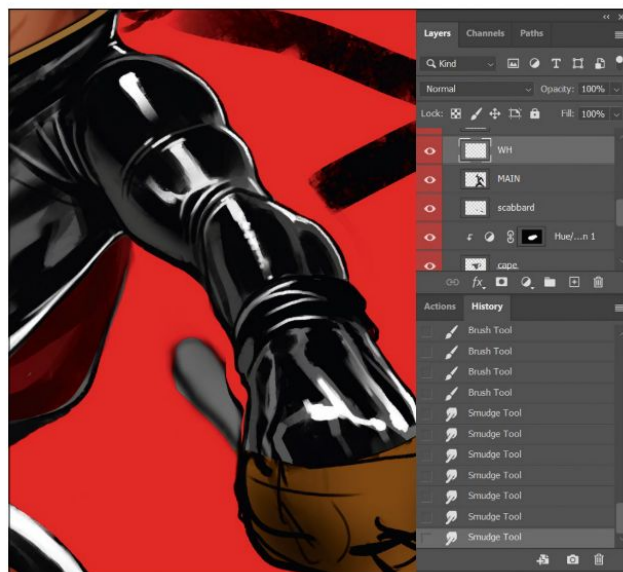

9 Create the sheen of her costume
Now I consider the particular materials in the costume. Skin and cloth react to light differently of course, so here I'm working on the highly specular black portion of her outfit. And again, reference comes in very handy here to help you understand how reflections and white hotspots appear on round versus flat forms.
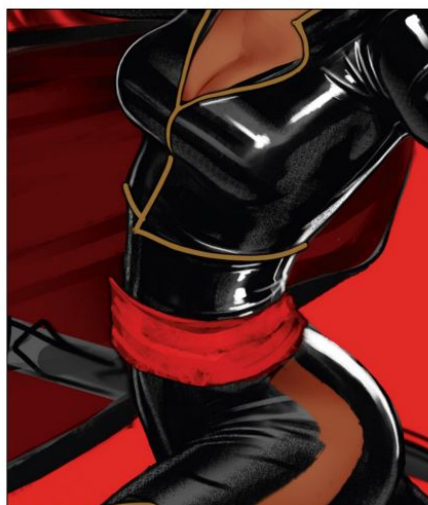
10 Texture brush work
I'm still focused on materiality here, trying to make the fabric look textural not just in the way I'm rendering hard light playing over the forms, but also with some strategic application of a texture brush. This particular brush adds some grit and noise to give the fabric a more realistic appearance. I don't use a lot of different brushes, but it helps to add noise sometimes.
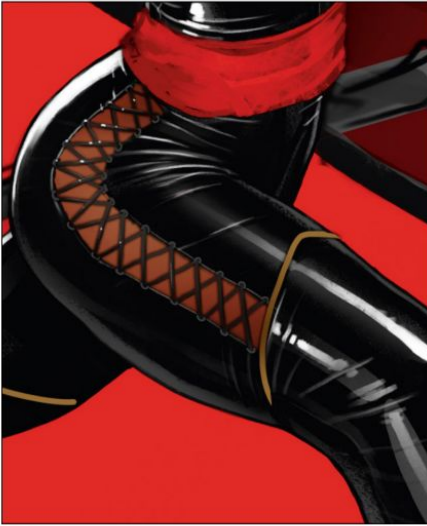
11 Ribbing the outer glow
One trick I really like is painting thin linear marks such as the ribbing and laces shown here on their own separate layer and then using Layer FX/Outer Glow to add depth and shadow automatically. Play with a low Size value and low- to mid-range value to get a nice effect.

12 Introducing the final details
I'm getting to the end of the rendering process, and it's time to start putting in final details, such as the hat. I also add gold stitching details (reminiscent of Mariachi outfits) throughout using the same Outer Glow technique.
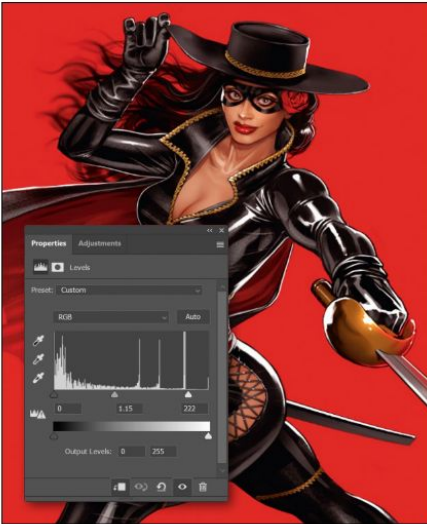
13 Create the tints
With all the basic rendering complete, it's time to improve things with Adjustment Layers. Currently, all the black material is a little too dark with the interior details difficult to read; likewise, the lighting feels unsaturated and boring. I crank up the Levels and add a Color Balance layer to amp up the red.

