Ark Ruffians Comic Book

A Senior Project

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by

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Abstract

This is a written report documenting the research, story, sketch, and drawing phases for the illustration of a comic book.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Somehow after passing through three years of graphic design, I’ve lost quite a bit of my passion for drawing. I’ve fallen out of practice enough that most of my newer drawings aren’t good enough and I’ve become extremely picky with what I finish.

Since I’ve always been fascinated in comics since my affinity with “Calvin and Hobbes” since I was a child and have been interested in drawing one. Unfortunately I never really had the creative inspiration, or the time to test it out. I felt senior project was a perfect chance to jump on it before I made it out into the working world and had even less opportunity.

I. Problem

A friend, Jon Rothenberg, wrote a scripted story, which needed to be fully illustrated in a traditional comic book format.

II. Objective

By illustrating a comic book, I hope to reignite my passion for drawing and illustration and to develop my skills in a format that would showcase my abilities. It would also give me an opportunity to practice character design, storyboarding, and digital coloring, essential skills for job fields I’m interested in pursuing in the future.
III. Limitations

1. Time Limit: The single quarter time limit on senior project this year left little time for sketch exploration. With only ten weeks at my disposal I had to get down to the meat and potatoes of inking and coloring pages for the finished product as soon as possible.

2. Writer Communication: Due to the time constraint I also decided to work with a writer due to my less than amazing writing abilities, but this proved to be a challenge not only to find one, but also to communicate and get the work out of him with his own busy schedule. I ended up dropping my first writer (who indeed turned out to be far too busy to write a script with the rest of his schedule), in favor of a friend from high school with a story idea already planned out, ready to begin work on the comic book script.

3. Format: Choosing a format size for the pages was easy, because I wanted to do a standard size monthly booklet format, so I bought and measured a DC comic monthly issue, which turned out to be 6.5 inches wide by 10 inches tall. Even after choosing the format there was still layout constraints based on the vertical format of the page.

4. Illustration style: I chose to use a cartoon style in however it turned out I felt comfortable drawing it. I also decided on a cell-shading style of coloring because it would be easier for me to color in a short amount of time.

5. Story: I would also be limited by the storyline, and whatever would fit in the allotted first fifteen pages for my senior project. I was completely at my writer’s mercy concerning what I would have to illustrate.
Chapter 2: Research

My research for this project began far before it even began. I’ve been engrossed in comics since I started college, so it was only a matter of pulling my favorites and flagging pages I liked. I flagged pages based on their layout, storytelling ability, illustrations, and color schemes.

I. Inspirational Artists

There are several illustration artists I’ve always been inspired by because of their interesting styles and character designs. The list includes a few comic book artists and animators, which I also examined for storytelling styles.

Fig 2.1 | Kozyndan:  
http://www.kozyndan.com/

Fig 2.2 | Dave Rapoza:  
http://daverapoza.wordpress.com
Fig 2.3 | Mr. Dynamite:
http://mrdynamite.deviantart.com

Fig 2.4 | Francisco Perez:
http://www.pac23.com

Fig 2.5 | Sam McKenzie:
http://sam-m.deviantart.com/

Fig 2.6 | Mr. Sheldon:
http://www.sheldonlovessheldon.com/

Fig 2.7 | Becky Cloonan:
http://www.estrigious.com/

Fig 2.8 | Raphaele Bard:
http://dorkeanddraw.blogspot.com/
II. Comic Book Layouts and Color

To research layouts I pulled several of my favorite comics and flagged pages I liked with interesting layouts and paneling. One of the comics, “Supertron” (fig 2.9), has intense breakout layouts and retina burning color, it uses intense angle views and action lines to bring its story across. My style has always been very concentrated on detail and I studied these layouts for their amazing storytelling ability through breakout and diagonal directional panels. I wanted to incorporate similar panels rather than just the generic blocky Sunday paper panels. Another comic, “Pirates of Coney Island” (fig 2.10), uses similar burning color as Supertron”, but with more arbitrary use of color in each panel. I also loved Mr. Dynamite’s “Grog and Bits” (fig 2.11) use of overlapping panels.

