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Crafting Comics: My Journey Through the Creative Process

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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

“Crafting Comics: My Journey Through the Creative Process”

written by

Carrie Hill

and submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for completion of
the Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

Ferris Williams, thesis director

Dr. Amy Sonheim, second reader

Dr. Kevin Cornelius, third reader

Dr. Barbara Pemberton, Honors Program director

April 23, 2019

When I was 12 years old, I drew a short, goofy comic book that followed the adventures of Carrie Hill and her wacky friends. Now as a 22-year-old graphic design student, I've continued to draw comics because they can tell stories with great depth using only a sequence of images. Whenever I read Ben Hatke's *Zita the Spacegirl* or Kate Beaton's *Hark! A Vagrant*, I dream of publishing a graphic novel or comic strip. This dream prompted me to create several comics for my thesis, exploring different genres and styles. My original intention was to develop several 10-page comics, adapting famous narratives and writing my own scripts. However, my final thesis ended up looking a bit different. I only made one 10-page comic, along with several shorter comics and dozens of sketches. Most of these comics have incomplete stories; they are windows into bigger ideas that I could not finish for this thesis. Although I have been casually drawing comics for years now, I learned that intentionally making high quality comics is a lot more difficult than I expected it to be. This was because, although I had a strong head knowledge of comics, I had not developed adequate craftsmanship. In her essay, "The Macrame of Resistance", Lorraine Wild explains that we artists need more than just theoretical knowledge: we need "craft knowledge", gained through hands on experience (84). This allows us to create artwork more instinctually (Wild 85). As I began creating comics, I shifted the focus of my thesis towards developing my process so that I could begin developing this craft knowledge. In this essay, I will trace my journey through the creative process to show you how I developed each comic. Then I will show you how I applied this process to my final comic.



Samuel 15

I began to refocus on craft knowledge when I started work on my first comic, an adaptation of the biblical story found in 1 Samuel 15. Over the past couple of years, my pastor has been preaching through 1st and 2nd Samuel. During this time, I have found myself captivated by these books, not only because they are filled with Biblical wisdom, but also because they are simply good stories; each episode in the lives of Samuel, David, and Saul are filled with relatable characters and intriguing plots. As I sat listening in church, I began doodling these characters on the backs of church bulletins. As I drew, I was especially intrigued by the story of 1 Samuel chapter 15. In this story, Samuel tells Saul that God has rejected him as king of Israel. I was excited to tell this story because I wanted to combine its drama with my own style and vision.

As I started on this comic, I researched some of the visuals that would appear, such as desert settings and Israelite weaponry. I primarily researched Israelite clothing; I didn't want the characters to look like generic flannel-graph figures dressed in bed sheets. What I discovered is that no one has a complete understanding of what the Israelites wore during this time. This was both unhelpful and helpful; unhelpful because I wasn't sure how to draw Israelite clothing with perfect accuracy; helpful because this meant I could take a little bit of artistic liberty in drawing the characters.

Researching characters took a long time, so I was ready to start drawing. Using what I learned from research, I sketched a rough design for the characters of Samuel and Saul. I wanted there to be a lot of visual contrast between these two characters. Saul is tall, chiseled, and angled, emphasizing his physical strength. Samuel is bent over, short, and rounded, much weaker compared to Saul. One detail I enjoyed giving him was a small cloak he wears on his back. In my mind, this was one of the coats that his mother Hannah had made him long ago when he was

a boy. This tiny detail made me excited about putting this character into this story. Perhaps a bit too excited; I didn't spend a lot of time developing and refining these character designs before jumping into drawing the story. This would lead to some difficulties when I began to draw the comic's pages.

After briefly designing my characters, I began thumbnailing my comic pages—drawing tiny sketches to plan the layout of each page. In drawing a thumbnail sketch, the artist is not trying to sketch each figure or object in detail. Rather, he or she is trying to determine the best place to position each figure to create a cohesive design. In the case of a comic, I have to plan the content of each individual comic panel, as well as how each panel is positioned on the page. This rough planning allowed me to and arrange the panels of *Samuel 15* so that the action on each page would flow with clarity.

Now that I had created character designs and thumbnail sketches, it was time to start drawing rough sketches of the comic pages. To organize my comic page, I used Indesign, a program often used to make layouts for print publications. I made a simple grid dividing the page into twelve rows and twelve columns. By drawing all of my comic pages on this grid, I was able to make them more uniform, having the same sized margins and gutters between the comic panels. Having this guide freed me to concentrate more on the content of the panels instead of their size and shape. However, the grid was also a little constraining; I could only make my panels certain sizes, with very little room for variation from page to page.

After drawing rough sketches in pencil, I began to refine them in Photoshop using my drawing tablet. I drew the characters with more detail, looking for their features and expressions. This is when I began to struggle a bit. Before sketching the comic, I had not drawn a lot of preliminary sketches to explore the best way to draw each character; I was impatient to start

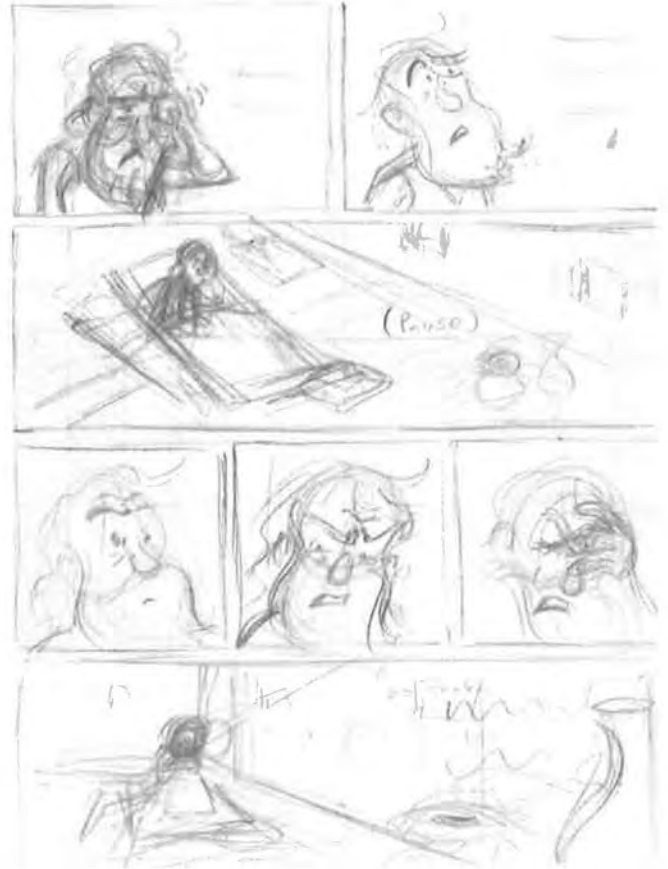
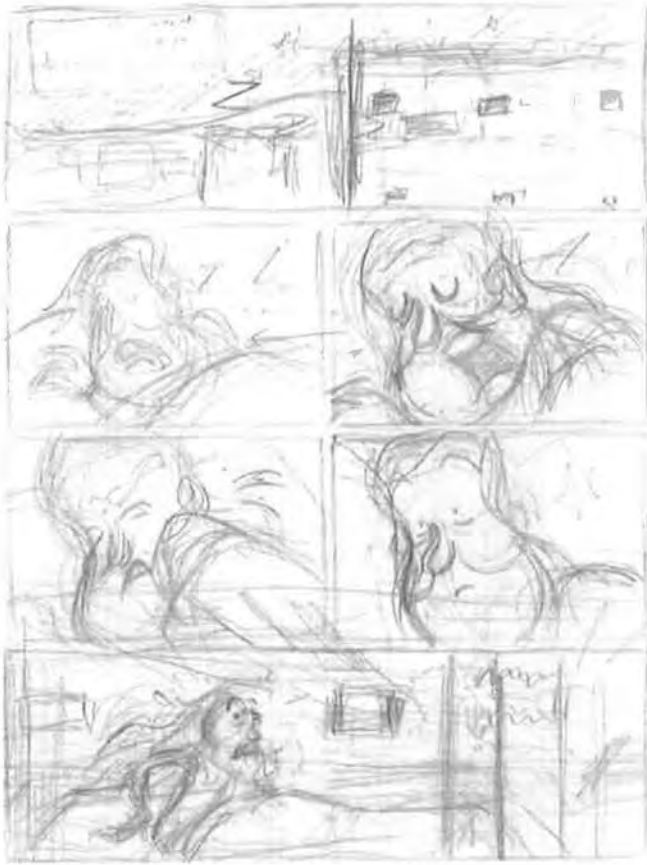
making the finished comic. Because of this, refining my sketches was a slow process. Although I had done a lot of research for this comic, I still felt unprepared to draw these pages. I wanted the characters to quickly flow onto the page, but they simply didn't. I wasn't aware of it then, but I could have saved a lot of time by making more preliminary sketches. I wouldn't fully learn this lesson until many comics later.