14 Making finishing touches
In the final pass, I add Linear Dodge (Add) lighting glows along the edges and some subtle white light blooms. Then on a separate later, an orange tint on Overlay to warm up the figure overall. Some final Liquify and some last-minute texture overlays, and we're done!

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX
Reviews

The latest art resources are put to the test by the ImagineFX team…

Artist's Choice Award
Art resources with a five-star rating receives the ImagineFX Artist's Choice award!

ARTIST'S CHOICE

4 PRODUCTS ON TEST
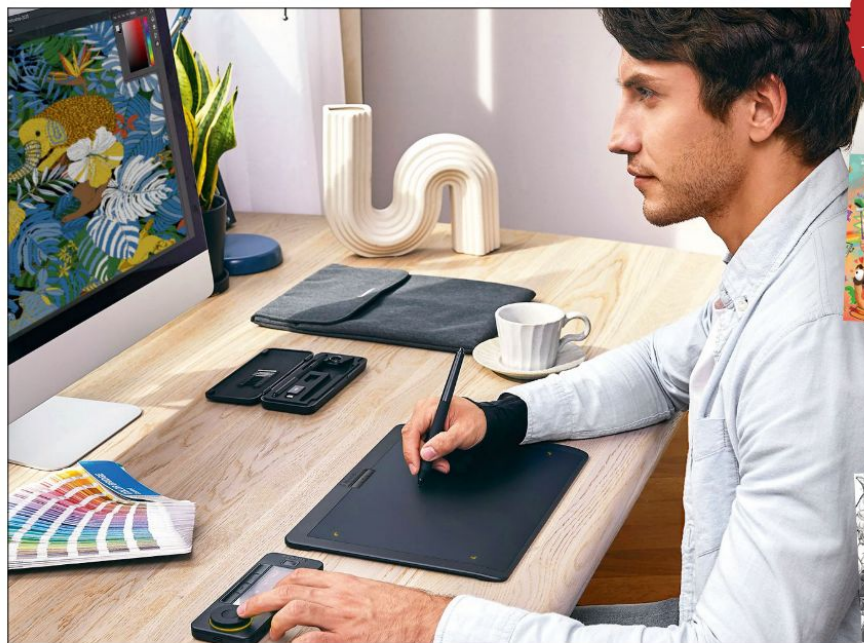
HARDWARE

82 Xencelabs Pen Tablet Medium Bundle
Xencelabs' package takes on Wacom with its expert design and competitive pricing.

BOOKS

84 The Art of The Mitchells vs. The Machines
Never has the end of the human race at the hands of evil robots looked so good.

85 Worlds: The Art of Raphaël Lacoste
Explore countless fantastical environments without leaving your seat.

85 Character Design Collection: Heroines
Fifty artists roll up their sleeves and reveal how they create unique female characters based on a specific brief.

RATINGS EXPLAINED   ★★★★★ Magnificent   ★★★★ Great   ★★★ Good   ★★ Poor   ★ Atrocious

You get a lot for your money with the Xencelabs Pen Tablet Medium Bundle, including not one but two pens!

Xencelabs Pen Tablet Medium Bundle

MAC & PC

ImagineFX ARTIST'S CHOICE

PACKAGE DEAL Xencelabs' pen and tablet package takes on Wacom with its expert product design and competitive pricing

Price £320 **Company** Xencelabs **Web** xencelabs.com

The team behind Xencelabs includes ex-Wacom employees, and they've put all their design and industry know-how into the Pen Display Medium. It's as user- and artist-friendly as you'd hope.

