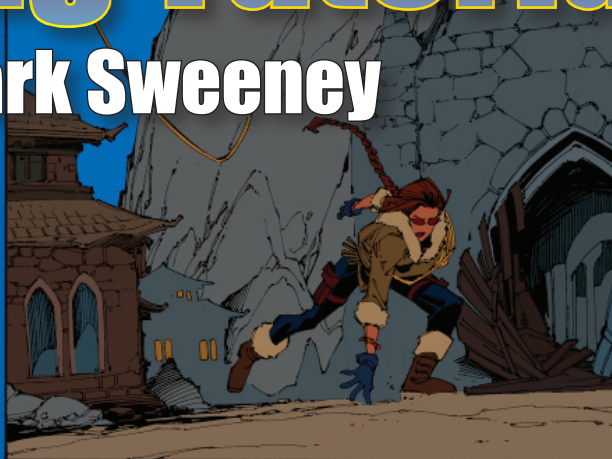


# Flatting Tutorial

Mark Sweeney

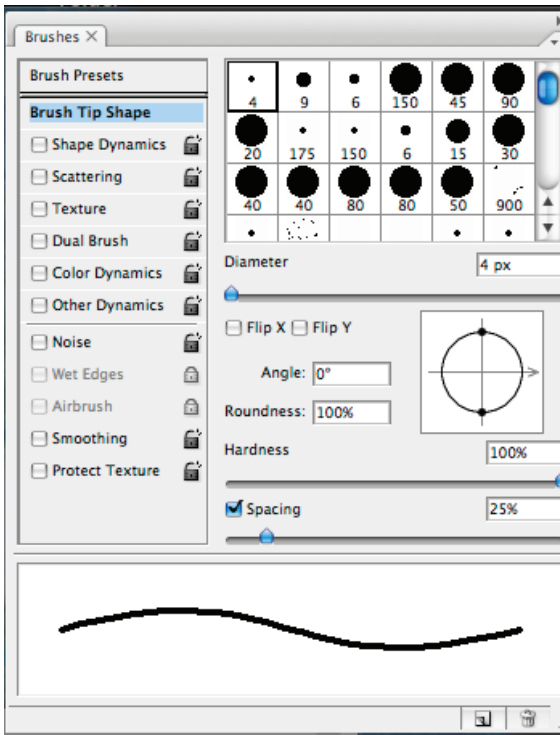


First Off, make sure your tools are set up properly.

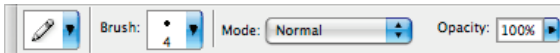
The Four main tools you will use are: Lasso, Bucket, Wand and Pencil.

### Pencil

You'll sometimes use the pencil tool to touch up edges or fix things on flats. You want all settings turned off for the pencil tool, as shown below.



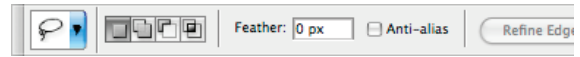
You also want to make sure it's set to 100% Opacity, and the Mode is set to Normal, as shown in the options bar below.



The Pencil tool is great for making quick fixes, instead of selecting and filling areas.

### Lasso

The Lasso tool is the main tool you'll use to make all the selections you're going to fill. You need to make sure you have the right settings for it, otherwise all your work will be for nothing.

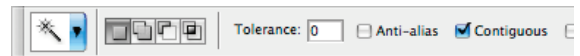


Feather should be set to 0 (zero), and *Anti-alias* turned off. If either of these settings is incorrect, you're shooting yourself in the foot.

Edges must be aliased in order for the wand tool to work properly, otherwise it's going to skip areas that are Anti-aliased, leaving funny little lines where different colors meet at the edges of selections.

### Wand

*Tolerance* should be set to 0 (zero), *Anti-alias* turned off, and *Sample All Layers* turned off as well (not shown).

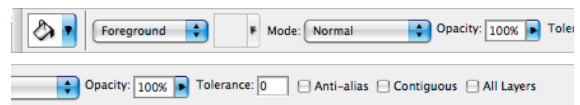


*Contiguous* can be turned off, or on depending on what you are doing. More on *Contiguous* later - it's an option that applies to both the Wand and Bucket tools.

### Bucket

The Bucket tool is what you will use to fill all your selections with color.

Make sure *Foreground* is selected, Mode is 'Normal', *Opacity* 100%, *Tolerance* 0 (zero), *Anti-alias* is off, *Contiguous* is off, and *All Layers* is off.



## Contiguous Option

The Contiguous Option is a very cool feature that speeds things up tremendously.

When it is checked with the *Wand*, it will only select colors that are adjacent to where you select. If it is unchecked, it will select the same color everywhere on the page, even if it is not adjacent, or connected to the color you select.

Below, you have something that looks like a white flag with an orange strip down the middle.

Clicking on the left half with the Wand tool, and *Contiguous* checked, will result in only the left side being selected (top left image).

Turn off *Contiguous*, and click the left side again, and both halves are now selected (bottom left image).

The *Bucket* tool works similarly with *Contiguous*. Turn *Contiguous* on, and click the left side to fill with red, and only the left side will fill (top right image). Undo, turn *Contiguous* off, and click on the left side, and anywhere there is white will be filled

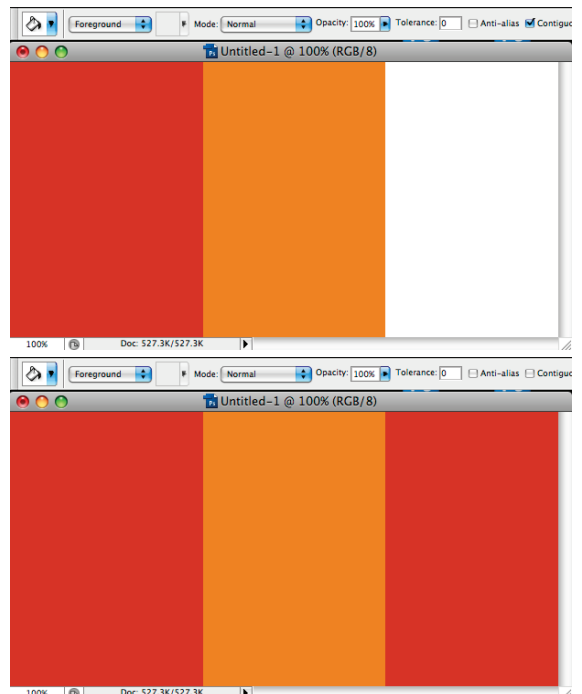
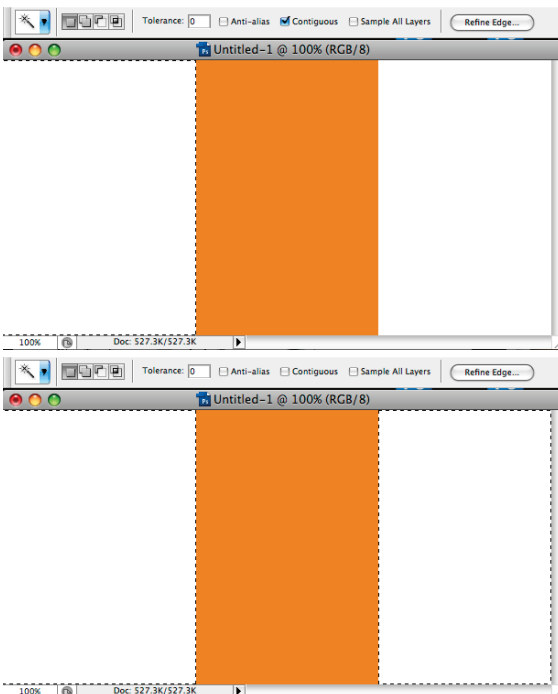
with red. (bottom right).