I also took several trips to Captain Nemo’s to read superhero comics (fig 2.13-2.14) something I don’t usually partake in, but useful nonetheless. These comics often use bright colors but place a darker tone with harsh shadows directly in the lines. I wanted to experiment with this but didn’t know if I would have enough time to implement it in my pages with the time allotted.

Fig 2.9 | Mr. Sheldon Supertron
Fig 2.10 | Vasilis Lolos *Pirates of Coney Island*

Fig 2.11 | Mr. Dynamite *Grog and Bits*

Fig 2.12 | Mr. Sheldon *Kill Audio*

Fig 2.13 | Alan Moore, Dave Gibbons
*Watchmen*

Fig 2.14 | Mark Verheiden
*Superman/Batman #32*
III. Photo References

While doing character design and actually drawing the pages, I had to constantly look up photo references, mostly on Google images. Smoke clouds, clothing folds, old vintage robots, the list is seemingly endless. One day I spent nearly thirty minutes researching and replicating shading on clouds. It’s frustrating to discover you have no idea how to color something but eventually rewarding when its decided it looks right.

See fig 3.10a, 3.10b, and 3.10c on pg. 22 for photo references

Chapter 3: Procedure and Results

I. Initial Story Concept

One day into the first quarter I met with my first writer, Brian Hildebrand, to discuss a story for my senior project comic. A recommended friend of a friend, Brian was recommended to me while I was searching for “an English major who wanted to write a comic book with an art student.” Not knowing much about him or his writing style beforehand, I came armed with a list of comic books I liked and things I wanted to draw. Our first conversation basically consisted of my saying, “I want to draw explosions, and fire, and smoke, and debris! And I want to draw panels with lots of wild things happening that I can fit a million billion little details in.” To which my writer responded “AWESOME!” We proceeded to discuss comic books we enjoyed but this was a little difficult since we hadn’t read most of each other’s list, but we decided on a couple of themes: Apocalyptic, Futuristic, and/or Detective story. The next day we met to trade a few comic books to get a better idea of what the other person was all about. Brian had mostly detective hero stories, and I shared with him a whirl of independent comics that I loved. Brian was about
story, I was about the art, and it seemed perfect. Brian assured me he would read a few of the comics and get back to me with a story idea in a few days.

Three days later I received an email with the first story concept:

“The detective, Joy, and her partner, the dumpy, innocent, socially awkward robotic Felix, live in a city fraught with riots and protest. It's a time of difficulty for the citizens, which plays well for a private detective. She is commissioned to find the brother of a client who went missing after a protest on a major government building that turned riot. At the same time, the story runs with a shadowy and ambiguous parallel of the missing brother and, as they converge, the stories of both main characters, Joy and the brother, Marcus, begin to unravel. I'd like the tone to be sort of silly and ridiculous at times with references to classic detective stories in a slightly futuristic setting.”

My first reaction to this story was “Oh no! A horrible cliché! A dumpy, innocent, socially awkward character messing up the other protagonist’s flow!” Another meeting with Brian later, I had informed him “If we go with this story, we need to dump the robot!” Luckily he agreed that the robot was cliché and presented me with a few other story ideas, including an odd one about a black metal band in a nursing home (which I promptly rejected on the grounds that it was far more ridiculous than I cliché robot), and a Peter Pan-and-the-Lost-Boys-like story about a gang of kids in dingy future world. We
got into a discussion about this idea and decided on it for the final story. Brian promised me a fleshed out story by the next week.

An email from Brian just days later contained a plotline about a gang that stands for chaos versus a corporation using them for financial gain. The gang becomes disgusted with their actions and takes down the corporation in a blaze of glory. This unfortunately was the beginning of the decline of the writer-artist relationship. While this was good baseline for a story, the way the events panned out in Brian’s plotline were somewhat unbelievable, missing specific points about why the gang hated the corporation and completely different from what we had discussed before. I replied with another email of edits that I thought made more sense with the storyline.

