

COLORING A SPIDERMAN PAGE

STEP-BY-STEP

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FOREWARD

This is not so much a 'How to Color' tutorial as it is a 'How I colored this page.'

I wouldn't even consider this a 'How I Color' (in general) tutorial, as it's the first time in a long while that I have used a lot of Cut and Grad - normally I use almost all brushwork, with very few cuts, and even less grads.

You'll see almost everything I rendering on here, step-by-step. You may or may not like or agree with some of my methods or techniques.

But hopefully, by the time you're finished reading, you'll have learned a thing or two, added a few tricks to your coloring arsenal, or look at things in another way.

If you have questions about this, please, post a message on www.gutterzombie.com, in the Tricks & Techniques section. Chances are, if you have one, other people will.

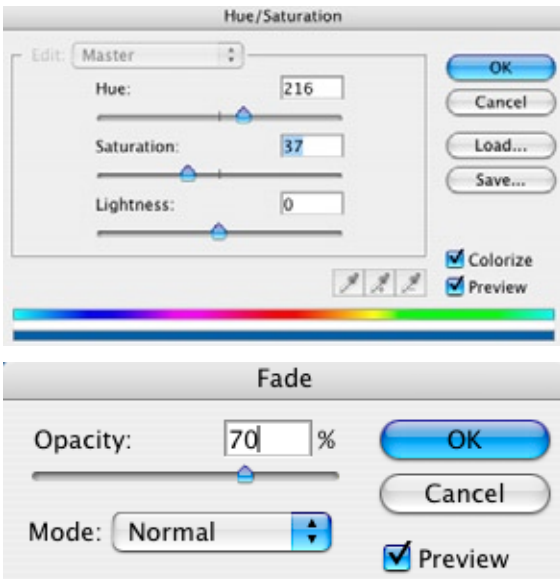
Rather than trying to individually answer emails from hundreds of people, it's easier to post on gutterzombie.com, where everyone can see what's been asked and answered, so I don't get the same question 17 times.

STARTING FROM FLATS



1

2. Using **Hue/Saturation**, I use the Colorize feature to shift everything to a cooler color. However, Colorize changes everything to a different shade of the same color. So I use the **Fade** command, and set it to about 70% - this lets some of the original color blend with blues.



1. The basic flats - no real conscious color or picking here - just flats done as quickly as possible. In fact, the flats are pretty ugly.

I work in CMYK mode - means less work at the end to have a press read file.

Normally I'd have a trapping Layer, but I'll wait until the end to add that, as the file gets pretty big at times.

I make a copy of my flats layer, re-name it '**Colors**', and make sure the **Colors Layer** is on top.

We know it's winter, from the heavy coats and gloves, and the overhead lighting indicates mid-day, or little after.

So I'm thinking cool colors for backgrounds, warm, bright saturated colors for the characters.

The skies will be light, unsaturated cyans and blues.



2

Coloring - Step-by-Step

3. Using the wand, I select all the parts of MJ and Peter, and use an action to copy/paste the selection to a new layer.

I move this layer above my **Colors Layer**

From there, I tweak the colors a little, making MJ's jacket and glove more saturated, and deeper magenta, and Peter's jacket a richer, deep navy color. I know my skies will end up much lighter than what I started with, so I'm not worried about him blending into the background.

Lastly, I merge the characters back into the Colors layer.



4. On my **Colors Layer**, I go through and pick out areas I separated that are part of the same object - for instance, the collars on the jackets may be a slightly different color than the rest of the jacket; or some of the windows in the buildings in the bottom right are different colors from adjacent windows.

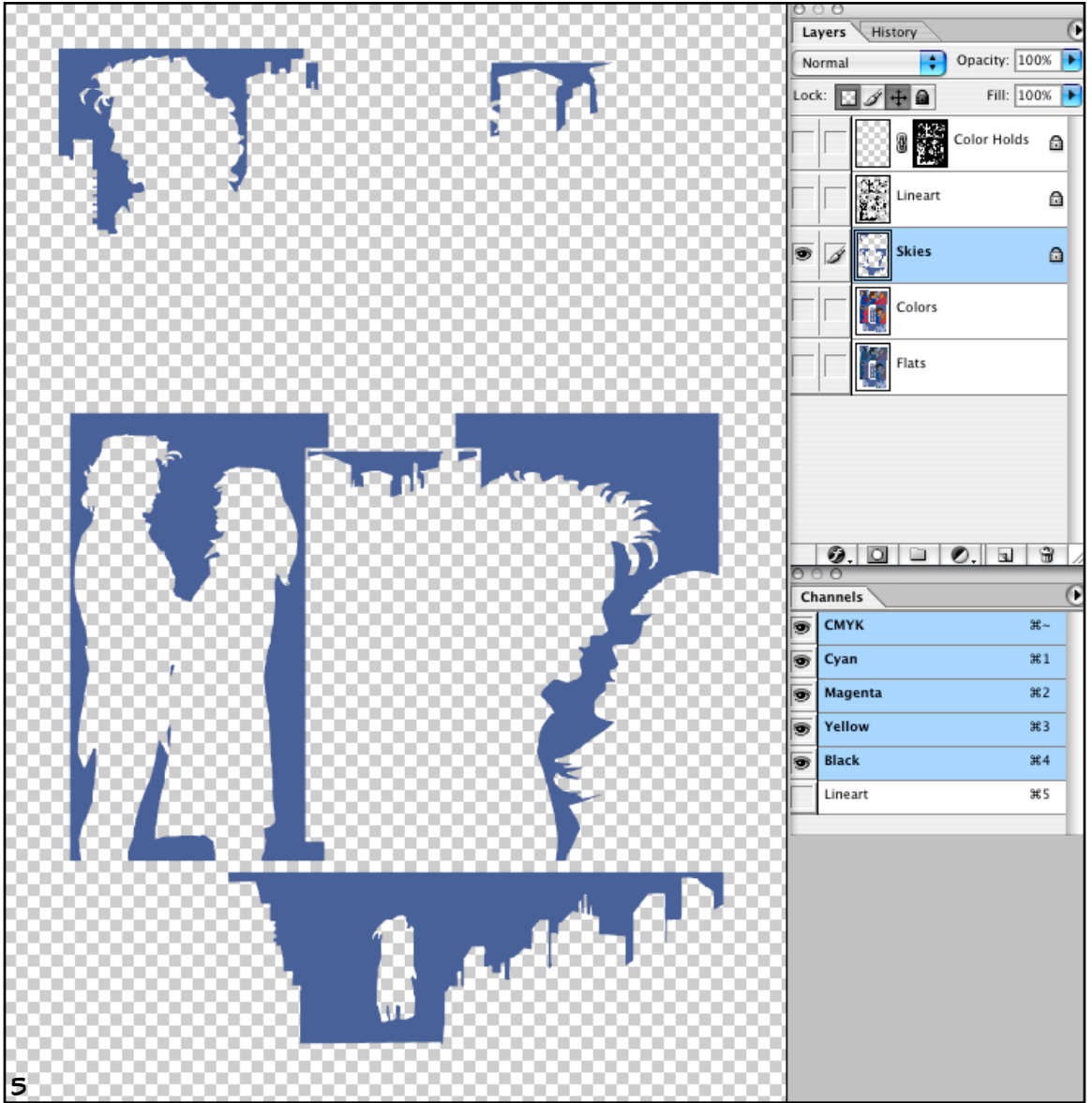
I make those colors the same on the **Colors Layer** - this way if I throw a grad over top, they won't appear separate.