I generally work with *Contiguous* checked for the *Wand*, and turned off for the *Bucket* tool, but I'll often turn contiguous off and on with the Wand to make sure I get all the parts I need. It can be easy to miss one small spot when selecting things one at a time with the wand.

With the *Bucket* tool and the *Contiguous* option it allows you to flat from foreground to background without worrying about missing or not filling in areas that are not adjacent, and you can fill in different areas in one selection with one click, even if they are separated by areas of color.

When flattening, you **always** want all your tools with *Anti-alias* turned off, and *Tolerance* or *Feathering* set to zero. You don't want any fuzzy or blurred edges separating colors, otherwise you're going to spend as much time fixing the flats as it took you to do them in the first place.

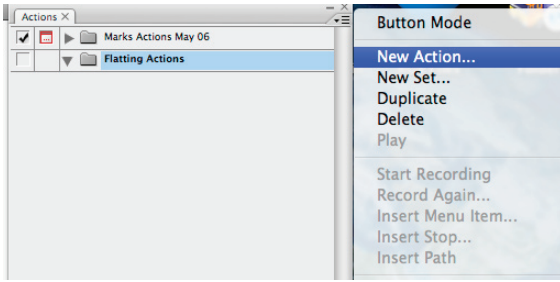
On to setting up your file and getting it ready for flattening.



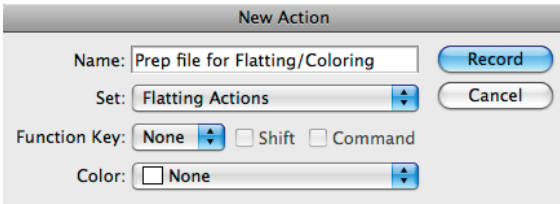
### Setting up your file for Flatting.

One thing you'll do many times is prepping a bitmap file for flatting. Rather than repeat the same steps over and over again, you can create an *Action* that will do it all for you.

Start by opening your *Actions Palette*, clicking the little arrow in the top right corner, and select 'New Action...'

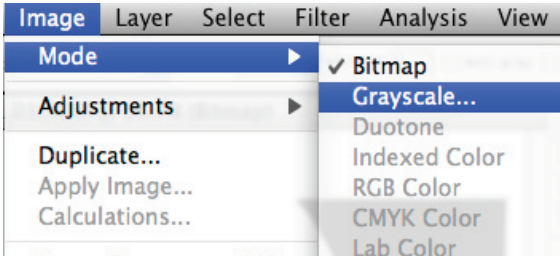


Name your Action, and hit 'Record'.

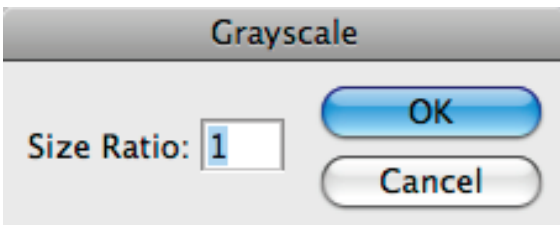


Photoshop is now recording what you do for this action.

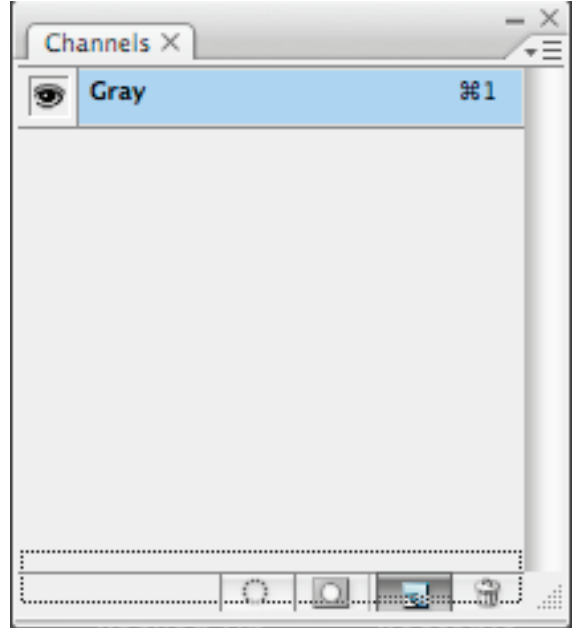
In the Menu Bar, select Image, then Greyscale, as shown below.



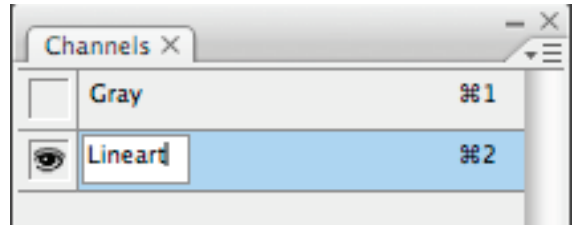
It will ask you for a size ratio. Make sure it is set to '1', as shown below.



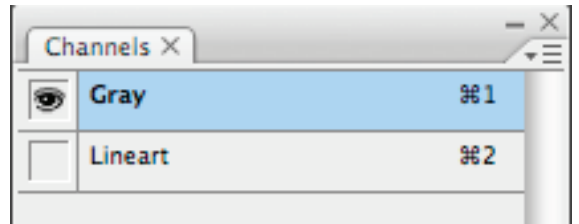
In your Channels Palette, select the Gray channel, and drag it down to the 'Duplicate' icon as shown below. (The Duplicate icon is the one to the left of the Trash can icon in the bottom right of the Channels Palette)



Rename the new channel to 'Lineart'.



Select the 'Gray' Channel so it is highlighted as shown below.



Next, you want to Select All in your main document. You can use the Menubar (Select -> All), or keyboard Shortcuts. ⌘-A on a mac, or CTRL-A on a PC.