Below is Brian’s original plotline in black, with my edits and observations in red:

While the plot being set in a modern-ish time is important, I do not think the whole story has to be completely based in realism. One of the things that make comic books (and other media) so much fun is that it takes you out of reality. While I don’t want the story to be super fantastical, it needs to pull out of realism a bit more.

1. A representative from NWIS (Nation Wide Insurance and Security <this needs to change because there already is a Nation Wide Insurance that has obviously not given us permission to use their name. The company doesn’t have to be specific either; they can just be generally corrupt and only referred to 'the corporation' with the exception of television broadcast and advertising/signage. > Comes to the hideout of the primary (the only gang mentioned?) gang. He hires them to turn the protests, that are occurring in the streets around them into riots, taking the crowd that is already formed and irate and turning it just a little more past its independent reasoning into a riot (need explanation for protests, but not necessarily in this scene. important because its a major plot
point). The goal for NWIS is to use a riot as a form of advertising, convincing an entire society, nation, country that they need insurance and security, of which NWIS has plenty to offer. In this way they will profit greatly (OR attention will be turned away from them). The gang will take them up on this because they are being paid and they like the chaos that is inherent in a riot. (I think we talked about them stealing and destroying, it seems hard to believe they would buy into the corporate plot without having some sort of extra gain for themselves outside of the corp. paying them. I also have my doubts about this gang because they want to be against the grain of corporate America, that’s why they're squatting and punk and what we talked about with characters.)

2. The gang discusses said proposal and the leader decides it would be fun to be part of such destruction and chaos. Delete this. The leader can decide in the meeting with the representative that it’s in their interests.

3. The gang goes into the crowd of the protests and begins to destroy things, leading the other protesters to destroy things and riot, thus achieving what NWIS wanted, for the entire nation to see on television.

OR---NEW PLOT IDEA (that ads explanation and depth and would ideally go right here in the story).

3a. The gang proceeds to pillage, smash, and burn several buildings and landmarks in town for fun and leisure and now EXTRA profit.

3b. A couple of days or a week later an angry protest at city hall breaks because the police do not seem to be putting effort into catching these law breakers. The gang needs to join the crowd and kinda throw the first molotov at the building THEN wreak havoc, if they just start destroying people are gonna be like wtf.

4. The gang returns to its apartment, raised in the air, and watches the fires of the riot. A television in their hideout blips to a press release from corporation X about how they plan to clean up the city's 'filth'.

5. [The gang discusses its payment and decides to claim it in person at the luxurious, monolithic central headquarters of NWIS in the center of the
city, traveling via Subway to the center of town and merely walking into the building foyer.

6. The gang sees the beautiful, pristine building, sasses the security at the front desk and leaves, disgusted at who they just worked for, a corporation that prides itself on order and security, the opposite of those things that the gang loves.] 5&6 can now be combined into: The gang discusses the corporation's betrayal to them and plans Revenge.

7. The gang plots a way to [cause chaos for] read: destroy the company that they just worked for, [making a decision to drive a car into the foyer of the building full of explosives.] while I like the explosives, this is cliche/suicide bomber-ish and potentially kills our gang. Need to think of another way to set the building ablaze.

8. The gang achieves the goal of its plot, destroying the building of the NWIS and causing more chaos, especially for those who were so secure.

Tell me what you think of this.

-L

After this I received an understandably sore email from Brian about how he felt strongly about his original plotline and how the gang was mainly just a symbol for chaos. In my opinion the gang was our main characters and needed to be fleshed out as more than a symbol, since we already had the symbol of the corporation, and both were already placed in a semi-anarchic setting. After discussion we chose to agree to disagree and we would edit the story some to fit both our ideas. The beginning of a script was promised within the next week.