Here, I've also started thinking about depth and perspective, and started making adjustments to things in the background.

In panel one, the buildings are getting lighter as they recede - you can see the same with the second and fourth panel.



THE SKIES



5. I use the Magic Wand, with the Contiguous option turned off, the 'Use all Layers' option turned off, and click on a piece of sky on my **Flats Layer**.

This way it selects all the sky colors on the page, everywhere at once, and only on the currently **Active Layer. (Flats Layer)**

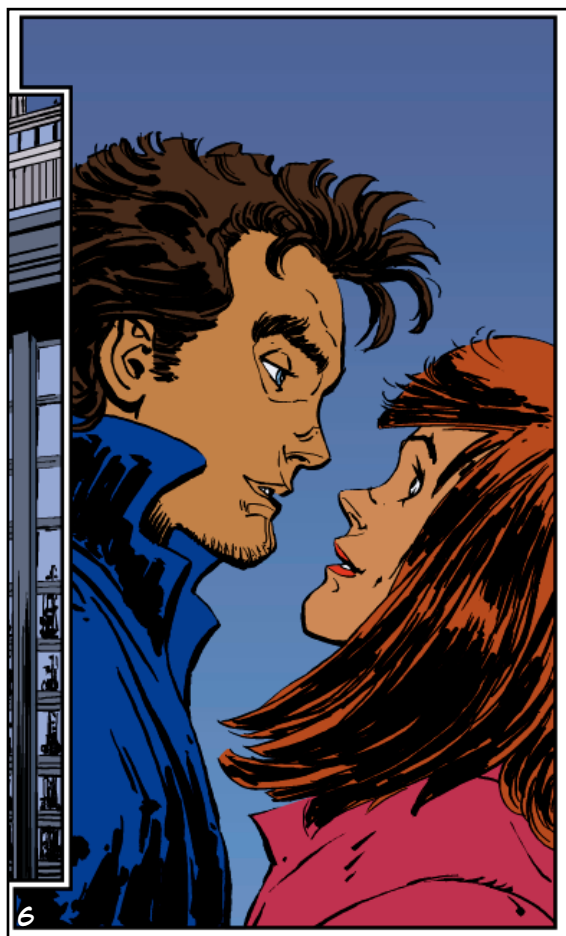
Switching back to the **Colors Layer**, I use my copy/paste action to copy the sky

selections to a new layer. This action also locks transparency, and movement. Now I can only color or paint where there is sky, and can't accidentally move this around.

For more about this technique, see my 'Using Layers' tutorial on my web site.

Now, I'm ready to work on the skies, establishing the lighting, and time of day (TOD).





7. Next, if make another grad, this time a Radial Grad, with an even lighter blue. This grad is centered right between their noses.

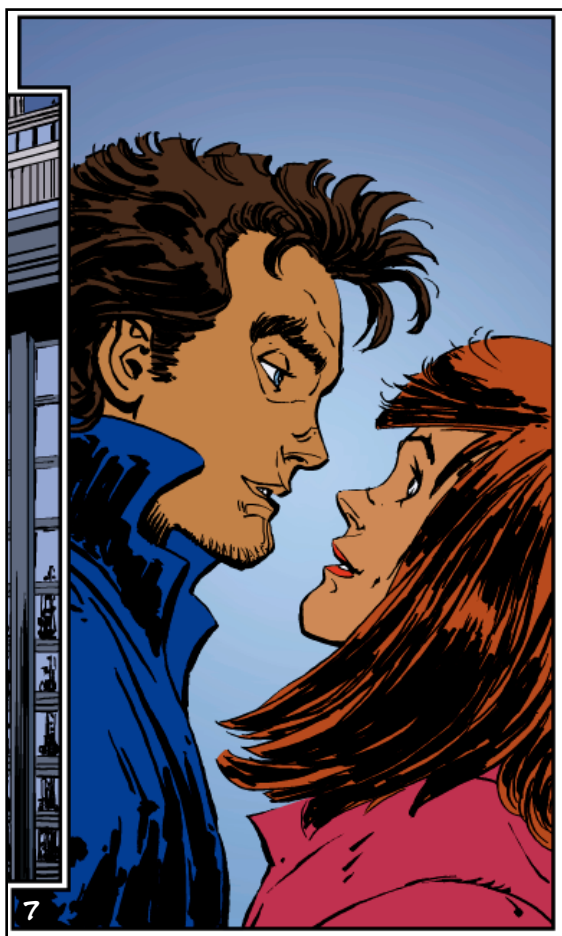
This helps put the focus right where we want it, on two characters who look like they're about to kiss.