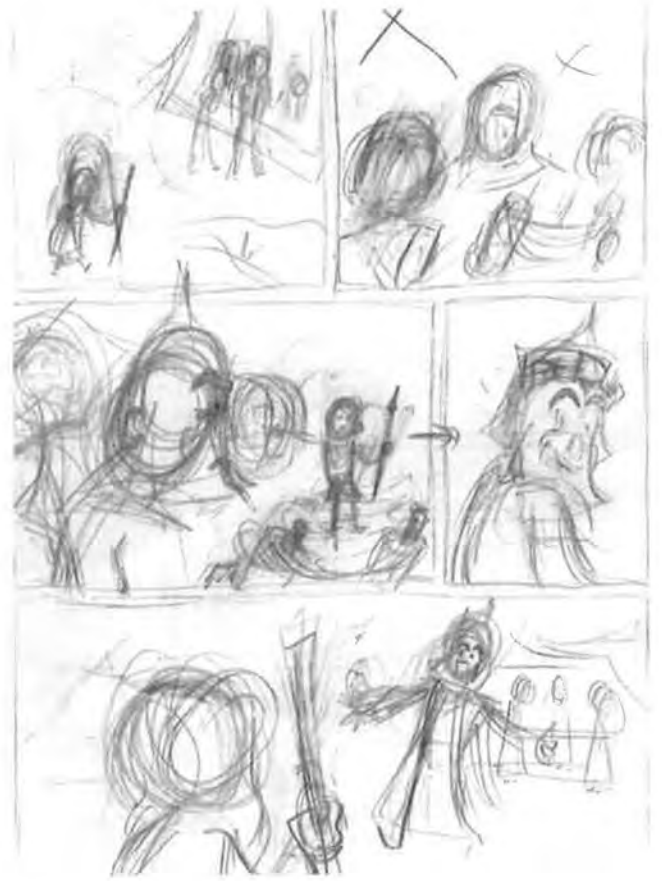
My difficulties continued as I began to ink the comic. For this comic's style, I was inspired by animated cartoons, like *Gravity Falls*, or the film, *The Song of the Sea*. Like these cartoons, I wanted to use smooth, clean shapes to draw my characters. To achieve this style, I inked the comic in Photoshop using a stabilizing software called Lazy Nazumi Pro. This software subtly modifies pen strokes into cleaner, smoother curves. Although this tool created the effect I wanted, it felt a bit unnatural. I had to slow down my drawing speed to allow the software to smooth my lines. Drawing slowly was difficult for me; I kept having to undo my strokes and try repeatedly to draw the right shape, continually second guessing myself. Additionally, I couldn't draw with the level of precision that I wanted, which discouraged me from adding a lot of details to my drawings. For example, the Israelite city I drew in my final comic spread is sparse with identical houses. This was because it was difficult to draw each house; even adding little details like bricks was a challenge.

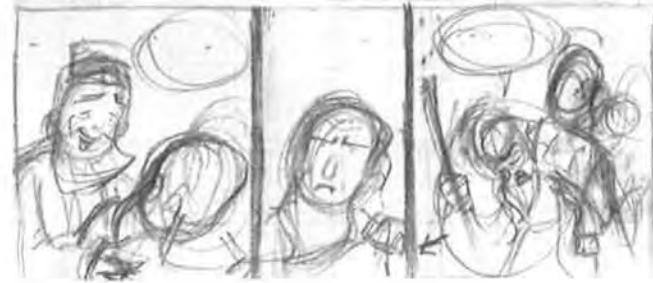
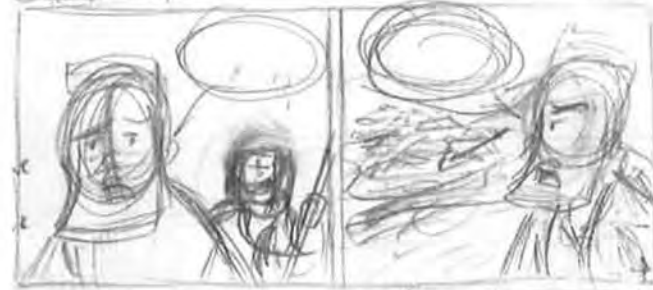
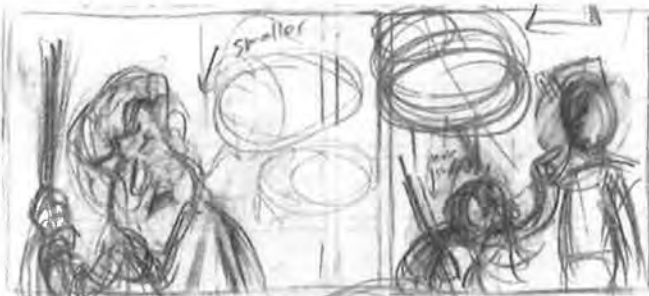
In the end, I spent six months writing, planning, and sketching this comic. I had planned for this comic to be fourteen pages, but instead I ended up with a pile of sketches and two finished pages. If I had made the entire comic, I would have included speech balloons and a wider variety of colors, but I decided to end this project early. This was partially because I was running low on time; I had spent so much effort on research, I felt that I had no time to develop this comic further. However, I primarily gave up because the tedious process of creating this

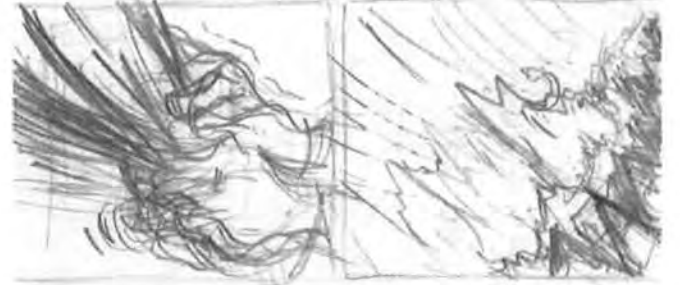
comic left me feeling discouraged and bored. I was worried that all my comics would be this difficult, and that I wasn't cut out to be a comic artist. However, I would soon learn that this wasn't the case. In their book, *Art and Fear*, David Bayles and Ted Orland state that "the seed for your next artwork lies embedded in the imperfections of your current piece" (31). The imperfect, tedious process for creating *Samuel 15* would become clear as I continued to make more comics. Because of this "failed" comic, I was able to improve my craft knowledge, modifying my process so that it became far more intuitive.

Page Sketches

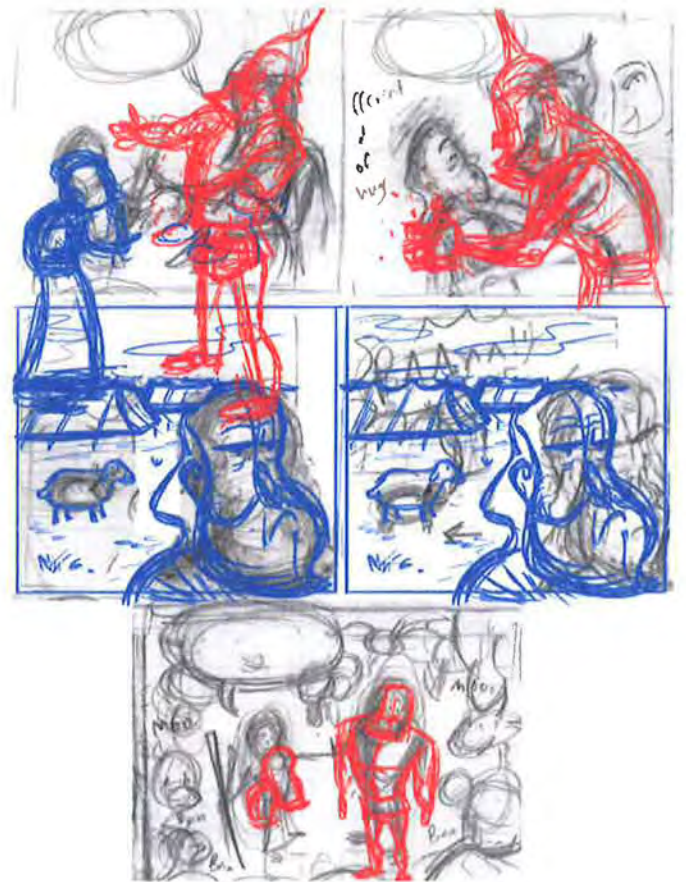
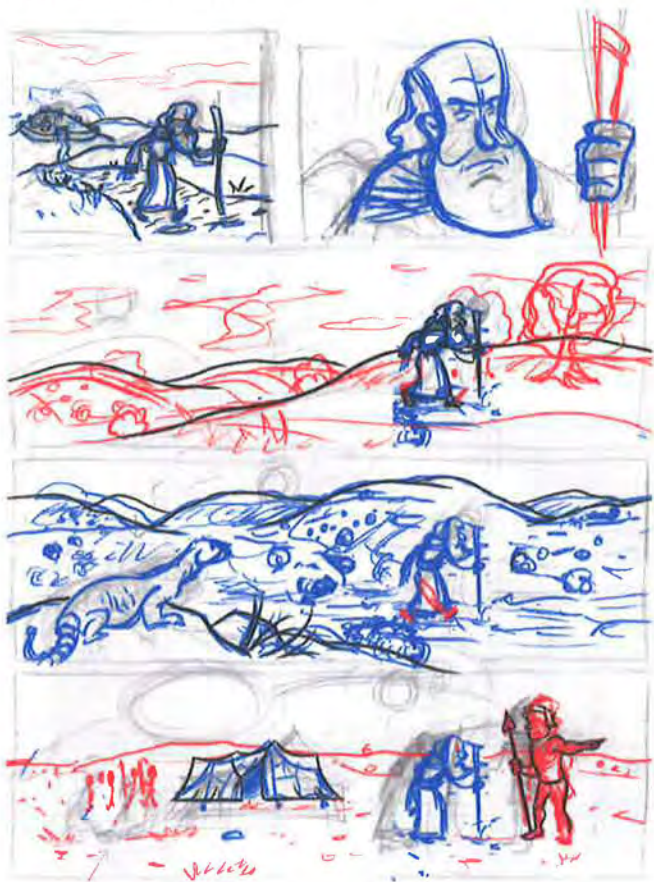