It was around this time I began to whine about my current writer to a high school friend of mine, Jon Rothenberg, currently a graphic design student at a different school. After listening to my frustrations about my current writer’s plot line and how I kept calling him to check up on the script and he was nowhere to be found! It was already the
end of the third week of school and I had only a loose plotline, no character descriptions, or even a list or them to begin designing them from, and I couldn’t figure out where my writer had gone. Amazingly, Jon mentioned he already had a story in the works that he had planned to illustrate him self, but would let me illustrate if I wanted, he just needed to work on the script a bit and sent me the plot and character overview right away, both of which I was having difficulty squeezing out of Brian.

Here is Jon’s emailed plotline:

The story takes place in the Ark, a huge pangaic continent, surrounded by a (supposedly) endless ocean. It is ruled by the ARKING, (By convention, every letter of the ARKING’s name is capitalized, as are pronouns referring to HIM.) who generally stays out of the affairs of HIS subjects, though HE demands all people in the Ark recognize HIS rule, and enforces it with a massive robot army. (Everything’s massive; we get it.)

The main character is robot, who abandons his post in the army. He has no name but is referred to by his number: 6. This means he was the 6th robot every created, and therefore was the 6th highest ranked, i.e. a general.

6 hints that his reason for leaving is guilt over the pain he's caused to so many people, but over time there are hints that his plan goes deeper. He is rarely welcomed anywhere he travels, and thus generally keeps to himself and stays out of towns.

Physically, 6 appears tall and lanky. His hose-like arms and legs can extend to great lengths. He has powerful blasters for hands, but the lack of fingers makes his life difficult at times. Most of his body parts, if severed, can simply be stuck back on and then re-fuse with the body. Despite being an obsolete model (he was one of the few high-ranking robots who refused to update himself), he was easily one of the best fighters in the army.

The ARKING (we can assume because he is never shown) cannot tolerate 6's desertion and sends HIS personal assassin after him. The Oswald is a dark
floating orb of ethereal energy, who drags a large broadsword on the ground behind him. He becomes a repeated antagonist in the story, mainly because of the fact that he cannot be killed. When he's seemingly destroyed, he re-forms in his place of origin (deep beneath the ARKING's castle) and immediately resumes his mission. 6 has already defeated him several times, though each time the Oswald takes a little less time to find him, and each time he fares a little better in the fight.

The story begins with 6 walking alone through the Spicy Desert, when he stumbles upon a small girl lying unconscious miles away from civilization. He resuscitates her, and finds out her name is Bea and she doesn't know how she got where she is, but she's from New Jersey, a place he's never heard of. Which is surprising because he has traveled everywhere in the known world.

Bea refuses to leave 6's side, and he decides to help her find her way home, partially in an attempt to make up for past transgressions, and partially out of curiosity. 6 is a rather gloomy robot, but he tries to keep a cheery exterior for Bea's sake, which is often more creepy than cheery. Bea wears a much-too-large green hoodie and is surprisingly acrobatic, using her stretched out sleeves to swing herself from various objects, mostly into bad guys' faces. Thus, she proves to be something of a wild card in 6's many strange encounters.

This was like a godsend! I was thrilled with the idea of illustrating this story, but I wanted to get in touch with Brian first to see if his script had started yet. By the time I got in contact with Brian it was the beginning of the fourth week, days after he told me he would get an initial script for me to start working from, only to let me know he was revising the story even more. Due to our plot bickering before, I decided to just go with Jon’s story, and suggested that Brian might be too busy with other activities to work on this project too. Thankfully he didn’t take this to bad because his fall schedule was admittedly very hectic, and we parted ways. From here I told informed Jon I would like
to work with his story and thanked him for being a lifesaver. I received the first part of
the script from him in less than a week and could finally start work on the project at hand.

II. Character Design

Now that it was week 5, I was finally set with a story and some fantastic character
descriptions already provided by my new writer, Jon Rothenberg.