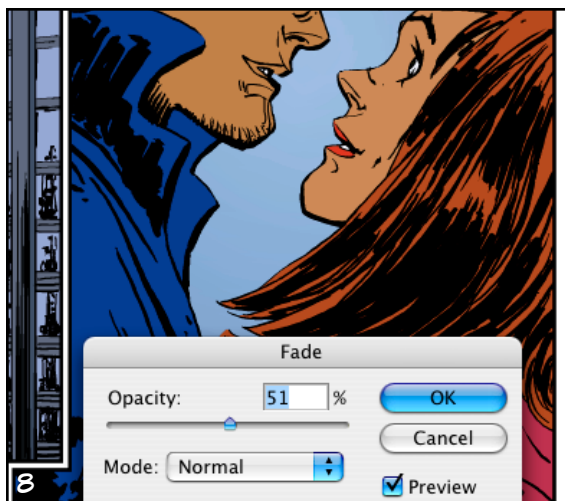
I'll combine these two different kinds of grads (Linear, and Radial) to create a subtle 'spotlight' effect. If you just use the Radial Grad.... it's as blatant as a tacky neon sign that screams "Look Here! Look Here!"

6. Because I have 6 panels with skies in them, I use the Wand Tool, this time with the Contiguous option turned on, to select the sky in panel five. This way I don't affect the skies in the other panels. I'll use my Copy/Paste action to isolate it for now.

I make a simple linear grad, from the bottom up, using a lighter shade of blue. I almost always use Foreground to Transparent for color style with grades, and Normal Mode.

In some cases, I'll use other modes, Screen, Multiply, Color, Color Dodge, Color Burn, etc. But for this page, I stuck with Normal Mode most of the time.





8. The Radial Grad effect looks a little strong, so I use **Fade** to pull it back a little.

Fade is under the Edit Menu, and can be used on just about anything - grads, brush strokes, filters, Curves, Levels, Hue/Saturation... you name it.

It's great for those times when something is 'a little too much' - you can pull the effect of what you just did down a little (or even increase it!), and see a live preview of your changes before you click OK.

Beats the hell out of Undoing, then redoing it several times to it the way you like.



9. I carry on, repeating the process with the skies in each panel.

In Panel 1 and 2, I just use Linear Grads. The warmth and saturation of the characters will be more than enough to pop them and give them the focus.

In panel 3, I have to be careful with the radial grad - too much and it will look like a spotlight is on them - it will be lighter between their heads than down at the bottom, which will skew the perspective. Skies are lighter at the horizon than higher up.

Ditto for the bottom panel - if the Radial Grad is too strong, it will look like a spotlight is the light source.



PANEL FOUR

10. I start on Panel 4 - this is one of the difficult ones to establish the focus. Zoomed in, it's easy to see the tiny figures on the top of the roof of the foreground building.

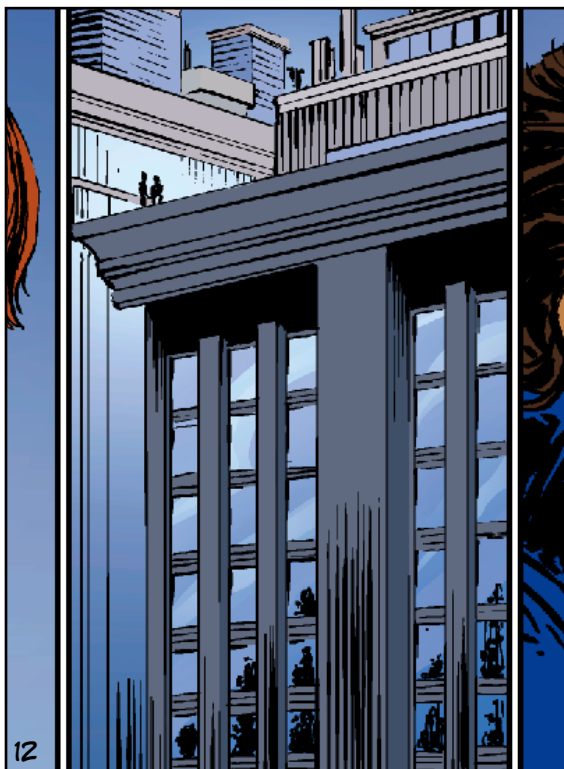
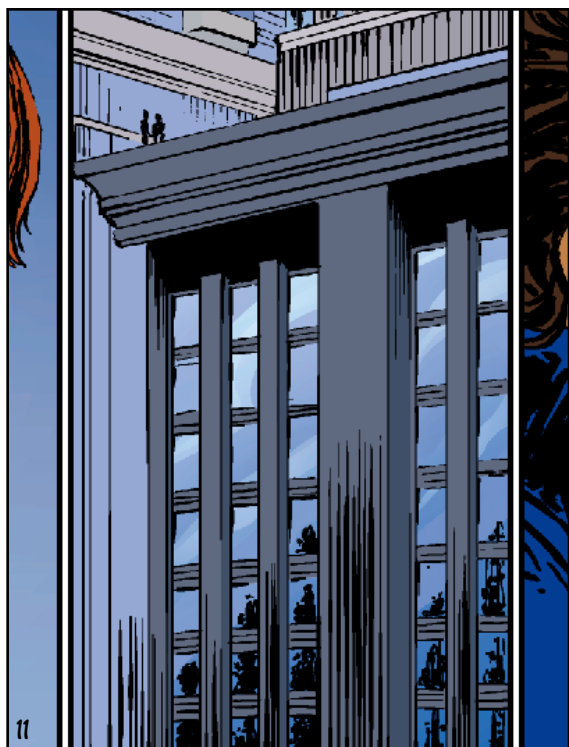
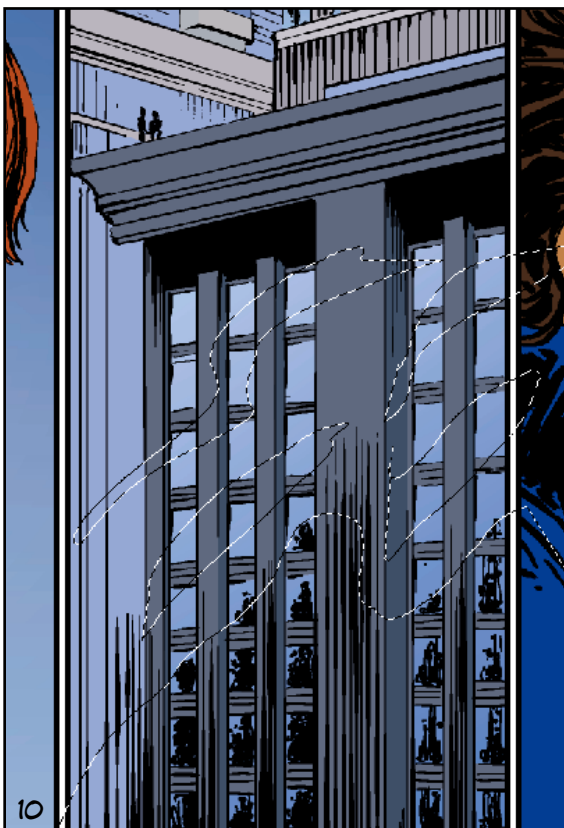
But we need to make them the focus so the reader knows where the characters are.