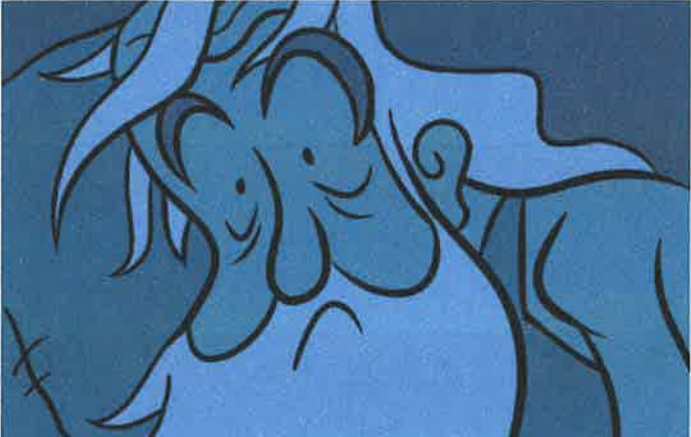
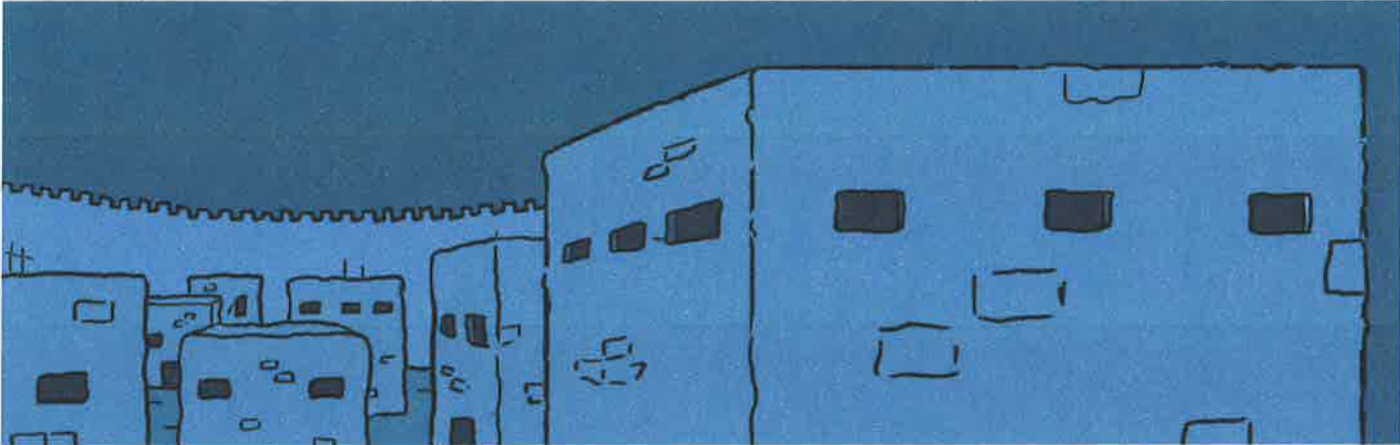
Refined Sketches

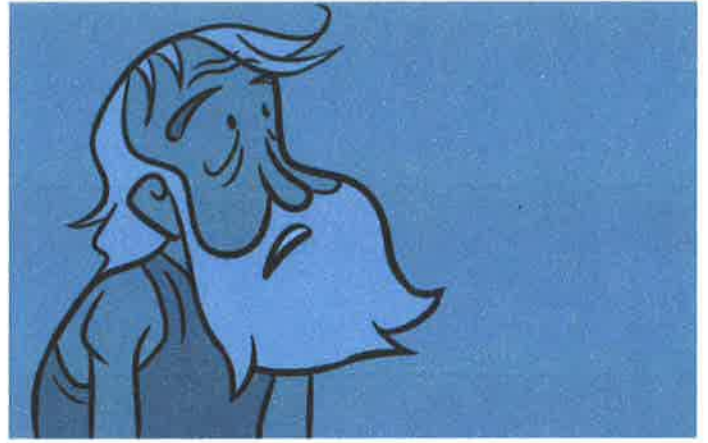


Character Sketches



Finished Comic



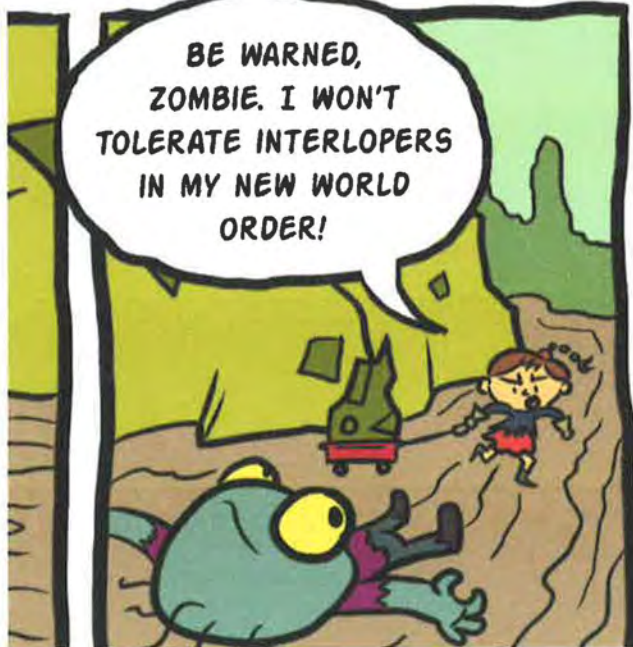




DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU JUST BIT? YOUR FUTURE RULER!

Zombie Friend

BE WARNED, ZOMBIE. I WON'T TOLERATE INTERLOPERS IN MY NEW WORLD ORDER!



After struggling with *Samuel 15*, I needed to try something simpler in order to gain some creative momentum. Thus, I created *Zombie Friend*. This comic began as an idea that my brother and I developed several years ago. We discussed the idea of a family sitcom set during the zombie apocalypse. In this setting, the horrors of zombie hoards and constant death would become normal, and families would go back to the suburbs to create new lives in this apocalyptic world. As we developed this idea, I created a character named Becky, the little sister of the family. Becky desires to establish a new world order and rule it with an iron fist. However, no one takes her seriously; no one except for her little zombie sidekick, Fred. I felt that Becky and Fred had a lot of potential as characters, so I fleshed them out by writing a play and picture book about them. However, I had always wanted to write a comic for these characters because I could delve deeper into the story and dark humor of a small girl being best friends with a dead kid.