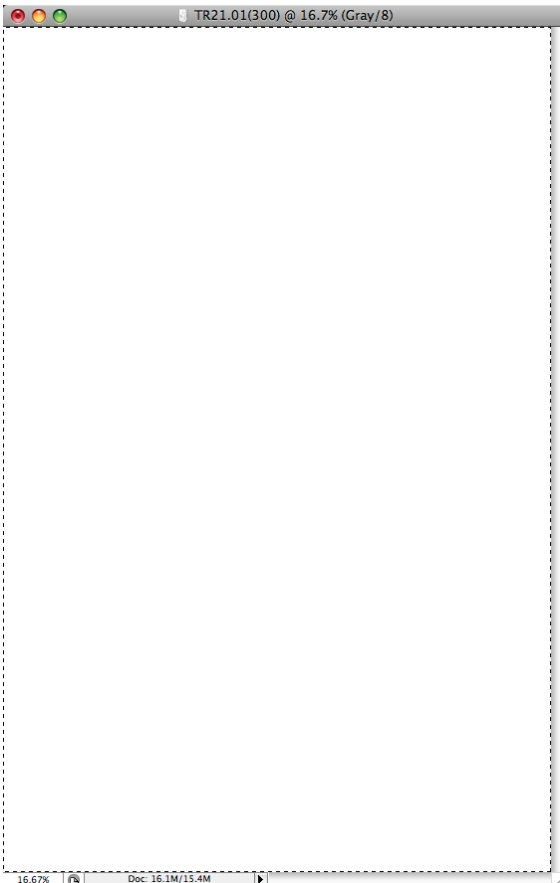
Hit the 'D' Key - this sets your foreground color to black, and background color to white.

Hit the 'X' key, this switches your foreground and background colors. White should now be your foreground color, as shown below.

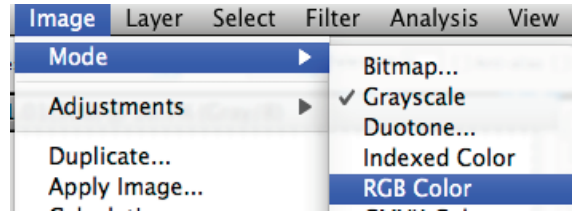


Fill with white (under the Menu Bar, Edit -> Fill, or shift-F5, or hit Option-Delete).

Your page should now be filled with white, as shown below.

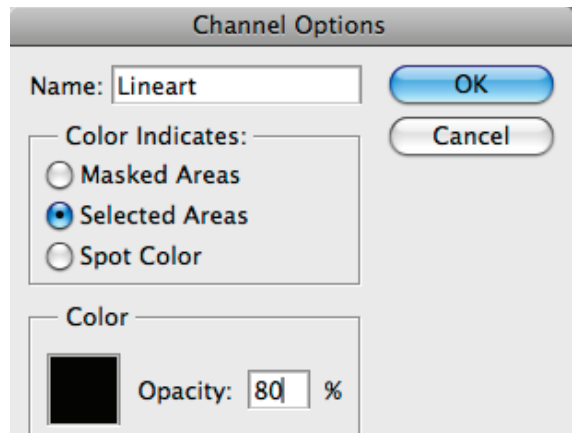


In the Menu Bar, under Image -> Mode, select RGB Color as shown.



In your Channels Palette, Double-Click your Lineart channel. You'll see a new dialog box open. Make sure the color is black, and Opacity is set to 80%. Hit 'OK'.

The reason you set the opacity to 80% is so you can see where colors butt up under the lineart. You want them to line up in the middle where you can.



In your Actions Palette, hit the 'Stop Record Button' (the square one on the bottom left of the palette).

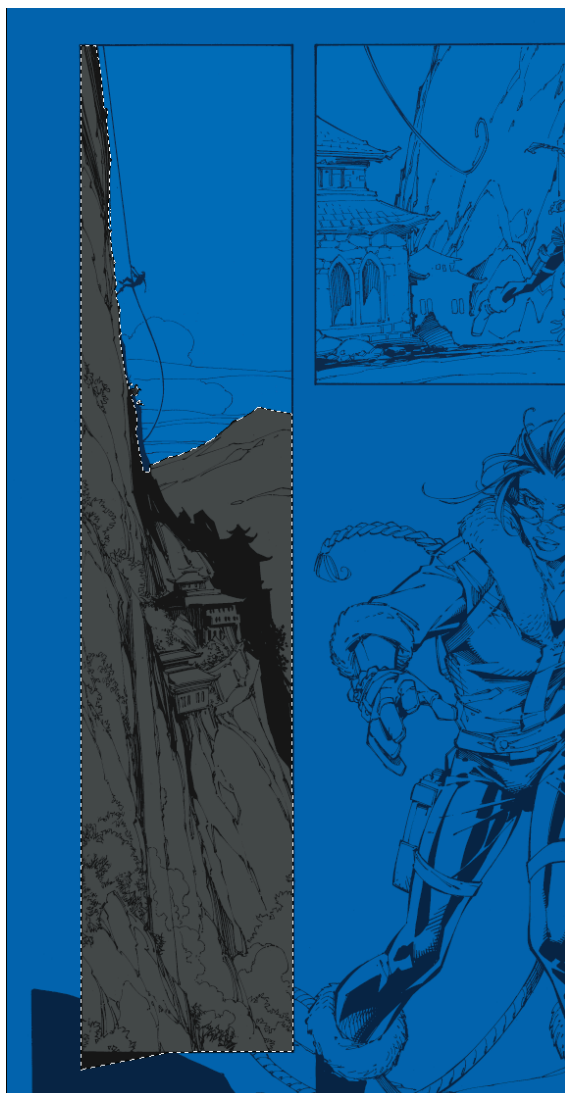


You now have an action that you can use to do all this tedious work for you on the rest of your files. You can set a keyboard shortcut for this action, or create a Droplet.

Droplets are little files on your desktop you can just drag files onto, and it will open Photoshop and run the action on them.

Now you're all set up to begin flattening a page.