I use simple cut and grads to make the reflections in the windows of the foreground building. You can see the random selections I made with the Lasso tool.

11. I fill the selection with a grad, then make smaller tighter selections that overlap the originals, and fill them with a lighter grad as well. These are Radial Grads that start from the upper left corner of the all the windows on the foreground building.

12. I select the windows of the background building, and make a Linear Grad from top to bottom, and then another from bottom to about half way up, with a darker color. Lastly, I make one more small Radial Grad, with an very light cyan right where the two figures are - that area is now the

brightest part of the panel, pulling the focus on the two characters.





13. I make some selections to add reflections to the building in the background. Here, I can see a strut of the building I missed in the flats (the gap between two halves of selections). I'll fix that in a little bit.

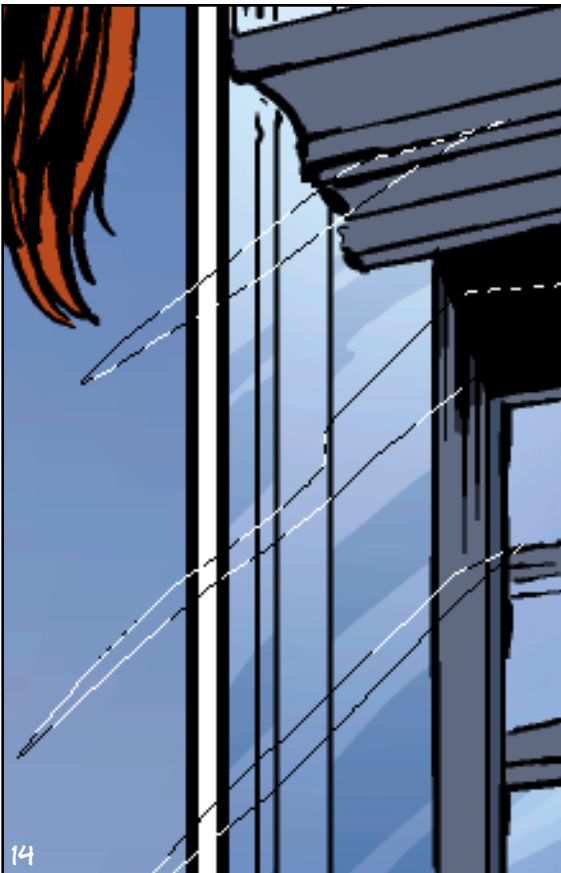
I use another little trick to add a hint of realism - I enter Quickmask Mode, and off-set all the mask (selection) on the right side of the gaps, raising them up a little. Windows in office buildings never reflect things perfectly evenly.

I get out of Quickmask mode, and make a linear Grad from the bottom, up, with a darker, less saturated color.

14 & 15. I make a second set of selections, and enter Quickmask Mode, again, off-set part of the mask (selection), again adding a touch of realism to the reflections.

This time I use lighter colors for the reflections.

Maybe no one else will notice things like this... but I know they're there.

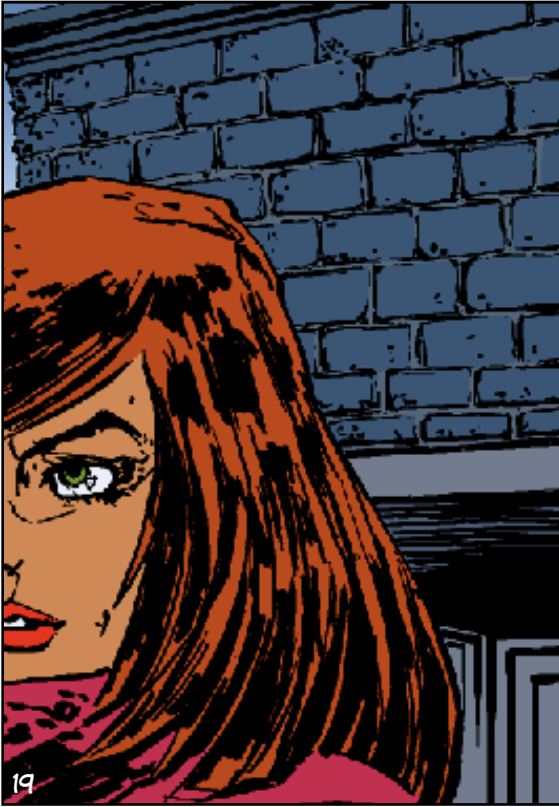


16. The windows on the background building done, I'll be starting in on the details of the foreground building.

17. I mix a combination of Linear and Radial Grads - a Linear Grad from top down, using a lighter color, and then a small, subtle radial grad centered on the two tiny figures, to help pull attention to them.