In creating this comic, I followed a similar process to the one I had used to create *Samuel 15*. Because of this, I ran into some of the same issues. I jumped into this comic without a lot of preplanning, not even bothering to draw thumbnail sketches; I simply began sketching. I also did not take time to refine character designs because I felt confident that I could draw my characters well. And again, I used a grid to layout my comic, refining my sketches on the computer. Because of this lack of preplanning, I again had to spend extra time searching for the right way to draw the characters and scenes; I was wrong in thinking that I could easily breeze through this process. However, I did not become bogged down by this slow process like I did in making *Samuel 15*. This was mostly because I was only drawing four pages, so I felt less anxious about taking my time to refine them. Further, I made a couple of key changes to my process that led to a better result and a better experience.

First, I modified the way I inked *Zombie Friend*. Like *Samuel 15*, I used Photoshop to ink this comic. However, this time I did not use a stabilizer to smooth my pen strokes. Thus, I could ink these pages a lot more quickly and with a lot more precision. However, this change wasn't perfect. As before, I kept second-guessing myself, undoing my pen strokes over and over. In this way, digital inking was becoming a crutch; because I could constantly undo my marks, I could never make a final decision about where a line would go. Further, knowing that I would be able to undo these strokes discouraged me from refining my sketches as much as I should have. Thus, even though digital inking allows me to fix mistakes quickly, it ultimately takes a lot longer.

The second change I made in my process was being more intentional in developing the comic's style. Speed was not the only reason why I decided to ink without a stabilizer. I also chose to do this because it resulted in a rougher inking style that seemed to better depict the rugged, scrappy world of the *Zombie Apocalypse*. I also used this inking style to draw the speech balloons and panel borders, so that these graphic elements would feel more cohesive with the images. Finally, I experimented with the sickly yellow and green colors of the trash dump to put the finishing touches on the comic's style. The line quality and color of this comic worked together to create a style that supported my comic's story.

I am happy with how this comic turned out, though it still has some weaknesses. When I showed this comic to a couple of editors, they really liked it, but they encouraged me to work on making the characters look more consistent in each panel. This is a fair critique; Fred in particular looks slightly different each time he appears. Additionally, I wish I had sprinkled more detailed objects into the abstract background. This would have grounded the comic in reality a bit more, making it more relatable to the viewer. However, the tedious process leftover from

Samuel 15 discouraged me from trying new things and adding more detail. After failing to completely finish *Samuel 15*, this piece gave me a me a confidence boost, making it easier for me to experiment in the next comics.

Page Sketches



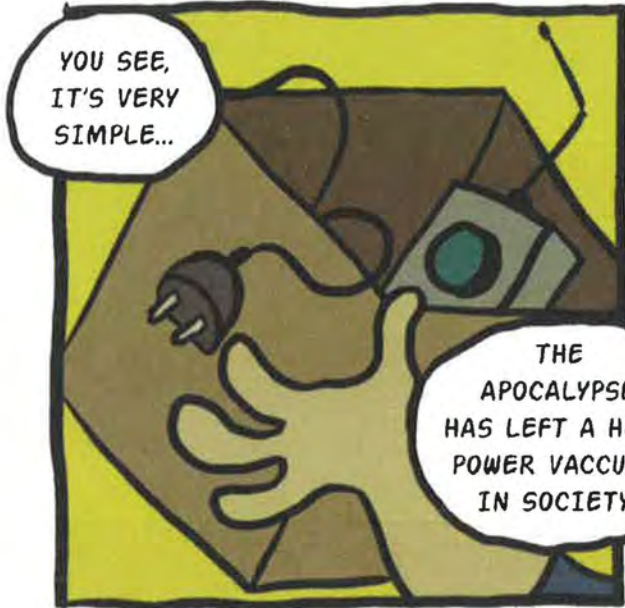
Cover Concept



Character Sketches



Finished Comic



THE APOCALYPSE HAS LEFT A HUGE POWER VACCUUM IN SOCIETY.







Trespassing

Creating *Trespassing* was originally assigned as part of my illustration class. Due to time constraints, this comic is still unfinished, with only one large panel and several thumbnail sketches. However, this piece was very influential in helping me develop a better process that further refined my craft knowledge. This comic is loosely based on the Aesop Fable, “The Dog, the Cock, and the Fox.” In this story, a cock sits in the branches of a tree, while his friend, a dog, sleeps in the hollow of its trunk. A sly fox tries to lure the cock down to eat it, but the clever cock has other plans; he invites the fox into the hollow log. Here, the fox is quickly devoured by the dog (“Dog”).

To adapt this story, I wanted to use the same archetypes—the clever hero, the sly villain, and the strong protector—but I wanted to mold the characters into something different. I decided to rewrite the cock to be a young girl named Emberlyn, and the dog to be a sentient tree. For the fox, I brainstormed different animals that seemed just as sly and cunning. I began thinking of insects, and a praying mantis stood out to me. I gave him sorcerer robes and a fly army, making him a worthy villain for the brave heroine. I was excited to tell this story because I love tales in which small children outwit evil adults.

In creating this comic, I made two major breakthroughs in both the planning and refining stages. The first breakthrough was spending more time developing the design and personality of my characters. In his book, *Making Comics*, Scott McCloud states that the “internal variety of character types will need an outward variety of visual designs” (70). Taking time to develop these internal and external qualities allowed me to better communicate them to the viewer. First, I was assigned to sketch many possible designs for the silhouettes of my characters, refining their designs. After that, I searched for a distinct personality for each character. I drew the characters over and over, finding things I liked about their body language and facial expressions, then

incorporating these into their overall personality. I realized that developing these personalities was important for making a character unique. For example, I wanted Emberlyn to be a spunky young girl. However, I did not want this character to be just like Becky in the previous comic. Through sketching Emberlyn in different poses, I discovered what made her distinct: Emberlyn is a little more kind and outgoing than Becky, but also a bit more manipulative. I learned this simply through drawing her in different poses. Developing the design and personality of the characters made it easier for me to draw these characters into the comic.

After sketching the characters' silhouettes and developing their personalities, I made character turnarounds to solidify the design for each character. Character turnarounds are guides that show the character at every possible angle. Designing one of these for each character helped me gain a better sense of how to draw the details of each character, like Emberlyn's hair and the slouch of the praying mantis. Making a character turnaround for the tree was very important because it was the only character that wasn't symmetrical. The turnaround helped me draw the tree's branches in their proper positions at different angles, even if it was not heavily featured in the final comic panel.

My second breakthrough in creating this comic was a change in my inking method. When I was working on *Samuel 15*, I experimented with inking one of its pages using a nib pen dipped in ink. I enjoyed playing with this medium, but I wasn't confident enough to embrace this medium quite yet. But this changed when I attended an illustration conference at the Highlights Foundation in Honesdale Pennsylvania. Here I met Matthew Cordell, an illustrator who walked us through an exercise where we used nib pens to draw plastic models of dinosaurs. As I played with this inking process, I felt like I was quickly carving the dinosaur out of stone, looking for

his shape. I loved how I could create a broad range of thick and thin lines that made my drawings look looser and more alive.

Using this inking method for *Trespassing* was much easier. It was faster than digital inking, and I could be more precise in the details I added. Of course, this polished inking style took a lot longer than the loose sketching I did for the dinosaur, but it was far less tedious than the process I used for *Samuel 15* and *Zombie Friend*. In addition to easier inking, coloring this comic was much easier. I spent a long time in the planning stage refining its color palette. I wanted to find colors that made each character unique yet looked nice combined together into one image. I decided to use a brighter pink on the girl so that she would stand out a bit more from the background and other characters. I made the mantis blue, emphasizing his cold nature. And I used some of the same colors on the flies so that they would seem to fit with the praying mantis.

My experience creating this comic was far more satisfying than my previous ones. Not only was I engaged during the process, but the resulting comic looked far more detailed and polished. Having solid character designs helped me sketch this comic more easily; I didn't have to keep erasing and starting over. It also helped that I sketched and refined the whole thing in my sketchbook so that I wasn't bogged down by the computer. Also, unlike the page spreads I had been making, this comic is in a scrolling format, meant to be viewed on a smartphone. Not only was this long format much easier to design, but it also works well with the story; the vertical image shows the long distance between the girl and the ground. Finally, inking traditionally proved to be far easier and more intuitive than inking digitally. I can't wait to finish this comic, because I know I will have fun with this process.