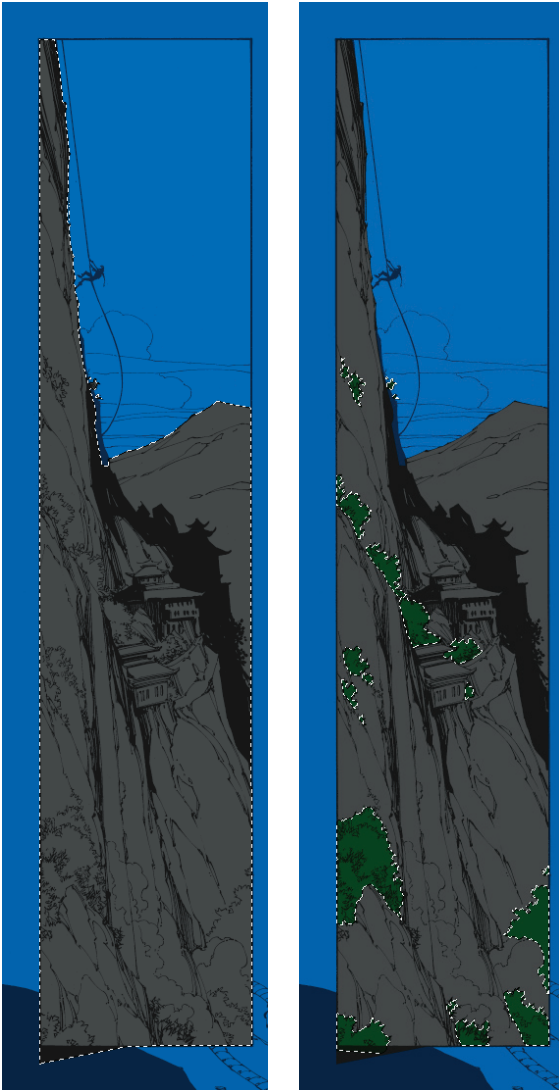




I know this book is printed Full Bleed (color goes right to the edge of the page), so I fill the entire page with a background color. If it had panels and gutters, I would leave the gutters white, and fill each panel with a background color (top left).

Next, I break out the individual panels using a different shade of blue than the main background color (bottom right).

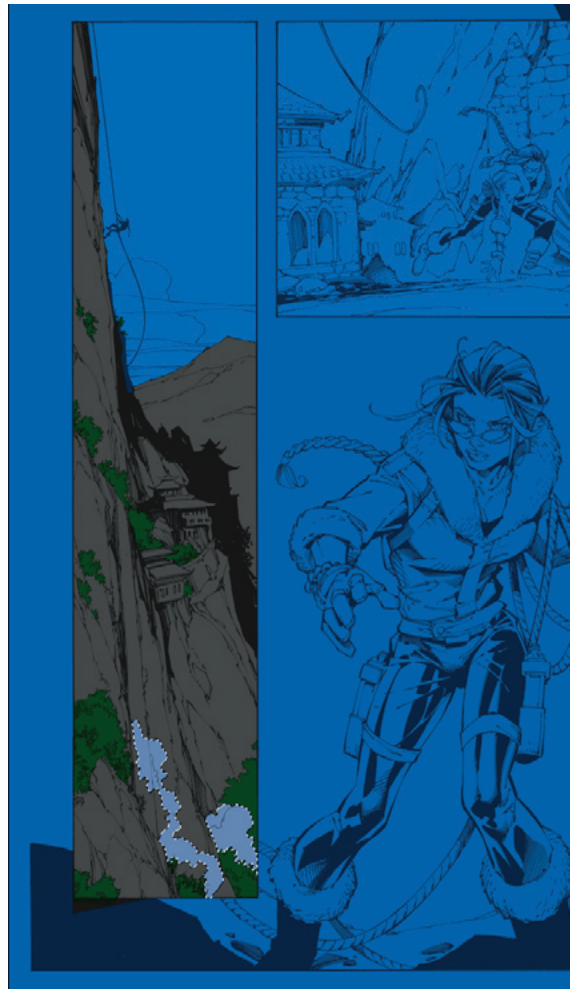
I start working on the first panel. I select all the mountains using the *Lasso* tool, and fill it with the *Bucket* tool. I work from large to small areas. I don't select each part of a large object and fill with different colors, I get the whole thing, fill, then break down further.

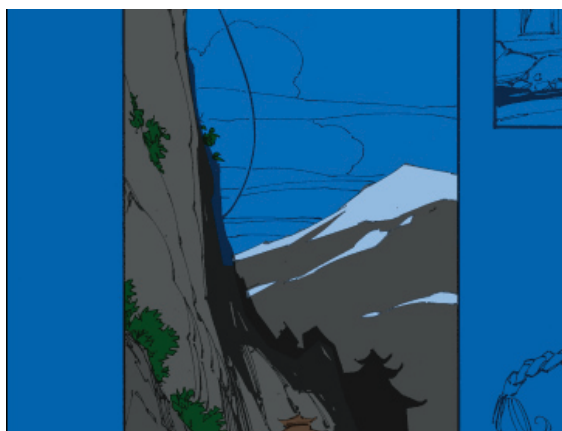
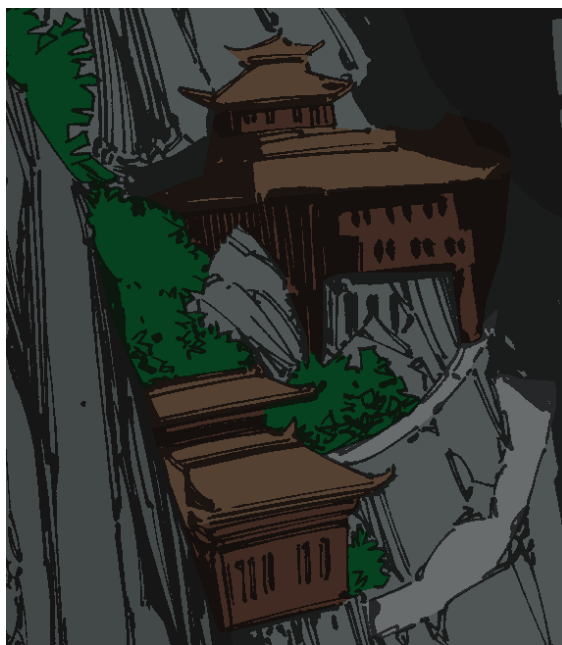


I select the shrubbery and fill with green. I usually make all of the selections first, and fill them all at once, as it eliminates extra steps of select and fill... select and fill... select and fill... etc., saving more time in the long run, and getting flats done faster (above).

I zoom in just enough to see all the details I need when making selections. Don't zoom in too far - just enough to be able to clearly see where things should be separated. Zoom in too far and you'll spend lots of time waiting for the screen to scroll to new areas when selecting with the *Lasso* tool.

Next I break out the mist in the lower right corner of the panel (left).





In the second panel, I break down the mountains a little more - foreground, middle ground, and far background.

However, I save a step by selecting the middle-ground first. By selecting and filling it first, I've also separated the fore- and background at the same time. If I had selected the foreground part of the mountain and filled it, I would still have to select the middle ground!

Deciding how to break down a page/panel/character is the key to fast flattening. With practice, deciding where to break down flats comes naturally, and quickly.

The more steps and needless selections you eliminate, the faster you go.

I break down the two little buildings on the mountain (top middle), then add snow to the background mountain (bottom middle).

Next I break out the clouds as one big mass (top right), and then pick out the individual parts of the clouds with another color (bottom right).