18. I make a couple selections near the top of the building, on the ledge, and use Curves to darken them slightly, adding a little dimension and shape to the top of the building.





19. A very subtle grad on the bricks, with a slightly lighter color, from top to bottom.

20. Adding a little texture to the bricks, using a custom brush. This roughens up the bricks a little, matching the slightly irregularly linear and shapes and sizes of bricks.

21. I use the Unsharp Mask filter, to sharpen the texture I painted over the bricks, to make them a little stronger.

It's too easy to go overboard with a very noticeable texture... I'm looking for more of a 'suggestion' of texture, rather than a slamming, in-you-face, scrape your skin off kind of texture. It's really just stage dressing, and pushing the depth and perspective a bit. Detail and texture make things come forward.



21-A. While there is a brick pattern on the chimney on the building behind them, I won't add any texture to it - otherwise it will want to push forward. Just one of the principals of atmospheric perspective - *'The further way things are, they less detailed and textured they appear to be.'*



CHECKING YOUR VALUES



22 & 23. What are Values? It is how light or dark a color is. By looking at a page or panel in grayscale, you get a true sense of the values you used - how light or dark a color is.



24 & 25. You can easily have reds, blues & greens that are all obviously, different colors, but still have similar values - i.e., in grayscale they all look the same.

Viewing a page in grayscale helps when you want to pull things forward or push things back without changing hues; thus establishing more depth in a page or panel.

In the first panel, depth is clearly established with a progression of dark to light, from foreground to background.

If all the values are similar, or worse, jump all over, the entire panel would flatten like a pancake.



There are exceptions to the rule - in panel 5, the lightest spot is not the furthest back.... but it is the focal point of the panel. Everything else still goes from dark to light.



CONTRAST & VALUES

26. The panel as it starts - it looks very flat right now, especially on the right side.... buildings in the background look just as dark and solid as buildings in the foreground. We're going to fix all that.

On the left, I start with a Linear grad, going sideways on the closest building, using a lighter color - I'm trying to establish depth by going from dark in the foreground, to light in the backgrounds.

27. I start working on all the glass and windows, on the right side of the page. This is fun, because I'm going from light to dark, from top down, and dark to light from the outside edges towards the middle.

Why light to dark, from top down on a

building? The lower parts of buildings usually reflect other buildings, while upper parts reflect the sky.

28. I change some of the colors of the buildings in the background, start establishing form, and pushing the depth with all the buildings, and glass windows.

I also start adding color holds to the lineart on the buildings furthest back. This adds atmospheric perspective, pushing all the details back. If you compare the right side of **26 & 28**, you can see a huge difference in depth.

29. Popping into Grayscale Mode to check Values... and Contrast. As previously mentioned, Values help to establish depth.

Contrast helps establish depth, and focus. On the right side, while the buildings go from dark to light, there's little contrast between each individual building.

On the left, there's more contrast between the silhouette and the next building.

This contrast is what helps pop the silhouette forward. Things with the most contrast tend to pop forward, while those with little contrast fade backwards.

The most contrast is between the figures, and the background sky, putting the focus on them.



30. I start tweaking the background buildings, using Linear Grads, top to bottom, using colors lighter than the base of the buildings. I don't get very detailed or dramatic with these, for two reasons:

One, the background is just establishing where Peter is - it isn't inherently important to the story, or the focus of the story. It's stage dressing.

Two, word balloons are going to be covering up some of these.... so spending a ton of time niggling away on details that are going to be covered up is a little pointless.

31. Time to push the atmospheric perspective with some color holds again. I start with the buildings that are the furthest back on both sides of Peter.

In this case, I could just use a pencil, as demonstrated in the **Using Layers** tutorial, but I find using the lasso is the easiest.

32. I pop out one more building with a color hold on the left of Peter.

Even the colors of a color hold itself can add to perspective and depth to a page or



panel. I change the color hold on the building to the right to something a little darker... otherwise the color hold puts it on the same plane as the building that is furthest back





33. I change to Grayscale to check out the values, and contrast of the backgrounds, ensuring things recede, and don't blend in



together.

Instead of converting back and forth between CMYK and Grayscale, here's a little trick you can use. Open a new window of the document you're working on in Photoshop. In the Menubar, under **View**, choose **Proof Setup -> Custom**.

In the Proof Setup dialog box choose **Profile** pop-up menu, and select **Working Gray**. It may say something else after Working Gray, (i.e. Working Gray - Gray Gamma 2.2) - just pick the **Working Gray**.

The image in the window will appear in grayscale, while your original window still shows all the CMYK colors.

34. I noticed that the building in the background on the right is blending right into the object in front of it, when checking out the values, so I made it a touch harder to separate them a little more.

35. It's always a good idea to zoom out and check the page, especially to make sure panels do not blend into each other. Zoomed in, you tend to forget about what's beside the panel you're working on.



CUTS AND GRADS.... PART 1

36. Lots more cuts, and grads here. This is probably one of the most commonly asked questions... "What is 'cut and grad'?", and 'How do I do 'cuts and grads'?"

'Cut' is just another name for a selection you make. Grad is just short for gradient.

Combining the two can give you shape and form, texture, color, depth, and more.

