

MIT Meets NYC – A Comic Narrative

Over Thanksgiving a group of friends and I went to New York City instead of heading home. It was an entertaining yet very relaxing trip with good food and great friends to hang out with. A memorable trip offers many Kodak moments, and there was certainly no short supply on this trip. Even though I often try to capture spontaneous unstaged moments using natural light, there were a couple of things along the way that simply begged for the group to play with. A friend would hang off a small cliff, for example, and pretend that he was holding on for dear life (see Pane 4 on page 2 of the work). When I came back, the opportunity to use these photos for this project was too good to pass up.

I designed a comic-based image that portrays an obviously fictional story from our time in New York City. Since it's in a comic book format, the image is separated into two pages and each has several panes of images. For the general comic effect, I used a modified version of MacMerc.com's "Comic Art Effect" tutorial. Each photo is placed through several revisions before giving shape as a comic:

- Create a Displacement Map: it will later be used to generate the black outlines
- Tone layer: Posterizing and cutting out the original document provides us with a tonal foundation for the image. This was modified – I removed the tone layer for this project.
- Color layer: comics tend to have very bright and exaggerated colors. Using the Dust & Scratches filter while increasing saturation by 80% reveals how the colors will look in the end.
- Ink 1 Layer: There are three layers of ink. The first uses an anisotropic diffuse filter on a high threshold level of the original file to produce the deep shadows in the image.
- Ink 2 Layer: The majority of the ink detail comes in this layer. The Photocopy filter with another diffused threshold provides a lot of ink detail.
- Ink 3 Layer: The final layer of ink uses the displacement map and a quick mask to create horizontal lines on the darker parts of the image. This creates a shading effect.

Placing these steps in a Photoshop actions file made things quicker, I was able to select an image and use the Action to efficiently make a comic. Each pane then needed additional work to bring out detail, reduce clutter, or increase color. In pane 1 from the first page, I used an inverted Glowing Edges filter set to darken the pane to create a color pencil appearance in the clouds. Pane 2 required a little teeth and eye whitening so it would look more like an authentic comic strip. Pane 2 in the second page had a lot of detail in the grass and surrounding rocks that was extremely busy and detracted from the feel, so I removed that from the second and third ink layers. Originally, the photo from pane 4 had a person standing right behind the head. I used a clone stamp to remove the person, then processed the file for the comic appearance. It then needed some teeth whitening using a white brush. Pane 5 also had a good deal of unnecessary detail in the background grass, so I removed that and whitened the teeth and eyes. The final pane

had a dense amount of black in the trees which was difficult to thin out, so I simply removed it from the second ink layer.

All of the text except for that in pane 1 is from the “Comic Book Commando” font found free on the internet. The text in the first pane was text on a path and altered slightly for a stretched effect. All text bubbles representing speech were created from a combination of masking, the pen tool, and the polygon tool. The narrated text boxes were simple rectangles with drop shadow for an outline. Pane 3 in the second page is a masked polygon tool, and the text follows a path with a moderate amount of barrel distortion applied for effect.

Finally, I created an action that used the color halftone filter on a 50% gray overlaid on the final image to produce the small color dots often found in early color comic books and newspapers.