And that finishes off the first panel.





Now, I pick out all the characters on the page, selecting the entire character(s), and filling with a solid color. People usually have the most irregular outlines, and rather than trying to select a background around them, I just select the character first, then fill them with a color.

The bottom right panel doesn't have much of a background, but the top right panel has moderately complex background that runs

behind Lara. Selecting and filling her first will make working on the backgrounds much easier.

I always leave breaking down the characters last, as that's what usually goes the fastest.

Backgrounds can be pretty time consuming, so I like to get the boring stuff out of the way first.



Sometimes, instead of selecting an area with the *Lasso*, I'll use the *Wand* tool, then remove areas from that selection. In the top left, I used the wand tool to select the background, entered Quickmask mode (hit the 'Q' key). I have Quickmask mode channel options set to 'Selected Areas'. If



your Quickmask looks like the opposite of your selection, double-click the Quickmask channel, make sure it's not set to 'Masked Areas.'

From there, I use the lasso tool to remove the section of sky (shown above).



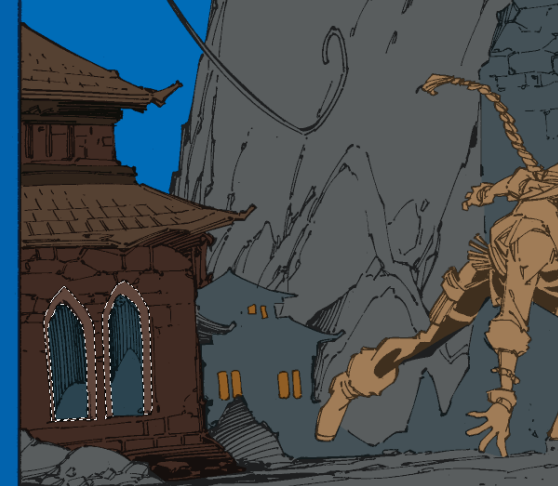
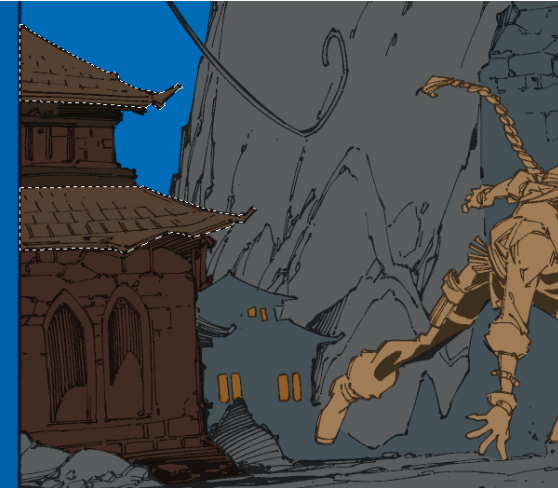
I fill the background with color. Next I select the distant building, following the lines



where they lead past Lara and to the right, then fill with another color.



I pop out the windows of that distant building. Are they lit up, or dark? Who cares. Pop a color in and move on!



Breaking down the house.... Again, I try to make selections that make my job easier and faster. In panel 2, breaking out the top strip and filling with color separates the upper roof for me as the same time. I'll just

keep breaking it down, bit by bit until it's all separated out. Don't bounce all around the page, that's how you miss things. Work on one thing at a time, and break it all the way down before moving onto the next.





Breaking down the rest of the main back-ground mountain, tunnel, and broken gate. Not the most exciting work in the world,

but you do need to get it right, and get all the different parts separated. Speed comes with practice.





The last few things are picked out - the rope, ground. I give the panel a last look over, turning the lineart channel off and on again to make sure I have all the areas properly separated on this panel.



Now comes the fun part - breaking down the character(s) on a page. I try to pick out parts so that I have to make as few selections as possible. Lara has 26 different parts that all need to be separated, but I can get them all separated by just selecting 11 different parts.

I start with the fur trim. By doing this first, I automatically separate her boots from the rest of her.



Next I pick out all the skin. This also ends up separating her gloves, lips, glasses and bracelet.

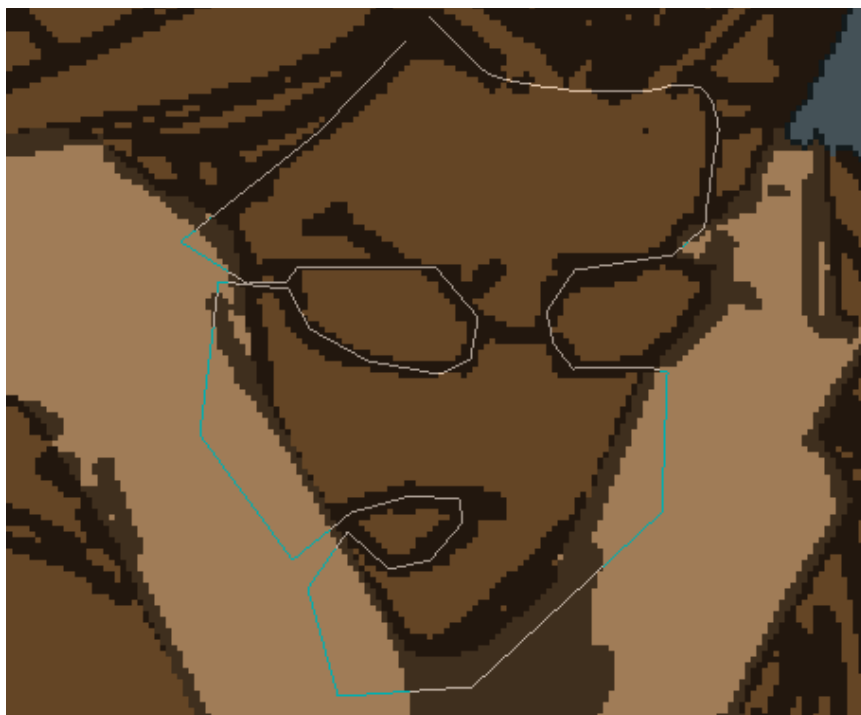
You can make pretty complex selections with the lasso tool - her face, with the lips and glasses were all separated using one single selection.

Sounds impossible? I'll show you how.

At the bottom is a screen capture that shows the path of the lasso tool.

I started near the top, looped around one lens, followed down to the lips, looped around them, moved up to the other lens, looped around it before following her forehead and closing off the selection.

Much faster than selecting her entire face, and cutting out those parts from your selection.





I pop out her pants, which also separates her holsters from everything else.

Smart selections like this will speed up things tremendously, rather than starting from the outside and moving along one section at a time.



Separate the hair, and rope. Technically, everything is all separated, but too many different things are the same colors. So I grab the *Bucket* tool, turn *Contiguous* on, and start filling things with different colors.