I use my Copy/Paste action to isolate Peter's jacket on a new layer.

I run a very light grad, from top, down. The difference is barely perceptible.

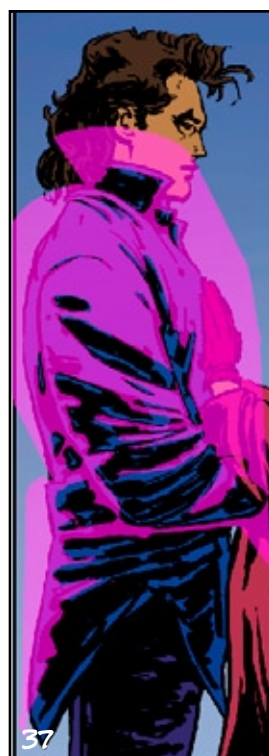
37. I roughly select the whole jacket, and enter Quickmask mode. From there, I start chopping out all the parts I want to remain dark, or in shadow - so the bottom parts of his jacket, under his arms and wrist, parts of his collar - they all get removed.

38. I use the grad tool with a lighter blue. I don't just add white to colors to lighten them - this can make lighter colors look washed out. Instead, the ratio of Cyan to Magenta becomes greater as the blues get lighter. This way the colors stay richer, even as they get lighter.

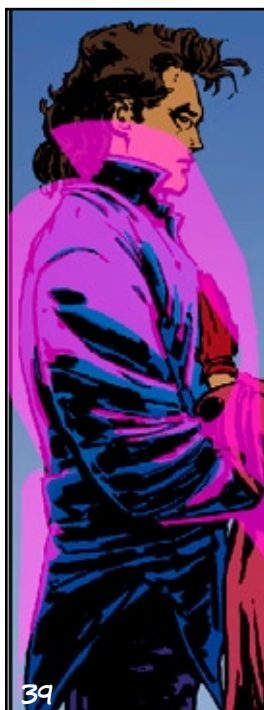
39. I enter Quickmask mode again, and begin chopping away more of the mask.

40. I make another grad, from top down, and remove more of the selection. The shoulders of the jacket is going to get the most light, since the sun is almost directly overhead.

One mistake a lot of people make is making



all their highlights the same value and intensity, which tends to flatten things, instead of having the brightest highlights where the most light hits, and lower highlights elsewhere.





41. You can see the results of the grad - not quite as bright as I'd like, so I run a grad over it again - 42.

43. I make some new cuts, and add a grad to create deeper shadows, especially in some of the folds on the arm of the jacket.

Now, with shadows, you need to be careful... cast shadows, and areas within shadows shouldn't vary much in value. Only when an object curves towards a light source will you see a dramatic change in value, but within shadows, values should be nearly uniform.

44. The finished jacket. I don't go too bright, because then the highlights on his jacket will blend into the background, value-wise, but I do keep the highlights quite saturated.

Saturated objects tend to come forward, while unsaturated things move back. Even though parts of the background sky may be lighter, the characters are far more saturated with color, popping them forward.

I did screw up on something here.... when working with shadow areas, add a little bit of the complementary color to the shadow tones - this can give you a richer range of tones from highlights to shadows.

And easy way to find the complementary color, is to sample the mid tone of the jacket, create a new RGB Mode document, fill it with that color, and then **Invert** it.

Inverting in CMYK will almost always give you black, and colors that are not truly compliments of what you are looking for. Invert reverses the percentages of ink.... so a color that is 100Y 100C (green), becomes 100M & 100K, instead of red.

However, in RGB... **Invert** works wonderfully. Just make sure you've picked a complimentary color that isn't out of gamut, and try blending it, and your original color a little, until you find a shadow tone you're happy with.

45. I use my Copy/Paste action to isolate MJ's jacket.

46. I start with a light grad again, from top down, over the entire jacket.

47. I make my first set of cuts, and throw a lighter grad over it.

48. Tighter cuts, lighter colors and another grad,

49. The cuts look a little too drastic, so I use an airbrush to tone down the difference between the cuts on the arm/shoulder

50. Now I use a soft edge brush, and dab on a few more highlights, including on the elbow (reflected highlight). I use the brush because it will give MJ's jacket a slightly different texture than Peters.

51. Now that I have my highlights and shadows, I add them to my swatches - and save the swatch in case the Photo-shop crashes.