The Pen Display Medium Bundle, which includes the Xencelabs Pen Tablet, two pens (the three button and Thin Pen) and a case, a Quick Key remote, a drawing glove and a very nice soft tablet carrying case, comes in at just £320. The tablet sits just under a 13-inch MacBook in size and at only 8mm thick it looks and feels lovely. It has an ergonomic curved front edge, and is super-sleek, solid and well made. From the texture of the active drawing zone, to the metal alloy underside with six rubber non-slip pads, it all adds to a build quality you might expect from a more premium piece of kit.

The active area is delineated by four corner LEDs you can customise in eight different colours. You can set these for different programs: blue for Photoshop, pink for Affinity, say.

REMOTE WORK

Three small customisable buttons sit at the top of the tablet. They're perfect for accessing the tablet or pen settings, or for switching programs. As for the rest of the shortcut buttons, that's where the Quick Key Remote comes in. Those quick key shortcuts have been lifted off the tablet and configured into a separate, OLED

Rather than have controls on the tablet, the Xencelabs team has placed customisable buttons and a scroll wheel on a separate remote control.

display and nine-button remote with physical scroll wheel. The remote itself is as nice a build as the tablet and is customisable with up to 40 shortcuts. A bit of time spent in the settings means a relatively easy configuration of dial sequences – ideal for scrolling, zooming and changing brush sizes.

You can configure the eight buttons into different sets for different art jobs:

The separate remote control means a less cramped way of working while you paint.

> ❝ Wacom sells its slim pen separately, but kudos to Xencelabs for including one with the Pen Tablet Medium Bundle ❞

Set A for sketching, B for editing, C for colouring, and so on. The OLED display makes everything easier. Compared to other drawing tablets, this – as well as the initial setup and driver installation – is stress free.

DOUBLE THE PEN FUN

Wacom sells its slim pen separately, but kudos to Xencelabs for including one with the Pen Tablet Medium Bundle. You get a regular three-button pen *and* a slim two-button pen.

Being able to customise both pens to different settings is a nice touch – you can grab one for shading or light pencil work, and use the other for inking or painting in, for example. Both pens have the standard (and very high) levels of pressure sensitivity, and 60-degree tilt functions, as standard. The drawing experience with the pens is very good – no lag, smooth lines, and no marks missing when sketching at speed. Again, it's Wacom-like.

Ten extra nibs are included in the case. Four of them are made of felt for extra 'tooth' to get that paper feel, plus a nib extracting ring.

The pen tablet and Quick Key Remote both link up with to your computer via USB and once charged, are both connected to the tablet via Bluetooth. The battery of both the tablet and remote lasted a fair few hours. The pen takes less than an hour to fully recharge (while using it), and the remote about half an hour. The pens are, of course, battery free.

Between the Deco Pro and the Intuous Medium and this tablet, Xencelabs comes out on top. The Xencelabs Pen Display Medium bundle is a clear signal that the Xencelabs team is a serious competitor in this market, offering a capable tablet and accessories set that's understated yet cleverly designed, for a sensible price.

Whether you're a professional digital artist or are just starting out, it's hard not to recommend this well-designed tablet and bargain bundle of goodies and extras. ⬤

DETAILS

Features
■ 19:9-inch aspect ratio touchscreen
■ 10.3x5.8-inch active area size
■ 8,192 levels of pressure sensitivity
■ Battery-free pens
■ Kensington NANO Lock security
■ 16 hours per charge
■ USB-C to USB-A ports

System Requirements
PC: Windows 7 or later
Mac: OS X 10.12 or later
Note: Wireless or cable connection requires USB Type-A port, internet access to download driver.

Rating
★★★★★

Ryan Carlson's concept art captures the awkwardness between Katie and her father Rick.

Younger brother Aaron's love of dinosaurs is apparent in Alice Lemma's painting.

The Art of The Mitchells vs. The Machines

FAMILY MATTERS Never has the end of the human race at the hands of evil robots looked so good, as this concept art book demonstrates

Author Ramin Zahed **Publisher** Abrams Books **Price** £30 **Web** abramsbooks.com **Available** Now

The Mitchells vs. The Machines tells the tale of one family's struggle against a deadly robot apocalypse. Ramin Zahed, a veteran film journalist, charts the film's visual development in this art-of book.