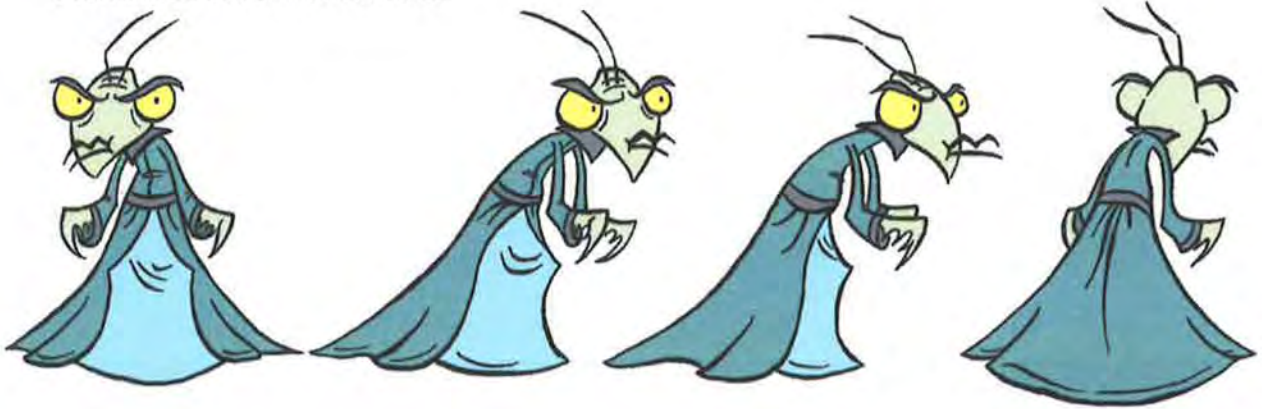
Preliminary Sketches



Emberlyn Turnaround



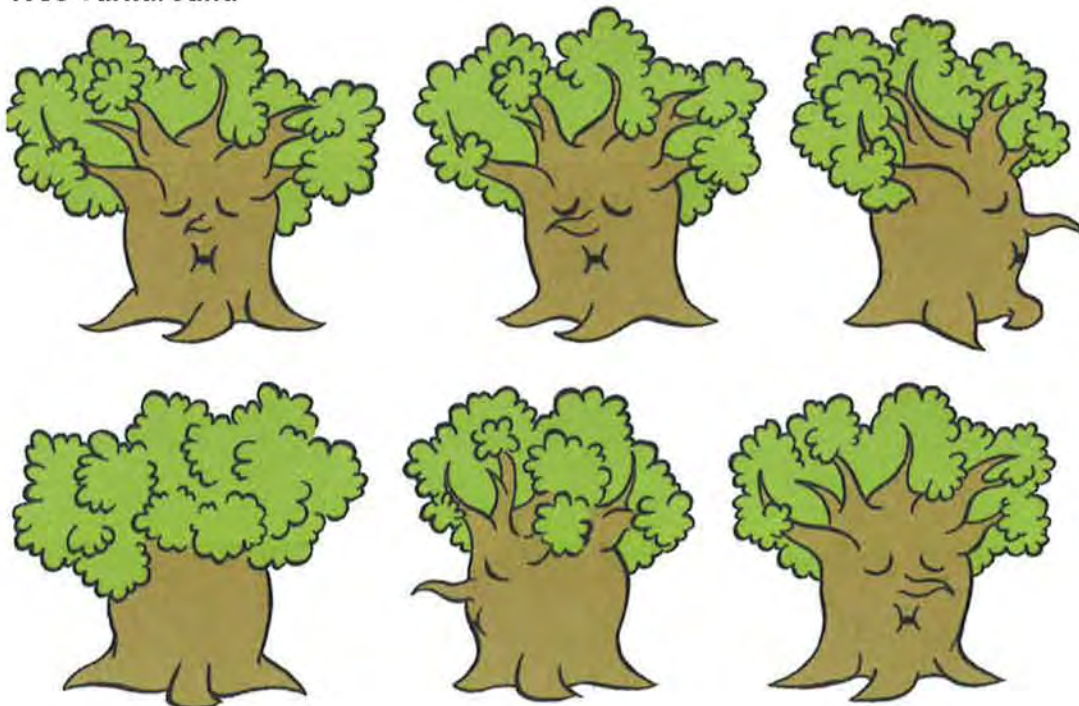
Mantis Maximus Turnaround



Fly Minion Turnaround



Tree Turnaround



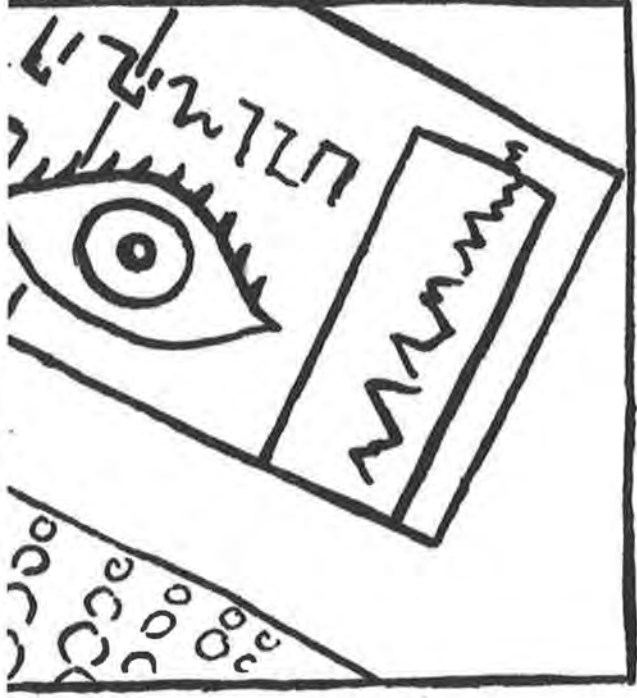


Dinosaur Sketches





THIS...
IS THE WRONG
BUS STOP.



Sundance Adventures

The next comic I created was a big departure from the more planned, refined style of *Trespassing*. *Sundance Adventures* was a short comic I made as part of a group project for my Sundance class. Over the course of this class, several classmates and I traveled to the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, then spent the rest of the semester discussing and writing about our experience. For this project, my friends and I each drew a short comic about our experiences. I focused my comic on my anxiety as an inexperienced traveler. I had been a bit nervous throughout the film festival because I was never sure where I was going or what I was doing. However, I always look for the humor in difficult situations, so I decided to turn my pain into something humorous. I wanted my comic to talk about my fanny pack, my social anxiety, my getting lost, and my constantly losing things. Additionally, this comic was an opportunity to reflect on my more serious feelings about the festival. Because this comic was about self-reflection, I had different goals for this comic than I did for the others.

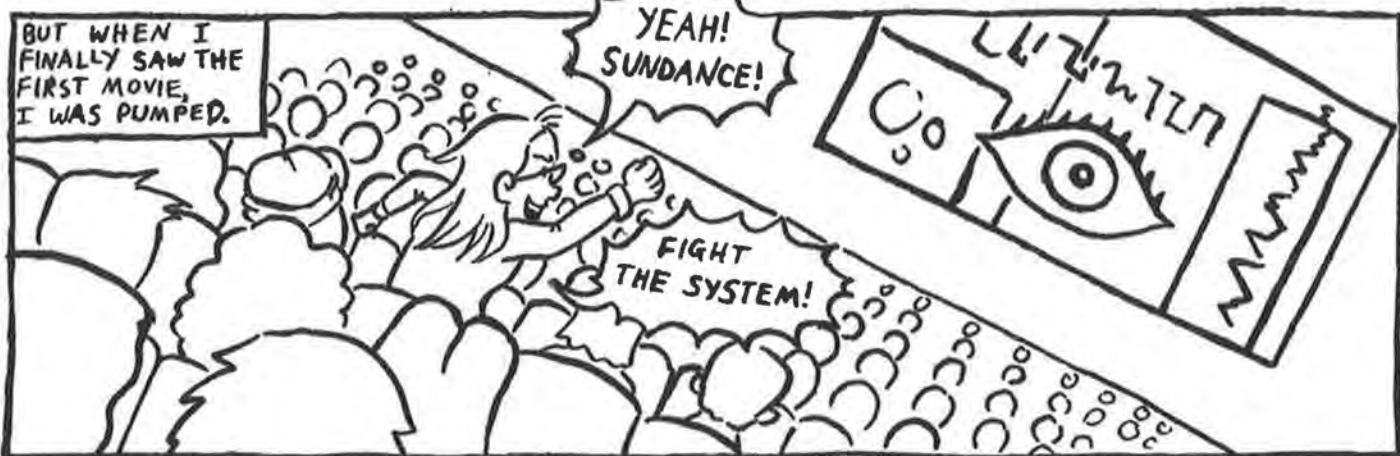
Like the Samuel and Zombie comics, I jumped into this comic with very little preplanning. However, this was not an oversight leading to mediocre results; this was purposeful. My goal was not to make a perfectly refined, colored comic, but to quickly share my experiences in one cathartic burst. The spontaneous comic is like those created in the 24-Hour Comic challenge, created by Scott McCloud. To complete this challenge, the artist must draw a twenty-four-page comic in one consecutive twenty-four-hour period. Similarly, I did all sketching, refining, and inking in one night until 3:00 am, and I felt that this experience stretched me as an artist. But this fast turnaround did not lead to sloppy art. Rather, because this story was about me, it seemed appropriate for me to follow my instincts, using a more intuitive style.