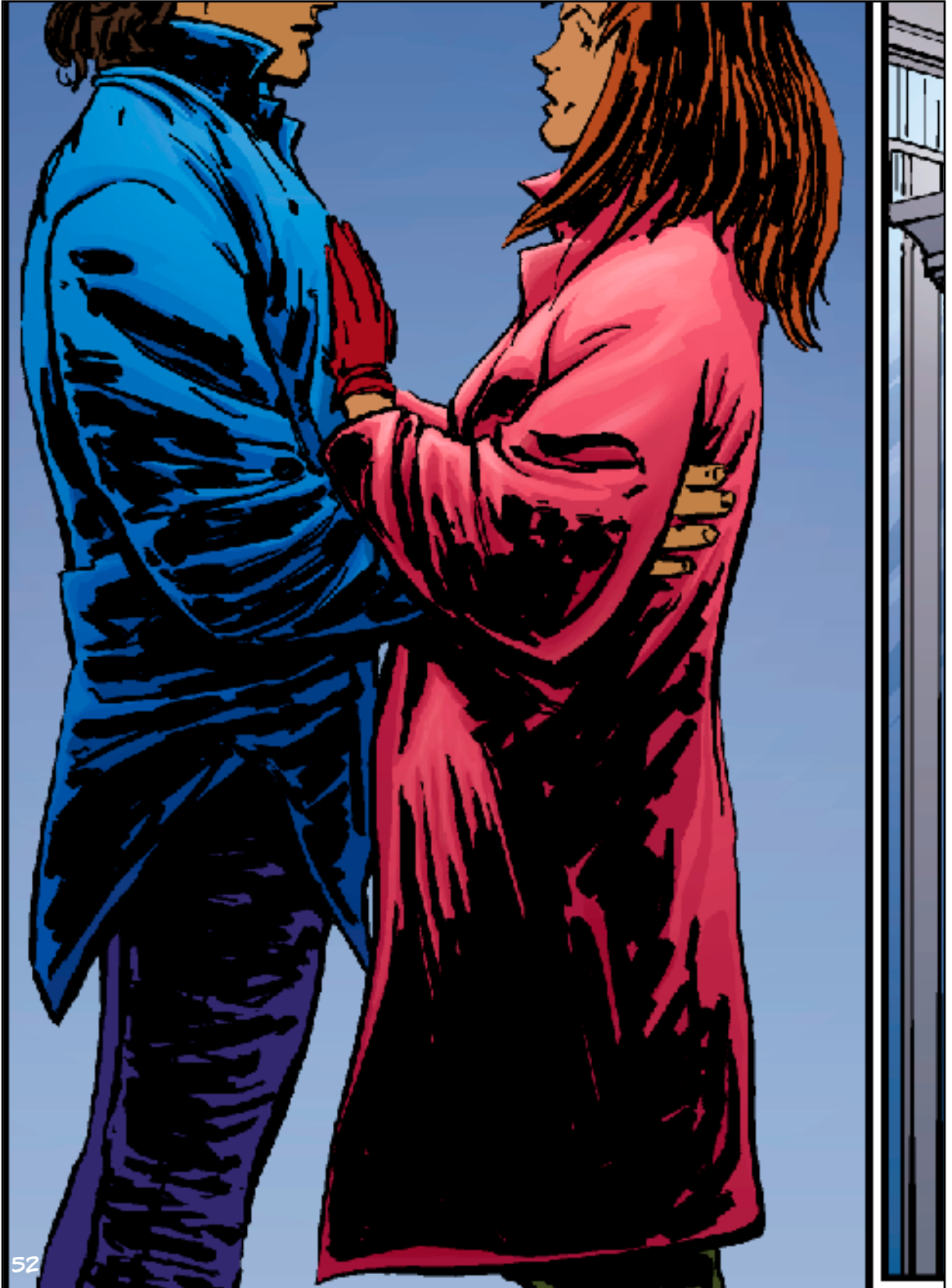
Swatch 183
Swatch 184
Swatch 185
Swatch 186
Swatch 187
Swatch 188
Swatch 189
Swatch 190
Swatch 191
51



52. Ido one more cut and grad, this time adding darker shadows to MJ's jacket.

The finished jackets, side by side. Even

through they were colored almost identically, they still have a slightly different 'feel' or texture to them.



HAIR.... PART 1

53. Time to start on some hair - One these panels, the heads are fairly small, so there's not much detail to do with the hair. I start with a slight grad, from top to bottom.

54. I switch to a large airbrush here, and add a little shape and to the upper part of Peter's hair. Because we're dealing with such a small area, I don't go nuts with detailing every strand (that comes later in other panels!).

Coloring hair is really about two things, building the shape of the hair, and the texture (strands). Without good form or shape, all the texture in the world won't help.

55. I do add a few strands here and there, mostly using the lineart for guide here, letting the inks be part of the texture.

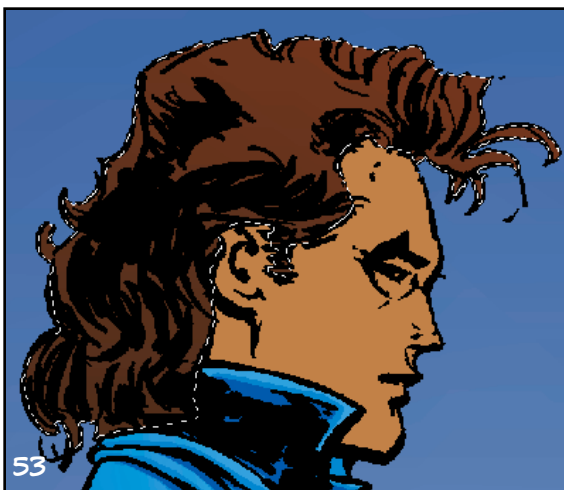
56. I switch to a hard edged, variable-sized brush. The harder I press with the Wacom pen, the larger the lines it makes.

I have several brushes that are the same, except for the amount they vary in size. Some go 1-100%, some 40-100%, and some from 70-100%. This gives me more or less flexibility and control over the size of the brushes, and takes a lot of practice to get used to, more so with brushes that change size from 1-100%.

Here, I add more folds in his hair, keep-

ing with the wavy, 80's inspired mullet locks.

Almost finished with Peter's hair - just a few more finishing touches to go.





57. I make some cuts, and pull out some highlights with the airbrush.



58. I use the Dodge Tool (everyone tells you not to use it right?), set it to 'Highlights' at about 20% Exposure, and carefully brush over the highlights. One thing about working in CMYK is that Dodge isn't quite as drastic as it is in RGB. Also, you won't have to worry about ending up with out of gamut colors using the Dodge Tool in CMYK.

However, it still goes a little too far, so I switch to the airbrush, set it to Darken Mode, about 20% pressure, and pick a color somewhere between the mid tone and highlight. I carefully airbrush over those highlights, pulling then back a little both in Value, and Saturation.

I added a few more highlights to Peter's mullet at the back.

59. I repeat the same process for MJ - starting with a grad, then building up a little more shape on the crown of her head.