As the film's title suggests, the art style is one of contrasts. Director Mike Rianda was keen to make every aspect of the Mitchell's lives as ordinary as possible. Lengthy chapters on the designs of the four family members (five if you count their dim-but-lovable pug), their home and station wagon show how this directive was carried out. Black and white sketches, clothing concepts, facial expressions and more all show the lengths the artists were willing to go to hit the middle-of-the-road sweet spot. Against the mundane human world, the pristine lines and neons of the robot universe stand out even more. From the evil AI's angular HQ to the shape language of the robot army, there are plenty of creative insights and quotes from the artistic team that shed light on their approach.

The hand-drawn look of Lindsey Olivares' early production art was emulated in the finished film.

66 Character concepts are printed at a large-enough size to spot any variations 99

Unusually for an art-of publication, no captions accompany the imagery (although all artists are properly credited, thankfully). While this might normally count against the book, Ramin's text enables the reader to follow the accomplished concept art without any trouble.

Furthermore, the absence of captions has freed up space on the page, enabling the book's designer to present the art at larger-than-normal size. Often a single keyframe takes up a whole page, while character concepts are printed at a large-enough size to spot any variations.

One notable example: the design of daughter Katie's younger brother Aaron shows how his mouth shape needed to be simplified. Specifically, removing the slight creasing in the corners of his mouth. Those readers keen to hone their concept art skills will appreciate clearly seeing such details on the page, which highlight the difference between good and great character design.

Overall, Ramin's book shows how strong art direction can help make an animated project stand out from the crowded field.
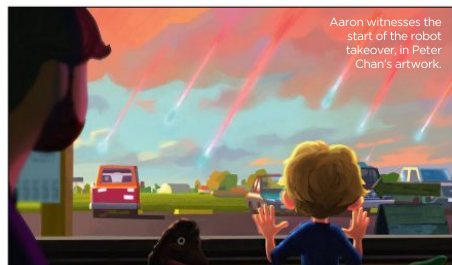
Aaron witnesses the start of the robot takeover, in Peter Chan's artwork.

RATING ★★★★☆

Worlds: The Art of Raphaël Lacoste

TOUR GUIDE Explore countless fantastical environments without leaving your seat, courtesy of the renowned art director, in this revised edition of his 2016 art book

Author Raphaël Lacoste   **Publisher** Caurette **Price** £30 **Web** caurette.com **Available** Now

Raphaël Lacoste is famed for his art direction on the Assassin's Creed franchise. This book showcases some of his concept work on the game, along with other commercial and personal pieces.

Following forewords by concept artists Ian McQue and Sparth, it's over to the man himself. In his introduction he talks about his approach to art. Essentially, it's about looking at reality
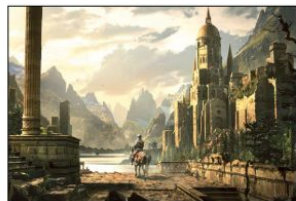
Raphaël Lacoste painted this scene as part of a tutorial for The Gnomon Workshop on matte paintings.

and then making choices: what to copy, and what to take into the realm of imagination.

And there's plenty of imagination on show throughout Worlds, which has chapters on fantasy, science fiction, book covers and Assassin's Creed. The book's narrow landscape format is well suited to showing off Raphaël's art, which depicts gorgeously rendered fantastical landscapes.

Mixing things up is a chapter of the artist's sketches. Even the most polished of pieces start from a simple ink drawing. Another chapter features three short workshops of Raphaël analysing his painting process. But even if you're not in the mood for learning, you can still enjoy this fine body of work from a digital art master.

RATING ★★★☆☆

Raphaël's cover art for The Windup Girl, a book by Paolo Bacigalupi, published by Night Shade Books.

Character Design Collection: Heroines

FIGURE ART Scientist, pirate and archaeologist are just three of the 50 concept challenges taken on by artists, who reveal their creative processes in this new title

Editor Philippa Barker **Publisher** 3dtotal Publishing **Price** £25 **Web** 3dtotalpublishing.com **Available** Now

The new sketchbook series from 3dtotal kicks off with 50 artists concepting characters from a specific brief. The result is a book filled with original drawings and designs.

Each artist is allocated four pages, with their character concepts developing from initial loose sketches to, well, slightly more refined sketches by page four. Along the way the artist explores facial expressions and poses, with short captions revealing their

Spanish illustrator Jordi Lafebre works up an idea of a young aeronautical engineer.

thought process and reasons why they chose to take a character in a certain direction – or not. There are also Post-it style graphics that feature more general character concept advice. There's no practical drawing advice on offer, though. The book's more focused on shining a light on the creative process of the 50 artists.