Having *Contiguous* on means I don't have to worry about the *Bucket* tool filling everything on the page that is the same color as what I select, with the new color.



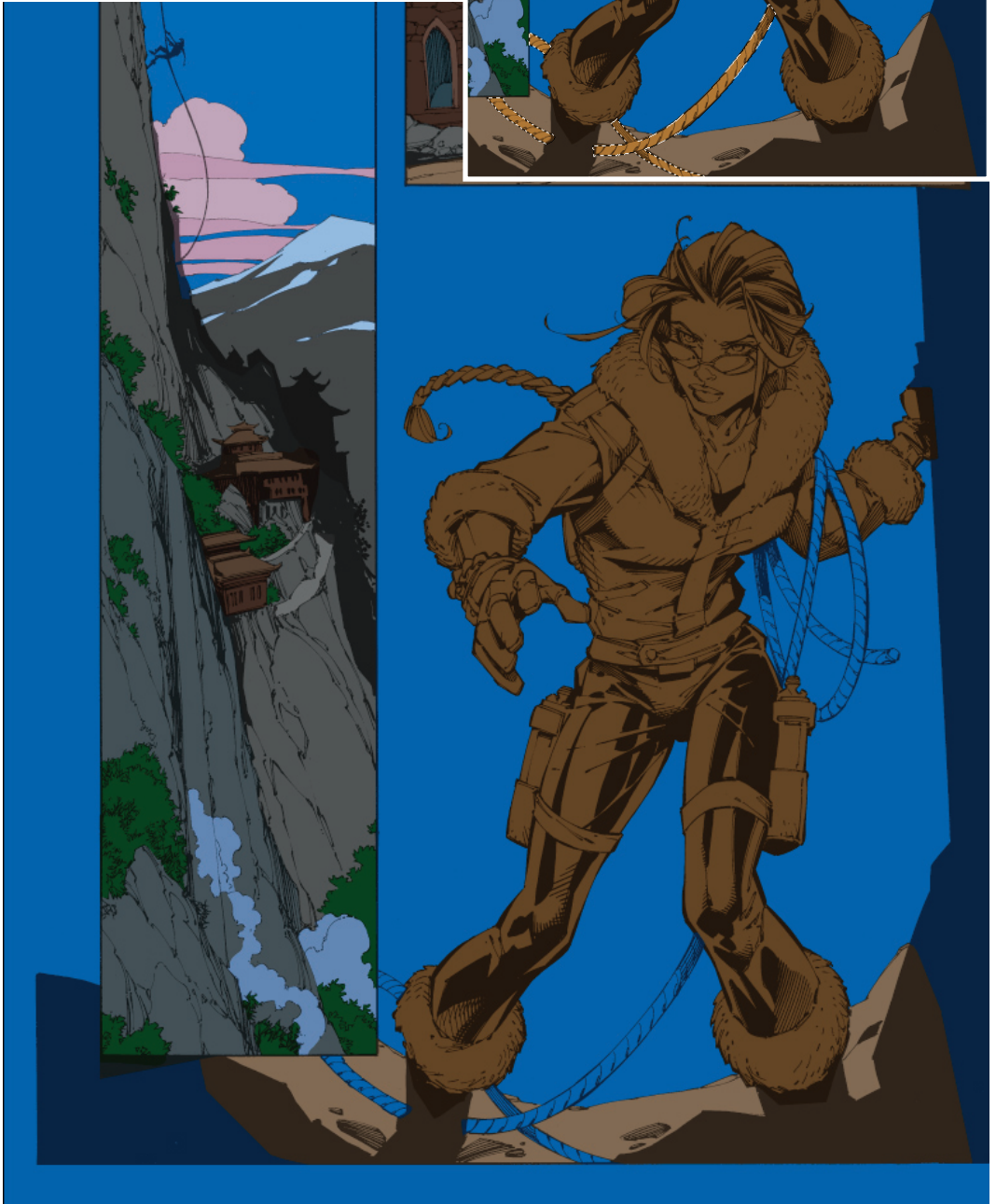
Now she's all separated properly, with different colors defining different things. Now that I've set up colors for her clothing etc., I can just eyedrop them to use on the last panel.

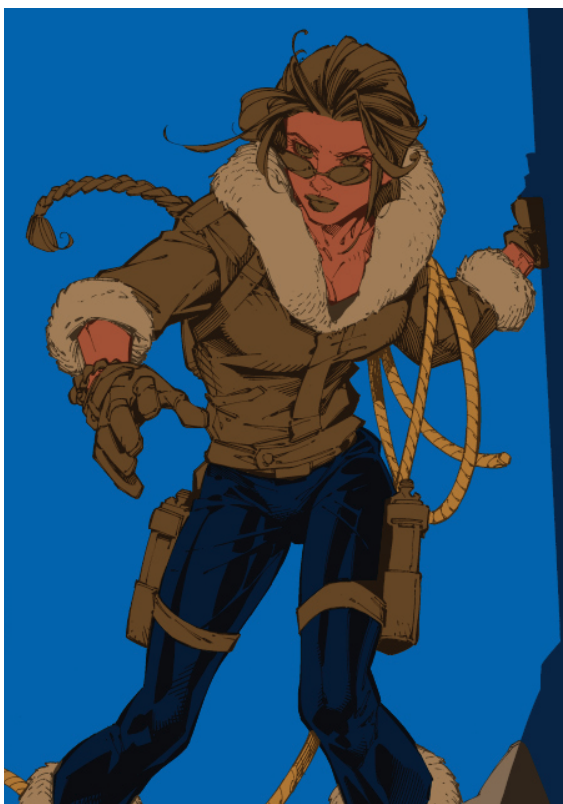
This is where dual monitors, or a single large monitor can come in handy. You can have a second copy of the file open, zoomed out all the way so you can pick up colors from it, and apply it where you are zoomed in on your main window. This way you don't have to zoom out again to pick up the color, or scroll around the screen to find it, and you'll also keep your colors consistent throughout the page.



Now I start on the last panel, selecting and filling the ground behind Lara (bottom). After that, I select and fill the rope with color (right).

Background is all done, now I can break down Lara.





As usual, I try to make smart selections so I don't have to select every last little bit with the *Lasso* tool.

Separating her pants also breaks apart the fur trim on her boots, and one holster (top left).