The little girl, Bea, turned out to be the easiest character to design, since her
description contained an overly large green sweatshirt, I knew she had to appear small
due to the bagginess of her clothes, I also decided on extremely stretched out, lengthy
sleeves to help her “swing herself” as Jon had mentioned in her description.

Fig 3.1 | Bea

6, the robot proved much more difficult to design, I went through several ideas for
his facial features and multiple sketches of his form before I decided on one that was
suitable for the plot. 6, being an “ex-bad guy” would have to look mean. Provided in Jon’s description was that 6 is tall, lanky, and has extendable arms with blasters for hands. Body parts can be reattached when severed, “despite being an obsolete model.” 6 needed to be futuristic, but less so than the other robots occupying ARK. I chose segmented arms, figuring they would solve the extending and reattachment requirements and an angrier face, due to his previous relationship with the ARKING.

**Fig 3.2a** | 6

![Fig 3.2a](image)

**Fig 3.2b** | Previous versions

![Fig 3.2b](image)
2, a “sexy elegant female robot” had no other description for me to work from. I discussed with Jon what robots would possibly find sexy, and whether or not robots were gender specific in the first place. Luckily he already had an idea in his head about her being “Bond-girl sexy” in relation to a human. After researching past 007 film girls, I based 2 loosely on Strawberry Fields from the most recent film *007: Quantum of Solace*, since to me, she looked the most classically like a bond girl.

**Fig 3.3a | 2**

![Figure 3.3a](image)

**Fig 3.3b | Strawberry Fields**

![Figure 3.3b](image)

**Fig 3.3c | Previous versions**

![Figure 3.3c](image)
The Sheriff was my favorite character to draw. I immediately knew I wanted him to look like a fatter Hulk Hogan, tough, sun burnt, and turkey necked, after reading the script.

Fig 3.5 | The Sheriff

The Oswald was easy to picture and draw as a ball of flame energy, but ended up being the toughest to color and depict expression through in the final product. I wanted him to be bright pink, but my writer argued that, “Pink isn’t a scary color!” But in the end, I still made him pink.

Fig 3.6 | The Oswald
The desert people were tricky, since they all required gasmasks to survive in the dusty climate they lived in it was difficult to make them distinguishable from one another. If they looked too similar I was worried it would take away their human quality. I didn’t do any finished desert people until I was drawing the actual pages, but the initial sketch was heavily influenced by Star Wars’ sand people on Tatooine.

**Fig 3.7** | The Desert People

III. Scene Design

Unfortunately by the time I got around to scene design it was already week 6 in the quarter, so most of the scenery I just worked out scenes while doing storyboarding sequences. I worked a lot with how I wanted the desert landscape to look, trying blowing sand, flat rocky terrain, and hilly sand dunes. Eventually I decided on the flatter terrain, it was easier to draw and easier to distinguish as a desert compared to the other two.
IV. Mood Boards and Color Palates

Once every character and scene was designed or loosely sketched, I would generate a color palate for each component. I also scrolled through saved images and flagged comic pages to see how other artists colored their landscapes. This proved to be immensely time consuming even after the initial sketches. Often I would think I had chosen an appropriate palate, placed the initial colors on the page, then decided it looked terrible, wash, rinse, repeat. Luckily, I did not have to choose a different one for every page or panel, just during scene changes.
Once I had all my reference pictures compiled, I Xeroxed pages from comics, printed images placed them on mood boards based on scene and character for quick reference. I also created a digital page of the color palates so I could quickly grab them in Photoshop while coloring.
Fig 3.10b | Reference Photos: 6

![Fig 3.10b](image)

Fig 3.10c | Reference Photos: 2

![Fig 3.10c](image)

V. Script layout

While reading the script, I tried to imagine page breaks where there was a comfortable pause for each page to start and end at. With my printed script I marked up page starts and ends for reference when storyboarding later. I ended up printing two copies of the script and doing this step twice, making sure my intuitions about page breaks were on point and editing where they were off.
VI. Storyboarding

I usually don’t do thumbnails if I can avoid it, I prefer bigger sketches, so I was originally using full 8.5 x 11 inch sheets to map out my storyboard, trying to get detail in my initial sketches, but these continued to get smaller and smaller at Professor LaPorte’s push. Until I finally used some postage sized thumbnails for the final page’s designs. I enjoyed doing the larger sketches because they enabled me to see what I had previously drawn if I looked at the much later, the thumbnails turned out to be much more practical if I got to the sketch of the page right away.