Character Design Collection: Heroines' layout aims to replicate an artist's typical sketchbook. This means that every page is packed with line-drawings; white space is a rare commodity. Initial fears that this might result in a confused presentation are soon dispelled – the busy layout actually works in the book's favour to convey the energy involved in refining the look of the characters.

The characters, drawn by the likes of Thomas Chamberlain-Keen, Jackie Droujko and Gretel Lusky, cover a wide

An alien empress takes shape in the hands of film and game concept artist Gary Villarreal.

range of styles that are well suited for original animation, video games and illustration projects. And there's nothing stopping the reader from using the 50 design briefs to help them take their creative skills in new directions. A recommended purchase.

RATING ★★★★☆

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists

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This issue:

FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

Guy-Pascal Vallez

LOCATION: France **MEDIA:** Pencil, ink, charcoal, watercolour, acrylics, oil **WEB:** vallezgax.com

Known online as Gax, Guy-Pascal's passion for illustration has seen him work for Square Enix, Ubisoft and Third Editions. Currently he's an art director for a tactical RPG project.

1 GARGANTUAN
"This is an illustration from my own tabletop role-playing game project. Here I'm exploring a monster design."

2 SNAKE TEMPLE
"Another piece from my tabletop role-playing game project. This time I'm setting the mood for some key scenes."

3 SPACE PIRATE
"A cool exercise where I used photo bashing for the textures. This lil' space pirate is an expert in space whale hunting."

4 BATTLE OF THE PEAK
"A random wizard clashes with a random demon. I pushed the perspective to give some tension to this fight."

Jaana Heiska

LOCATION: Finland **MEDIA:** Dip pen and ink, watercolour, markers **WEB:** jaanaheiska.com

Jaana likes creating dreamlike illustrations inspired by old storybooks, fairy tales and the natural world. After drawing digitally for what felt like ages, Jaana made the move back to traditional media and couldn't be happier.

1 I HEAR YOU
"From Witchtober 2020, this piece depicts a witch feeling the nature surrounding her and communicating with the deer spirit."

2 WILL YOU SING FOR ME
"I combined nature and a figure to create a personification of the nurturing and creative forces that are present in nature."
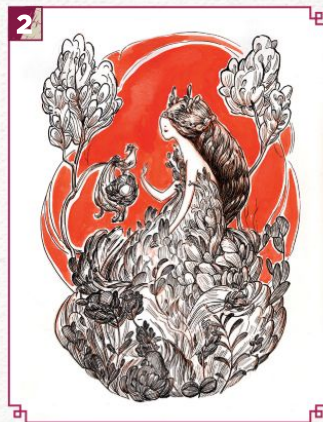
3 GROW WITH ME
"A spirit surrounded by greenery, drawing strength from the plants while helping them grow. I was inspired by the Queen of Wands from tarot and medieval iconography."

4 WEATHER THE STORM
"From Mermay 2021, this contrasts the delicate flow of the mermaid and her love of the sea with the force of the water."

Want to submit your work? Visit ifxm.ag/getinifx

ImagineFX

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Watercolour *Gouache*

COMIC BOOK HERO IN WATERCOLOURS

US illustrator BEN HARVEY walks you through his painting process that combines traditional mediums with a digital sketch to create a portrait of the Rocketeer.

When I first decided to take my craft seriously I knew I needed to branch out into the world of colour theory. This terrified me. Growing up, I was trained primarily in drawing. Occasionally, I was exposed to various painting mediums, but came away thinking they were too cumbersome to handle. Finally, I decided that watercolour would be the most approachable of the lot to get into. The paints last longer than acrylic or oil and it's far more portable when doing plein air work.

Watercolour behaves like no other medium. It can be unforgiving at times while yielding effects and textures that are wholly unique. Maintaining a careful balance of water and pigment is the most difficult aspect to master. Persistence

is key, along with curbing the urge to oversaturate your brush.

Colour shape, form and values should be prioritised along with careful brush strokes to avoid creating a muddy, asymmetrical appearance. The success of your washes depend on the watercolour paper you're using. I find that a cheaper, cellulose-based paper is much more forgiving when it comes to adjustments compared to a higher quality, cotton-based paper, which can have a death grip on the pigments used.