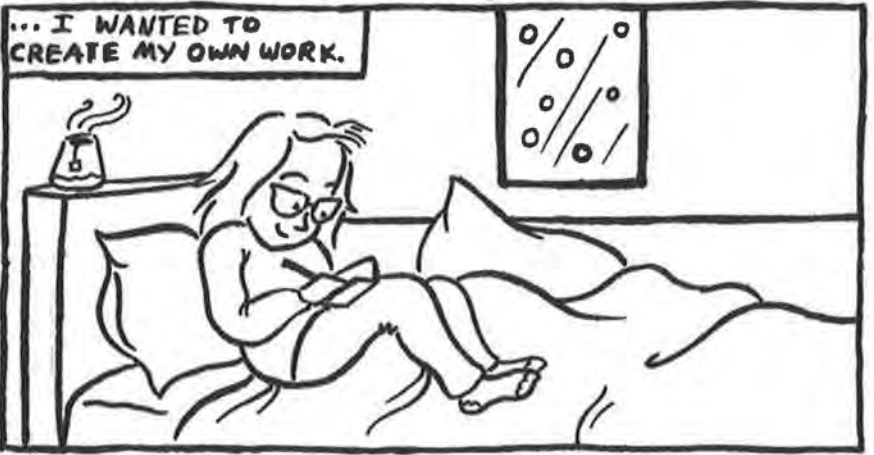
The process for making this comic was very enjoyable. Traditionally inking all of this comic, including the speech balloons and lettering, gave it a personal touch that fit with telling

my own story. This quick, intuitive process was far removed from the slow, cumbersome process of *Samuel 15*. Instead of smooth strokes, I made rough ones. Instead of constantly undoing pen strokes, I committed to them without second guessing myself. I enjoyed using this process to draw my own expressions, ranging from silly to serious. My classmates especially enjoyed the silly panels, and I was glad to give them a glimpse of my inner world.

Part of me wishes that all comics simply flowed from my mind to my pen. Instead of worrying about designs and sketches, I could just draw what I feel. However, I also enjoy spending more time on refined comics, fully developing my vision. I simply need to balance creating refined comics with making more spontaneous ones. Scott McCloud agrees; I had a chance to meet him when he gave a lecture at Henderson State University. After looking at some of my artwork, he recommended that I try out the 24-Hour Comic challenge so that I would make more comics without second-guessing myself. Doing so will keep my creativity fresh, so that I feel like I'm always trying something new.

Final Comic







IS
ME
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Doug the Time Traveler

In the past, whenever I would reflect on my life, I played a mind game in which I pretended to have a conversation with my past and future selves. I would give advice to my younger self to help her become a stronger person. I would also receive advice from my older self who had already lived through these experiences. This dynamic between past, present, and future became the premise for *Doug the Time Traveler*. In this story, a college graduate named Doug is forced into a time paradox where he must live with his past and future selves. I wanted this story to capture the sense of uncertainty that graduating students (like myself) have when they are trying to get their lives together. We look to the future, hopeful and fearful, struggling to fulfill our dreams. But we still feel a bit like little kids, stepping out into a new world. Using time travel was an exciting way to capture this tension.

Doug the Time Traveler incorporated a lot of what I had learned from my other comics. Although I didn't make elaborate character designs, I did spend a lot of time drawing these characters. I gained this practice when I made a rougher version of this comic in my "Science of Super Heroes" class. In this class, we were assigned to draw a comic about a superhero, and I decided that an average guy teaming up with his past and future selves would be an interesting premise. I sketched and inked this comic on paper, then added digital speech balloons. The finished product was simple and rough, but I loved its characters and story. I decided that a refined version of this comic would be an engaging story to create.

Before making the final comic pictured in this essay, I had previously made another attempt to ink and color one page from *Doug the Time Traveler*. However, at this time I was using the same inking stabilizer I had used for the *Samuel 15*, which made it difficult for me to add any nuance to the characters' expressions. Building on my previous experience, the

traditional inking and refined sketching of my second attempt led to better results; the characters' expressions in the second comic are less goofy than the first, more grounded in reality.

The process came together well for *Doug the Time Traveler*. Because I had already practiced refining this comic once, I was better prepared to sketch this attempt in detail. Like *Trespassing*, I refined the sketch of this comic using pencil, so I could draw the details much more easily than I could on a computer. Inking this comic traditionally gave it a different style; because I felt more in control, I was able to add tiny details, like blades of grass and subtler facial expressions. For color, I used a palette similar to that of my first attempt, but I desaturated it so that the warmer colors would not contrast as harshly with the green and blue. This resulted in a far less garish color palette. I also played with the lighting on the first page which proved to be a challenge; I needed to find a balance between not enough and too much contrast of dark and light colors. After all of this sketching, refining, and coloring, I felt that I had made this comic spread what I had wanted *Samuel 15* to be: clean but detailed, grounded, but with stylized designs. And after playing with beautiful lighting and complementary colors, I now feel confident that I can expand this comic into a longer story with interesting visual effects.

There was a downside to this process. Although I felt more in control of the detail and expressions in my artwork, I almost felt like I had too much control. After sketching *Doug the Time Traveler*, I inked its pages like a machine, simply tracing the lines I had previously sketched without making many creative decisions. While repetitive tasks are par for the course in creating artwork, I wondered if there was a way to liven this process up a bit. I wanted a balance between planning and improvisation, precision and randomness. I wanted the carefully designed characters in *Trespassing* to be combined with the playful spontaneity of *Sundance Adventures*.

Rough Comic

DOUGLAS READER WAS ONCE A TYPICAL COLLEGE GRADUATE: ANXIOUS AND FOOLISH.

A LOSEK, REALLY.

HOWEVER, EVERYTHING CHANGED THE DAY DOUG HIT THE "RANDOM" BUTTON OF A MAGIC ALARM CLOCK.

HE'S BEEN A LOSEK, THOUGH, NOT "SEVEN COMETS".

THROUGH DARK MESSURE THE ALARM CLOCK CREATED A STRANGE, IMPOSSIBLE TIME PARADOX!

A PARADOX THAT ALLOWED DOUG, PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE TO COEXIST.

IN OTHER WORDS...

DOUG IS NOW STUCK LIVING WITH HIS YOUNGER AND OLDER SELVES.

BEFORE THEY CAN END THE PARADOX HOLDING THEM CAPTIVE, THE THREE DOUGLASES MUST FIGHT TO REScue THEIR HOMETOWN OF DANGEROUS TIME ANOMALIES.

BUT CAN THEY WORK TOGETHER, OR WILL DOUGLAS JUST HAVE TO HELP HIMSELF INSTEAD?

OHAY GUYS, I KNOW THIS LOOKS BAD, BUT WE CAN DO THIS.

WE'RE SOBER, CATCH A T-REX WITH A MENEUR!

OH REALLY? HOW DO YOU PLAN TO DO THAT? RIDICULOUS! IT'S A TEN TON RAMPAGING LIZARD!

HE'LL FEED A WEE!

BUT DOUG THIS IS THE BIGGEST TIME ANOMALY I'VE EVER SEEN! WHAT HAPPENS IF WE FAIL?

WELL FOR SURE, THE TIME REZZARDS WON'T EAT US.

AND IF WE CAN'T AFFORD THIS MONTH'S RENT... WE'LL HAVE TO MOVE IN WITH MOM!

AND IF WE DON'T GET PAID WE CAN'T AFFORD THIS MONTH'S RENT.

FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION, DOUGIE!

Page Sketches

This section contains multiple pencil sketches of the comic strip's scenes. It includes character portraits, action shots of Doug and his friends, and the T-Rex scene. The sketches are rough and show the initial drawing process, with some lines being light and others more defined. The layout mirrors the panel structure of the comic strip above.

First Attempt vs. Second Attempt



Final Comic

DOUGLAS READER WAS ONCE A TYPICAL COLLEGE GRADUATE: ANXIOUS AND JOBLESS.



A LOSER, REALLY.



HOWEVER, EVERYTHING CHANGED THE DAY DOUG HIT THE "SNOOZE" BUTTON OF A MAGIC ALARM CLOCK.