Separating the fur trim doesn't break apart anything extra, but it sets the stage for the next set of selections (top right)

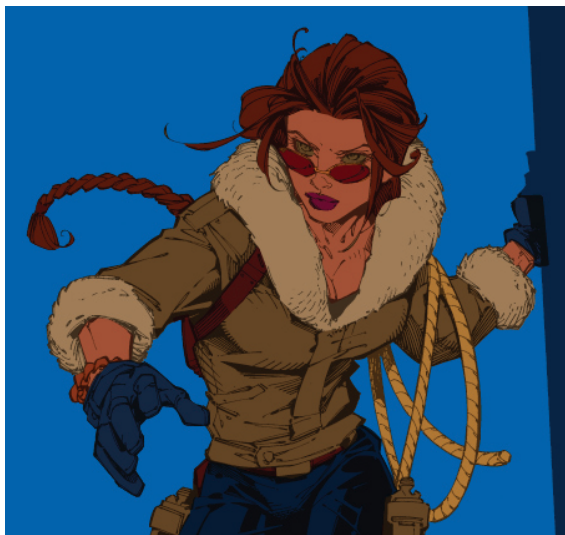
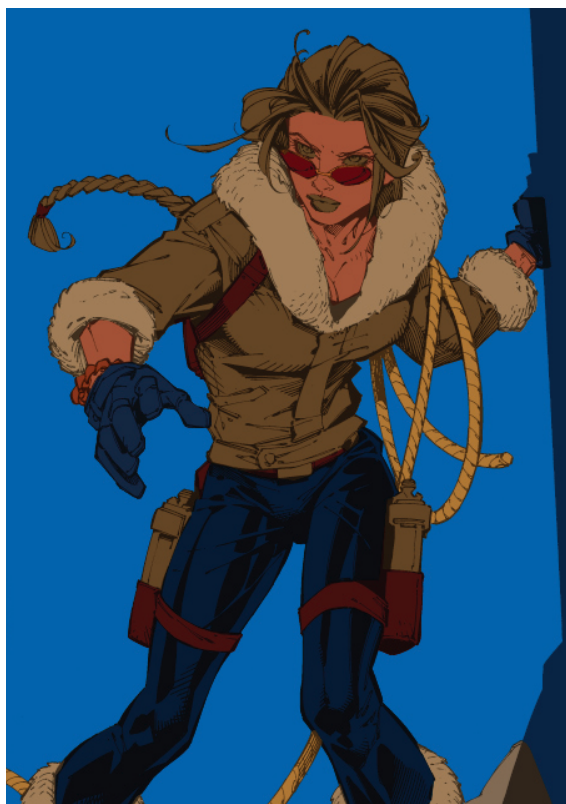
Picking out the skin separates her lips, and the glove on her left hand (left).



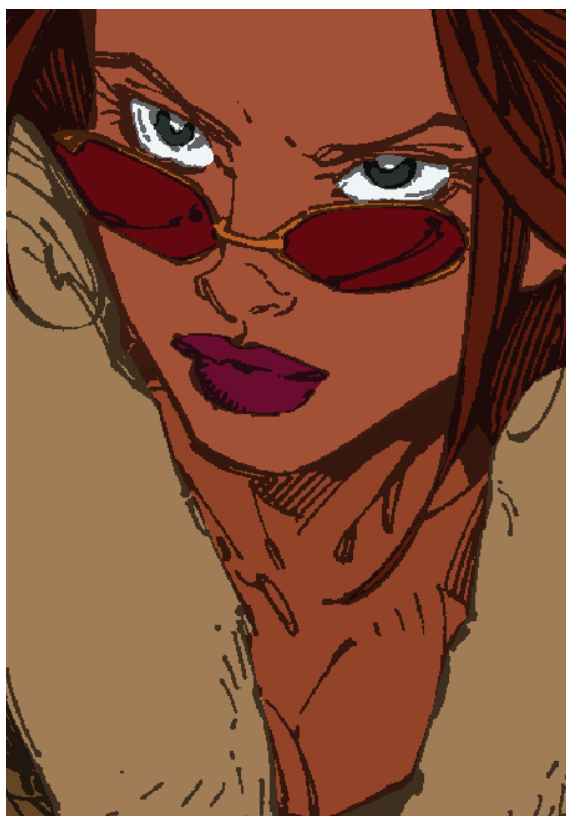
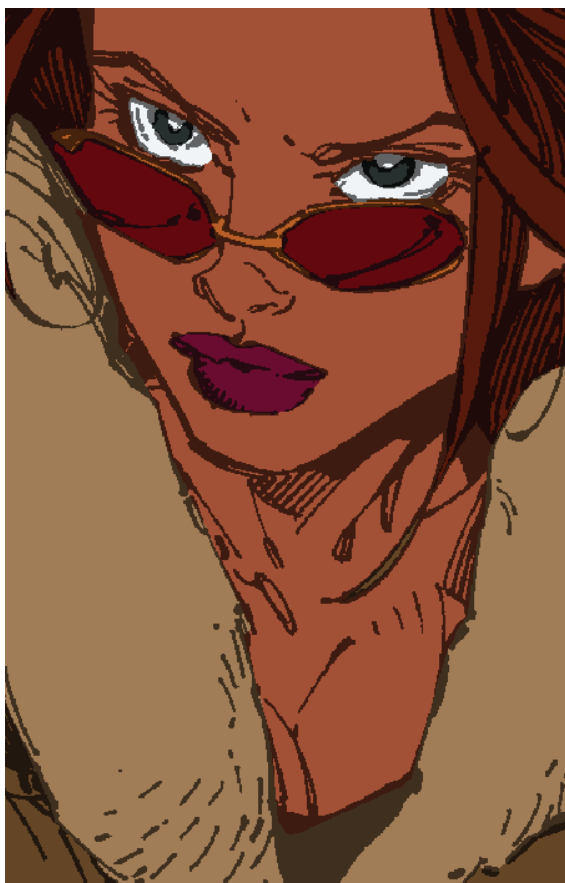
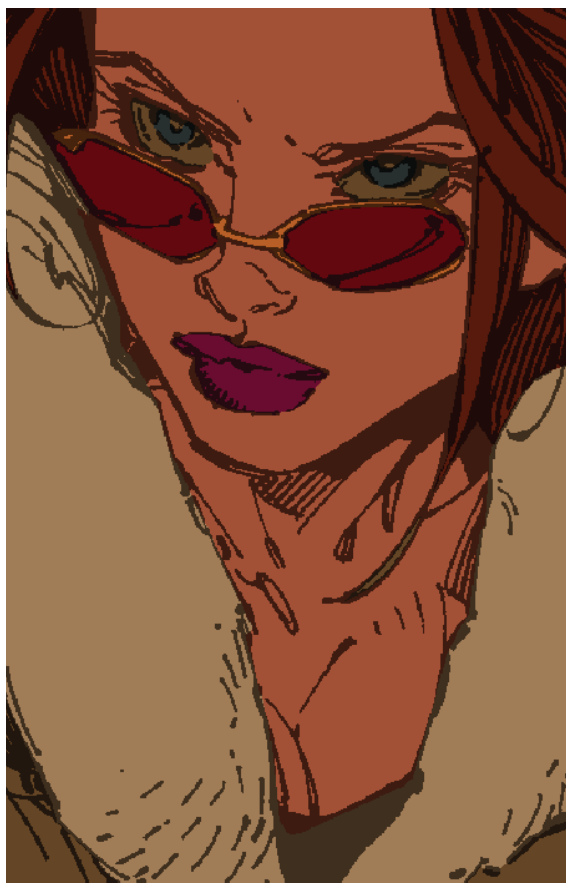
Breaking out the holsters separates one of the guns (top left).