Over time I was exposed to gouache as a secondary medium. This combines the opaque qualities that acrylic and oil offer with the added benefit of being water soluble, similar to watercolours. I enjoy how it enables me to fix or add as I progress through a piece. The mix of both watercolour and gouache

combined with a few other mediums makes for a diverse set of tools that can be utilised to tackle even the most advanced of pieces.

In this tutorial, we'll go over creating a portrait from concept sketches to finished piece using traditional and modern digital techniques. Also covered are my methods for gathering reference to achieve a more realistic pose to your character, as well as improving accuracy to the source materials.

I hope that you find this tutorial helpful on your journey to finding the mediums that fit well into your tool arsenal and wish you much luck in your future endeavours.

Ben is an illustrator hailing from the US. His clients include IDW Publishing, Valiant Entertainment, BOOM! Studios and IMAGE Comics. Explore his art at benharveyart.com.

MATERIALS

WATERCOLOR
- Mix of Van Gough
- Kuretake Gansai Watercolor Sets

GOUACHE
- Holbein Artists Gouache

BRUSHES
- Escoda Perla synthetic brushes 12, 8, 2/0, 1, 0 Liner brush
- Princeton Art wash brush #1

PAPER
- Frabiano Artistico 300lb (640gsm) Watercolor board

PEN
- Uni-Ball Signo White Gel Pen

SOFTWARE
- Clip Studio Paint
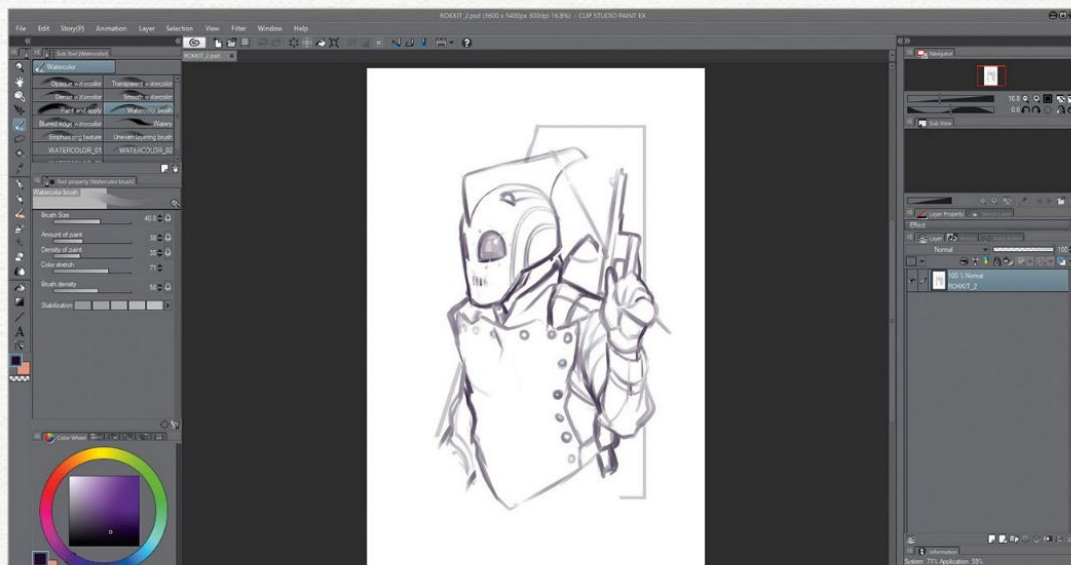
1 Gathering reference materials and digital rough layouts

I start by hopping on to Pinterest to search for inspiration, as well as reference materials for the character. Next, I open Clip Studio Paint to start the digital concept process. This is the most challenging part of my process because the number of poses and angles is nearly unlimited. In this instance, I decide to try something fun with my backdrop that complements the angles created by the character's pose.

2 Printing on to watercolour board

Once I've finalised my layout, I'll faintly print my layout directly in non-photo blue onto 300lb (640 gsm) Fabriano Watercolor board using my Epson printer. Printing directly onto the board enables me to use a wider variety of paper mediums with a heavier weight. This also reduces the amount of pencil abuse on the board, which can lead to deterioration.