**Fig 3.11a | Pg 1 Storyboards**

**Fig 3.11b | Pg 2 Storyboard**
Fig 3.11h | Pg 8 Storyboard

Fig 3.11i | Pg 9 Storyboard

Fig 3.11j | Pg 10&11 Spread Storyboard

Fig 3.11k | Pg 12 Storyboard

Fig 3.11l | Pg 13 Storyboard
VII. Sketching and Inking Pages

When I first began drawing the final pages, I drew a cleaner sketch on Bristol, did final outlines in pencil then went over them again in micron pen, then erased all the pencil. This was an extremely tedious process and once the 8th week of classes hit I decided to switch to digital sketch and ink. Then I would have to scan and fiddle with curves and masks to get the line work prepped for coloring. The digital method went much faster and the line art was easier to clean up in Photoshop by just hiding the sketch layer. Sadly the digitally drawn pages have less detail and are somewhat less varied in width than the hand drawn pages, but given more time I would have done them all in pen and ink.
Fig 3.12a | Pen and Ink Lines

Fig 3.12b | Digital Sketches

Fig 3.12c | Digital Lines
VIII. Color

The coloring phase was the most time consuming of all the steps. It would take about 4 hours to color each page. I colored in sections by color using masks and multiple layers to keep the color where I wanted. I also started with the bigger areas and masked the area, so when I started coloring smaller things, I would just have to fill in the holes under the previous layer. This was also an easy method because I could work across multiple pages with the same color to work a little faster.

Fig. 3.13 | Coloring Method
IX. Final Pages
IS SHE YOURS?
WHERE DID YOU FIND HER?

ABOUT A MILE FROM THE EDGE. DO YOU KNOW HER?

SHE'S NOT FROM HERE. HOW DID YOU GET PAST THE GUARDS?

BZZTT
come back, 6. we can go right back to normal. no questions asked.
1 can’t come back, 2.
6. I need you
you’ll never need me...
but i miss you, 6
1...I’m sorry
I miss you, 6.
I’m sorry
I miss you, 6.
I’m sorry

ZZTT

...
ARE YOU A ROBOT?

YES, BUT I'M NOT--

COOOOOL!

I'M BEA. WHERE ARE WE?

THE SPICY DESERT, ABOUT TEN MILES FROM THE SOUTHERN BORDER.

I FOUND YOU MILES FROM ANYWHERE. YOU WERE ALMOST DEAD.
AIM... FIREFIRE!!!

ENOUGH!!

IT'S THE OSWALD. THE ARKING'S PERSONAL ENFORCER, AND IT ONLY EVER HAS ONE TARGET...

WHO'S YOUR MARK, ASSASSIN?
6... a number. A robot? There are no robots here.

Shit.

Fire on my command! Dead center!
Chapter 4: Summary of Outcomes and Recommendations

I. Outcomes

I showed the final pages to my writer and he was more than pleased with the illustrations. He still had a few nitpicky comments about the story flow but it was an overall success. Despite this project being extremely time consuming, I’m proud to have finished it in the ever shortening amount of time I was given. I plan to continue this project in the future as my writer gives me more of the script to work with.

II. Recommendations

1. Get a story before you starts or write your own. All the writer shenanigans during the first 5 weeks of school really cut down on my time to actually get to work and ended with spending the last two weeks working 10 hours a day on my computer to finish.

2. Know your limits! Don’t overestimate your abilities and you won’t be angry and frustrated at the end. For similar reasons, don’t procrastinate.

3. Don’t forget to go outside and play once in a while.
Bibliography