Separating the gloves also breaks out the bracelet (above).

Now I start in on the face - popping out the lenses on her glasses (left), then I pop out her hair which also separates her eyes.



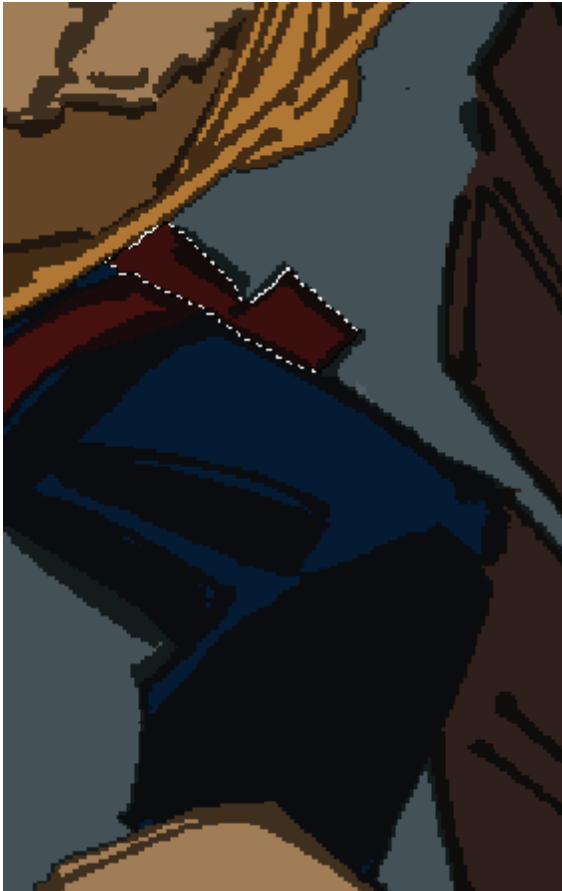




Zoom in, pop out the frames of the glasses and the iris' of her eyes (top left); fill the whites of her eyes (top right); separate the skin on her chest from the skin of her face. Lastly, I fill that stray hair I missed earlier, below her jaw (right).



Zoom out, and make sure I catch the rest of the details - belt buckle, jacket button, and the guns.



I start looking over the page again, zooming in and out making sure I haven't missed anything - such as the holster on her left hip, in the top right panel - I missed that earlier, thinking it was part of the background rock scribbles (left)

Once I'm sure I have separated everything, I double-click on the lineart channel and change the opacity to 100%. Now the page is all flattened, and ready for coloring (next page).



## The Business of Flatting.

Flatting pages isn't glorious work. You will rarely see your name in the credits of books you work on. You will almost never get comps of books you flat (Comps are free copies).

Compared to pencillers, inkers and colorists, the pay is pretty low. But it's still a business. No matter what your long term goals are, it's serious business.

I can't tell you how much work I get from colorist because "some flatter \*&\$^ed up". Either the unnamed flatter did a sloppy job, didn't do the job at all, forgot, got bored, missed the deadline, decided they wanted more money, etc., etc., etc.

The comics business is a small community - everybody knows everybody! Doing a poor job is a really fast way to get a bad reputation that's going to be hard to lose.

If you're going to do the job, do it well.

With that in mind, here are a few tips.

## Contact Information

Make sure you have phone numbers and email addresses written down on paper. If your email wipes out, or hard drive crashes, you need to be able to call your colorist to let them know you have a problem right away. No one's going to get mad if your computer has suddenly died. But if you wait until the last minute to let the colorist know you can't do the work, they'll be pissed because they could've spent the time to find someone else. If you just have their email address.... you can't get a hold of them.

## Know your Deadlines.

Most times 24 hour or less turnaround is expected. Sometimes you get pages for several different books at once. Make sure you know which ones are due first, and when.

Don't take on work if you're not sure you can meet the deadline. Take only work

you KNOW you can get done in the allotted time. People will respect you for saying you can't get the work done when they need it, if you tell them up front. People appreciate honesty, even if you are unable to help them with flats.

They'll be able to look for someone else right away, rather than finding out they need to look for another flatter at the last minute, the night before the last four pages are due in to the publisher.

## Keep Records.

Keep careful track of the work you do, on paper! Once again, if your computer crashes or file corrupts, and you kept everything on the computer, you've got no way to figure out what you're owed for. I have tracking sheets that list: Title, Issue & page #; Page Rate; Date completed; and Colorist I did the work for. After each flat is done, I fill in the information on the tracking sheet while the file is transferring. At the end of every workday, I enter the information onto a spreadsheet program, which is backed up every week.

I use this spreadsheet to keep track of all the work I've done, what is owed, what's been paid for, and my total earnings by the week, month, quarter and year.

This also simplifies things come tax time - I know exactly what I've earned, when, and from whom.

## Invoices

Check and see how colorists want invoices. Some will accept simple e-mail invoices, others want hard copy invoices snail mailed. Some require specific information (Tax Identification, Social Security, etc) listed on the invoice. Always make sure your name, full address, phone number, email address, date, amount owed, and itemized list of work done are on the invoice, plus any

other information they ask for.

### E-Mail

I have every business email sent to me on CD from the last 7 years. Always keep a copy of everything. This can protect you in the event of mistakes. For instance, if you're given a page rate of \$20 per page, and the colorist tells you "I thought I said \$15 per page", you can send them a copy of the email confirming they said "\$20."

### Page Rates

Before starting any work, make sure you know what you're getting paid, when you can expect to be paid, and how you're going to be paid. Usually it's 30-45 days after you turn in the last page of a book, but sometimes it takes longer. Many colorists pay

via Paypal, and if you can, get paid through Paypal. It's much faster than waiting for a check in the mail, it won't bounce, and your bank won't hold the funds for 30 days like they will a check, especially if that check is from someone outside your country.

If you're unfamiliar with the book, ask to see samples of the pages so you know what you're in for. Don't get stuck taking really complicated, detailed book where you're going to spend hours-and-hours-and-hours on each page for only \$5 a page. You'll end up kicking yourself for it.

Page rates for flatting will vary, from book to book and colorist to colorist.

Average rates are \$15 US a page. If the book is for a smaller publisher, it may be less, as the colorist's page rate is likely lower.

*If you found this tutorial useful, consider making a donation via Paypal. Click the button below and make a contribution!*