3 Refining and adjusting

Next I go over my printout with graphite to finalise and further tighten the figure. In this case, I've decide to rotate the character's head so that he's looking more toward the viewer. Working off of a printout gives me the luxury of being able to modify and correct before proceeding into colour.

4 Using your references

Here's a good example where I notice the hand of the figure could use some quick adjusting. I grab my prop gun and use it as a live model to identify where the fingers should be. Very useful when in a pinch. I'll often use myself as a model, taking several reference photos of myself to help figure out more advanced poses.

5 Masking the backdrop

A backdrop helps make my figure stand out from the white paper. I mask the area with 3M's low-tack painter's tape, then use my Exacto knife to remove the unwanted tape, making sure not to press too hard where I cut into the paper.

6 Prepping for initial wash

With my mask in place, I do an initial underpainting to set my tone or value. I gently apply a light and even layer of clean water to the character's body. When you put water on the paper you want to see a sheen, not a puddle of water. I also take note of where the brightest parts of his costume are. I'll mark those areas in pencil so that they don't get lost in the process.

7 Apply an underpainting wash

It's best to prepare your paints as much as possible before continuing in this step. Speed is essential. While keeping the entire prepped area on the character wet I'll strategically apply areas of warm and cool pigments. Keep these parts light and loose. You don't want too much definition here. The randomness in your paint patterns will help in later steps. ➤➤

8 More tone and value

I go into the figure with more tone and value over my initial underpainting wash. Working in watercolour means that, because of the natural transparency of the medium, your underpainting can help set new layers of paint to be either in the warm or cool tonal range. This makes the decision-making process much easier.

9 Tone and value continued

As I progress I keep in mind where my highlights are on the costume of the character, while adding more value and tone without overcomplicating things. This stage is where I lack the most confidence – I constantly worry about the current look of the piece as well as the various forthcoming steps.
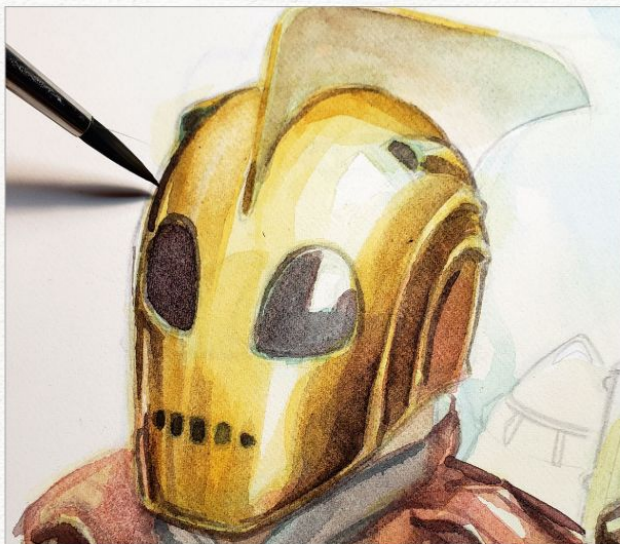

10 Creating highlights on the helmet

The helmet part of his costume is a challenge. It's easy to become lost while trying to assess the patterns of highlights and reflections when painting metallic objects. It also doesn't help that there isn't a live model to work from. My main goal is not to overcomplicate or muddy what I've already put down. Less is more when it comes to brushstrokes.

11 Correction methods

When it comes to corrections, I find that it's best to catch these areas early on. A problem area that's had more than an hour to dry on cotton paper will be a burden to lift off. However, an area that's relatively fresh can be re-moistened and dabbed with a towel.
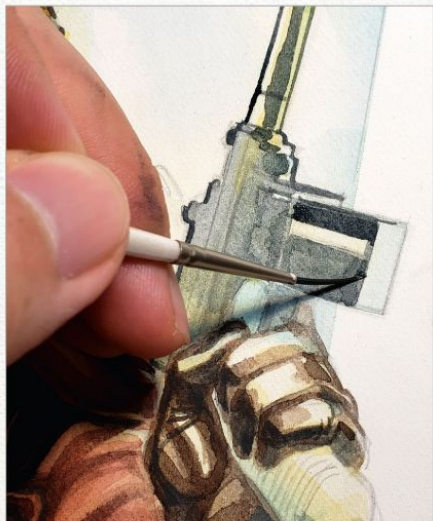
12 Adding details
At this point, I've got most areas of the piece figured out and finally breathe a sigh of relief that I can see the light at the end. The time has come to begin tightening the forms and adding details. This is one of the most enjoyable parts of the entire process for me.