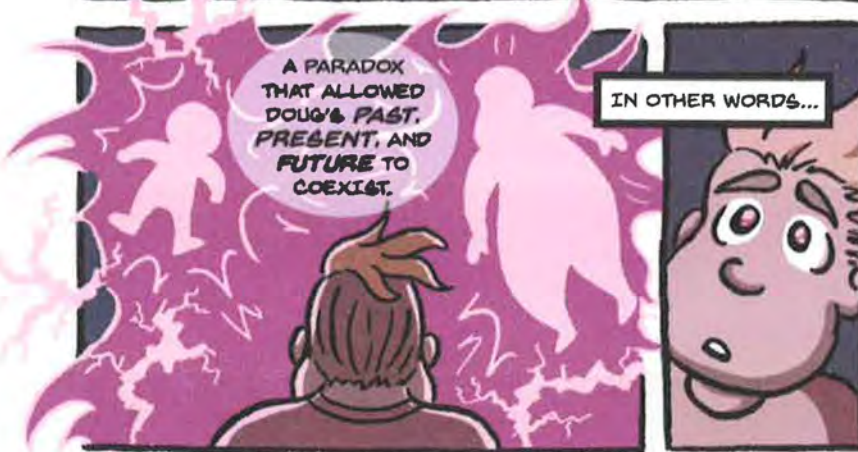
(HE'S STILL A LOSER, THOUGH, THAT NEVER CHANGED.)

THROUGH DARK WIZARDRY, THE ALARM CLOCK CREATED A STRANGE, IMPOSSIBLE TIME PARADOX!



A PARADOX THAT ALLOWED DOUG & PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE TO COEXIST.

IN OTHER WORDS...



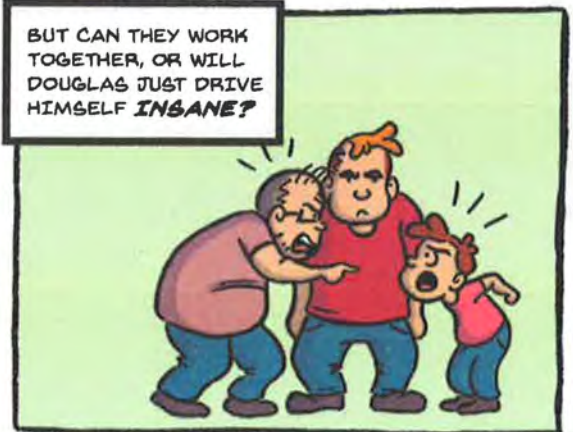
DOUG IS NOW STUCK LIVING WITH HIS YOUNGER AND OLDER SELVES.

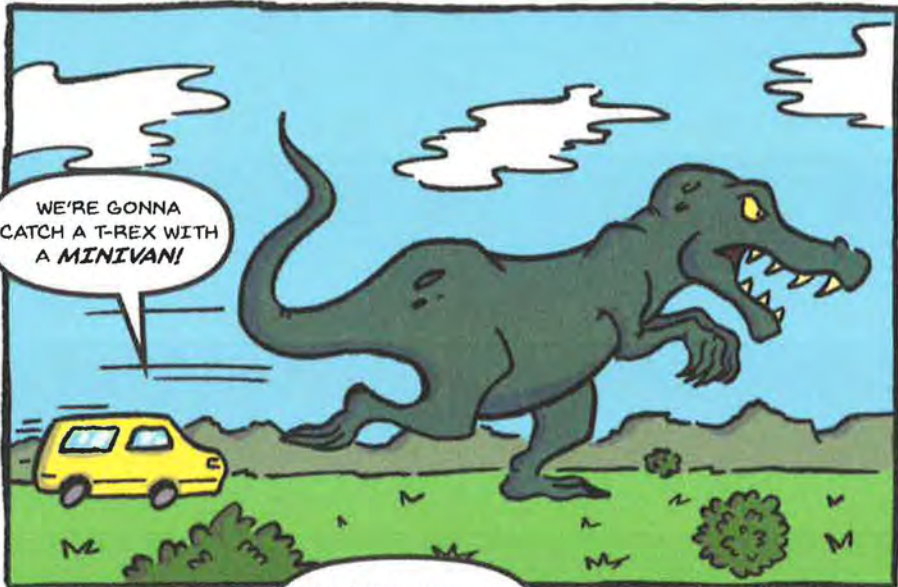


BEFORE THEY CAN END THE PARADOX HOLDING THEM CAPTIVE, THE THREE DOUGLASES MUST FIGHT TO RID THEIR HOMETOWN OF DANGEROUS TIME ANOMALIES.



BUT CAN THEY WORK TOGETHER, OR WILL DOUGLAS JUST DRIVE HIMSELF INSANE?







A Game of Fetch

In my final comic, I incorporated what I had learned from making my previous comics as well as some new techniques. Inspiration for this project began when I was working on *Samuel 15*. I was frustrated and bored with my lack of progress, so I tried an improvisational exercise by Matt Maddon. He suggests drawing a grid of panels, then scribbling a random mark inside each panel. Next, he says to look for ways to incorporate each scribble into a different image, designing each of them to flow together as a complete story (Maddon). By following this process, I managed to draw a story about a woman playing fetch with her small dog. I did not know at the time, but this exercise would become integral to my final comic.

I stowed this short comic away, not expecting to develop it further. But during that time, I learned about a painting called *The Ambassadors* in my art history class. I had seen this painting before, but I had not paid close attention to it. As I sat in class, I began to sketch the man on the left because I loved the look of his puffy sleeves. Over the next few weeks, I began to draw this man again and again, searching for his personality. He seemed like a kind soul, so I wanted to know what sort of story he fit into. Later, my professor, (Ferris Williams,) encouraged me to try expanding the dog comic into a bigger story. Inspiration struck when I realized it served as the perfect template for this character I had been developing. I decided to tell the story of a puffy-sleeved nobleman playing fetch with his spunky dog.

As I worked on nailing down the comic's story, I spent an extensive amount of time sketching my characters. I spent a lot of time playing with the nobleman's character design; I didn't want his puffy sleeves to be too impractical. I also drew lots of sketches of yorkies, because I wanted to learn how these dogs moved. Through repeated sketching, I built a lot of muscle memory that helped me to draw the final dog more easily. After mastering the basics, I struggled with figuring out the balance between realism and personality for the dog. I opted to

give her more personality so that her feisty attitude would contrast with the prince's sweeter nature. I also sketched the castle many times because I needed a cohesive background. Sketching the castle at different angles helped me stay oriented as I positioned the characters in different places.

Not only did these sketches help in creating a better comic, but they also enhanced my experience. I remember one day when I was sketching the outside of the castle. As I drew it, I felt myself tearing up, feeling so much love and excitement about my castle and characters; I felt completely immersed in the world of my comic. I knew that the viewer would likely never have this sort of response to the final story. However, by spending more time with my characters through preliminary sketches, I fell in love with them, which encouraged me to make this comic as immersive as it could possibly be. This quality would certainly enhance the experience for the viewer.

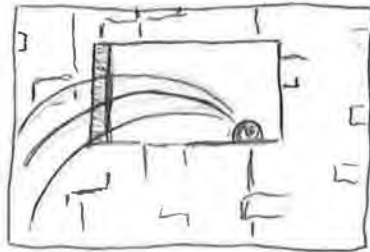
Because I spent more time drawing preliminary sketches, I felt better prepared to start sketching pages. After writing a rough script for this story, I scribbled doodles of how each scene would look, then expanded these doodles into thumbnails. In drawing these thumbnail sketches, I wanted to create more dynamic page layouts than the simple grids I had tried before. I looked for ways to break out of the grid, such as having characters jump out of panels or throw objects off the page. I used Photoshop to enlarge my thumbnail sketches, printed them out, then sketched over these thumbnails with more detail. After making these sketches, I would scan them into InDesign, where I could use shapes and grids to create uniform margins and borders around each panel. Finally, I would print out these more refined sketches, preparing them to be inked.

They say necessity is the mother of invention, and this was true of my own work. It was two days before my senior exhibit, and I hadn't begun inking *A Game of Fetch*. This made me

nervous because I really wanted to display it for a large audience. As I looked for a way to speed up my process, I asked my mom to buy me a nib pen that I thought would allow me to ink comics more quickly; it was the same nib pen I had used to ink dinosaurs at the Highlights Foundation. However, as I began to use it, it was not working the way I wanted it to. I realized that the traditional inking method I had developed would not be fast enough for me to finish inking this comic. Not only that, but this slow process did not create the energetic style I was looking for. I was frustrated because I was back to square one; my art style was constrained by slow inking.