13 Tightening forms
To bring more definition to the piece, I'll grab a small liner brush and go around the edges of the various forms in either a matching or higher tonal value. Doing this can create some interesting effects like a glow and highlights. Then, using a small amount of gouache, I'll add additional highlights or corrections if needed.

14 Making final touches
As the dust settles I'll go around the piece with a Uni-Ball Signo white gel pen to bring back any highlights that may have been lost in the painting process. I'll also use a kneaded eraser to clean up any remaining graphite. ●

First Impressions

✳ Clara Tessier ✳

The elegance of simplicity is key to this watercolourist.

Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?
I grew up in the countryside, in the middle of France. Perhaps it's why I've always liked drawing animals and forests. Also, it's a bit of an isolated area and so I had a lot of time alone to practise my art.

What, outside of art, has most influenced your artwork over the years?
I read various literature: fantasy, romanticism, Gothic, naturalism, historic... there's nothing better for igniting my imagination. But I realise that this is art, so travelling, a change of scene, exploring the past with different cultures and legends certainly influence me, too.

Is there a painting that you saw in your formative years that changed everything? What was it?
At the very beginning of my art journey I discovered a book

© DC Comics

illustrated by Mirko Hanák, a 20th century Czech artist. His animal watercolour paintings helped me discover the beauty of letting go, and the elegance of simplicity. Since then, the frustration of not reaching these goals has never left me.

What was your first paid commission like to work on?
I had to do several watercolour paintings on the broad theme of Quebec for a restaurant. I was excited with this theme, but also felt intimidated because my paintings would be on show for a long period of time.

ENSNARED
Poison Ivy uses her command of plants to trap Batman, in this mixed media piece.

LA SYLPHIDE
Personal art by Clara, based on the 19th century romantic ballet of the same name.

MÉLUSINE
Clara's depiction of a character from classic European folklore, who's cursed to be part-serpent.

❝ **I never seriously thought about the reality of working as an artist** ❞

What was the last piece of art that you finished?
My last piece was a cover for a comic book based on a famous character. This commission was more demanding, but the pay was better!

Is making a living as an artist all you thought it would be?
Growing up, I never seriously thought about the reality of working as an artist. I didn't ask myself many questions back then. I would never have dared to imagine working alone, at home, without a boss, in complete freedom. This is the dream.

What do you enjoy about painting comic heroes and villains?
Even if it's not my favourite field, I'm very glad of this opportunity. I get to expand my pop culture knowledge, and discover and even meet inspiring artists I wouldn't otherwise have known about. It also forces me to study anatomy and learn how to draw with dynamism.

How has the art industry changed for good since you've been in it?
I have the feeling that more people are interested in art and illustration thanks to social networks and pop culture conventions.

What character or scene that you've painted do you most identify with?
Several years ago I painted Ariel the little mermaid. She was angry because she was swimming in a polluted ocean. I share this anger, like almost all of us I guess.

What's your next step in art or life?
I've been mainly painted with watercolours for 10 years, and it hasn't always been easy. I'm now exploring digital tools and oils. I need to gain more control in my process. I'm certainly looking forward to this challenge!
Clara is a French freelance watercolourist and illustrator. You can discover more of her art at artstation.com/clara_tessier.
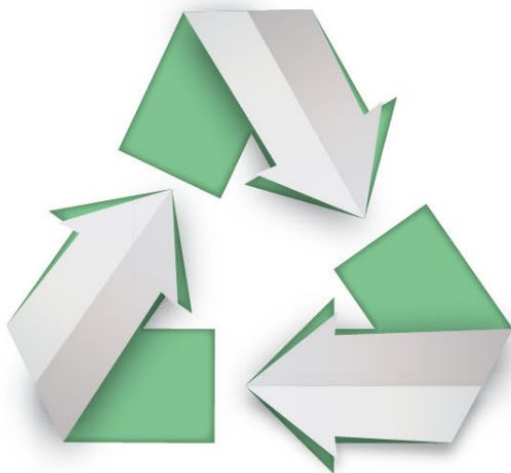
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