I sat in the computer lab, head in my hands, wondering how I could possibly finish this comic. My friend Audrey was there with me. To help me speed up the process, she recommended that I use a light table to trace my comic. As I sat there tracing, I tried using pencil instead of ink, on a whim. What I discovered was amazing. I could “ink” the page almost four times as quickly as I could with actual ink. Not only this, but I could play with my pencil strokes, making quick gestures. This speed allowed me to improvise, adding tiny details and playing with expressions. This also resulted in a different line quality: not a smooth, clean line, but a playful, rough line, which gave the comic more energy. With pencil, I had more control of my sketches, but I could also be more playful. To complement the sketchy lines, I used the messy style of digital watercolor. This was a much quicker way to color, and I could experiment more with shading and color mixtures. However, while this coloring method was effective, I think it could look a little more natural. Next time I try this style, I might try using real water color, or at least a different digital brush. Regardless, I had finally found a process that felt natural and freeing. This resulted in a comic that was loose in its style but precise in its detail.

Improvised Comic



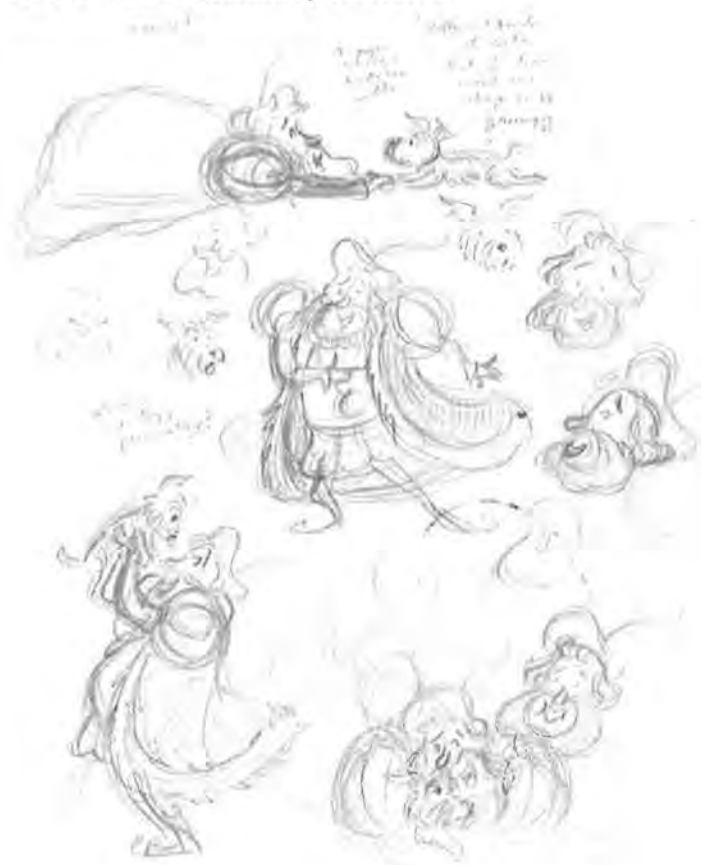
Dog Preliminary Sketches



one strand left
put the pencil in
then it is better
ditching below
with pencil and
brush - make

the dog's head
is the most
important part
of the sketch
and should be
done first

Nobleman Preliminary Sketches



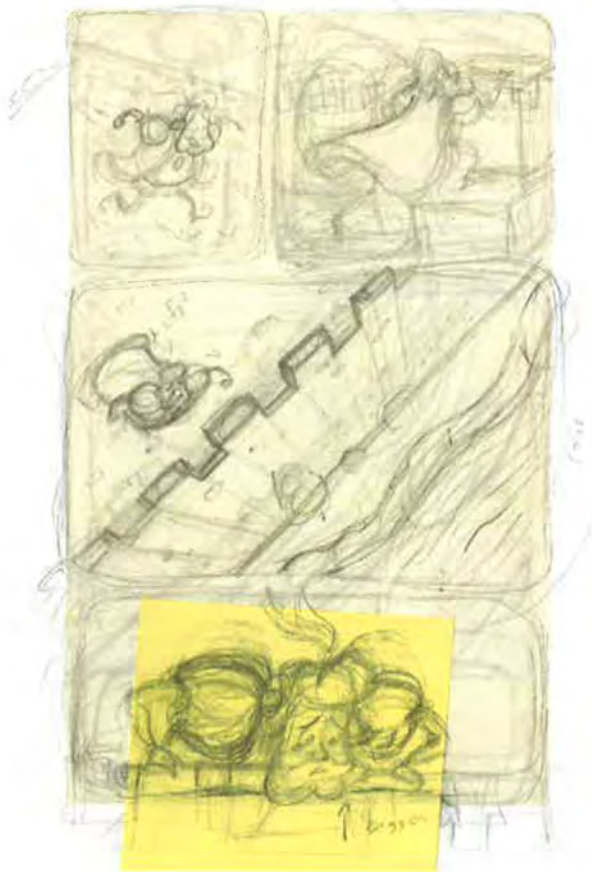
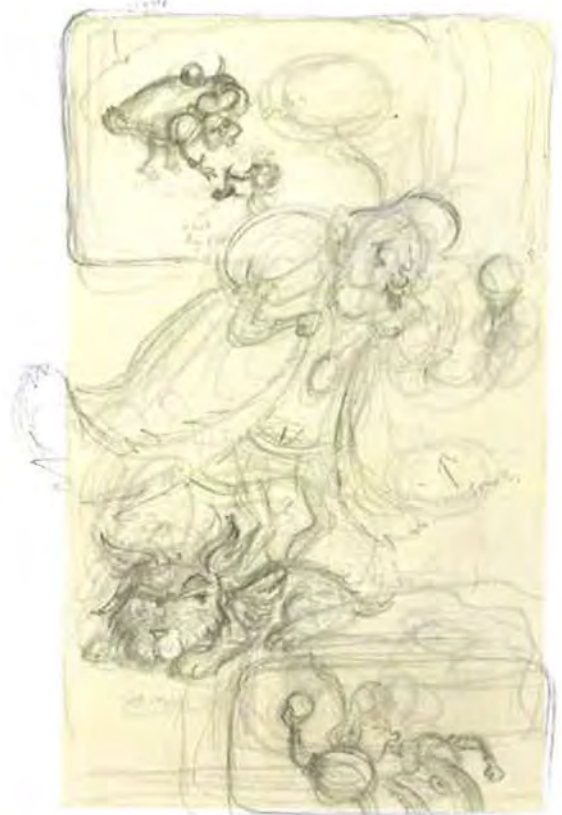
Alice Character Turnaround



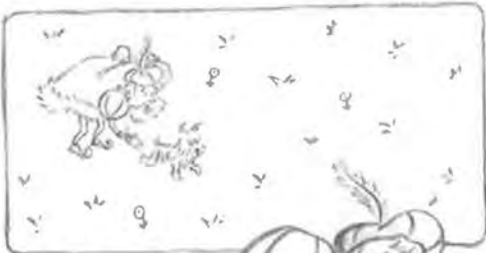
Nobleman Character Turnaround



Page Sketch Examples



Refined Pencil Examples



Final Comic











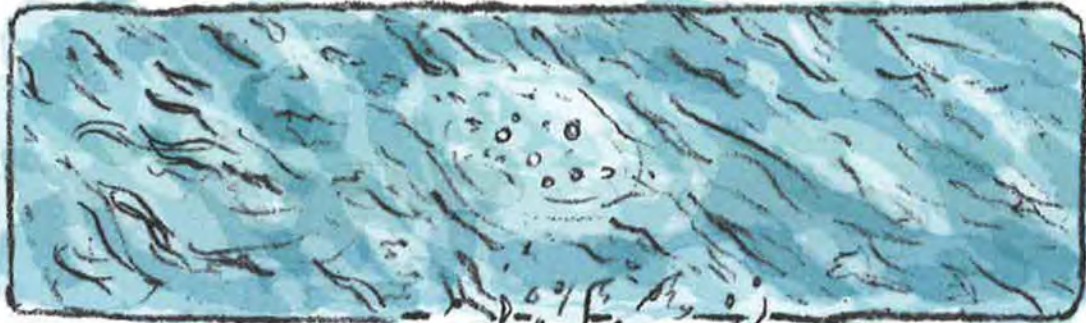






ALICE!









After playing with various ideas, mediums, and styles, I successfully finished each comic. Although some are more developed than others, creating each one taught me different aspects of the creative process. I learned that quality art does not magically appear; it takes practice and careful craftsmanship. This is something I've always known, but intentionally developing these comics really hit this point home for me. I learned to focus more on the process than the results because doing so will lead to a greater mastery of my craft. This in turn will lead to better results. In the future, I will continue to develop my process, so that I can create comics that are each better than the last. Eventually, I plan to make a fully developed comic anthology using the craftsmanship I've gained from this project.

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