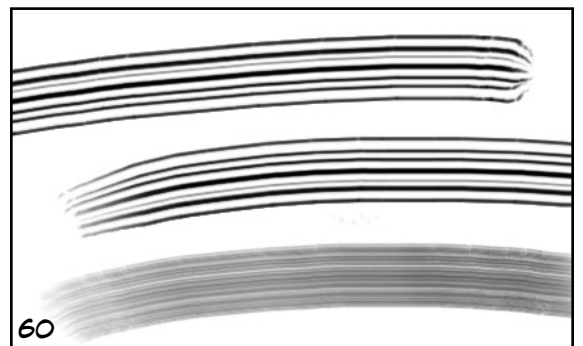


60. I have a custom brush that makes several narrow strokes at once, and varies in size according to pressure - there's two different ones, each varies more or less in size with pressure.

I also have another I use to create subtle texture for hair.

It's these brushes I use to create the strands of hair on MJ - she has fine, red hair, so I want to create thin strands to reflect that.

Again I use the Dodge tool to pop the highlights on the strands of hair.



60. Faces... since MJ's face from Panel 3 is so small, it really doesn't take much work.

However, when rendering faces, unless you're an expert, references are always handy. I've been re-building a photo reference folder, but for the most part, I use a pair of mannequin heads, one male, one female I got for about \$40 altogether.

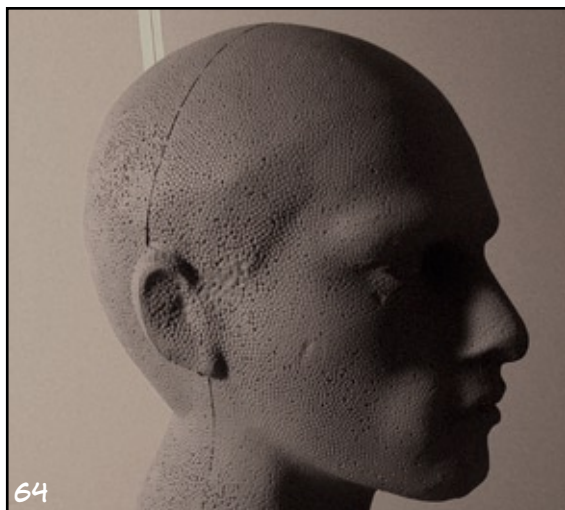
61. I start with a light, radial grad at the top of MJ's forehead

Then I make cuts, removing the areas from the selection I want in shadow (sides of the nose, under the nose, below the bottom lip, chin, and cheeks. I apply another Radial grad, going to lighter skin tones.

62. Lastly, I take an airbrush, and soften the cuts a little, getting rid of harsh edges on the nose and around the eyes, then add a little deeper shadow with the airbrush again, in the eyes, and the bottom of the chin.

I try to render female faces in as few steps as possible. Over-rendering is easy to do, and makes women and girls look older. The smoother the skin, the better.

63 & 64. My mannequin heads - the male head is styrofoam, painted gray, while the female head is a cosmetology head. I picked up both on eBay.





CUTS AND GRADS.... PART 2

65. More cut and grad work on Peter's jacket in Panel 1. I select the jacket, pop it up on a new layer, and select it all again.

66. I enter quickmask mode, and start chopping away areas I want to keep in shadow, following both the shape of the jacket, and the form of the folds in the jacket.

67. The results of applying a Radial Grad to the cut from the previous image, using colors I saved to my swatches earlier.

68. Another cut, another grad. One of the advantages of Cut and Grad, is ensure all your highlights are not the same value and intensity everywhere. Here, the highlights on the sleeve of the jacket are nowhere near the highlights of the collar, or shoulder of the jacket.

Afterwards, I decided I didn't like the way the shoulder looked (just left of the glove), so I made some new selections, set my airbrush to Lighten Mode, and began re-shaping that part of the shoulder.

Lighten works really well, because it means the color I lay down won't affect the lighter areas of the shoulder. Darken works the opposite, adding color up to a point, but not affecting colors that are darker than the one you're laying down.



69. The results of the cut and grad, adding the last of the highlights to the jacket. You can also see the changes I made to the arm, right beside the red glove.

70. I use the same process on MJ's glove, working from dark to light, and adding in some shadow tones at the end to keep all the shadows consistent.

71. Back to the hair again, building up shape with a large airbrush.

72. Adding some highlights with a hard-edge brush.

73. Peter's face. I'm missing some screen captures, but still using the same methods with Cut and Grad to build up volume, working from light to dark.





74. More hair. I start with the basic shape , working from dark at the bottom, to lighter as near the top, then much brighter on the crown of her head, as it gets the most light.

3/4 of the battle is getting the shape, form and flow of hair right. If you don't get that right..... anything else you do to it will just make it look worse.

75. Using my custom brushes again to add 'strands' of hair to MJ, and highlights on her hair. I think I've got overboard a little bit here. While the highlights on the crown of her head are the brightest, the ones on the side of her head appear brighter, simply because they are against a darker background.

76. I toned back some of the highlights, particularly on the left side, where it's in shadow. I need to tone down things a little more - it's one of those things I did at the end, along with a few suggestions from others I followed. I thought a close-up would show some of the details a little better.



CUTS AND GRADS.... PART 3

77. Cut and Grad is not a one-size-fits-all tool... In some cases, it just won't work on everything at once. On the jacket, you would have more light hitting the left shoulder than the left arm, and more light on the left wrist than the left arm. So you make separate cuts and grads for different areas, working some parts of an object individually, instead of as a whole as previously shown.

78. Added more Cut and Grad highlights to the left shoulder and arm of the jacket, giving it shape and form.

79. Now we finish off the left wrist part of the jacket, with its own cut and grad, following not only the cylindrical shape of the sleeve of the jacket, but the folds as well.

80 & 81 Now I selecting the right side of the jacket and jump into Quickmask mode, and start cutting out the areas I want to leave in shadow. Quickmask is a great tool - allowing you to see your selections as a mask. Looking at fig. **81**, You can see the resulting selection... with all those marching ants, it can be easy to confuse what areas are selected and what are not.

That funny line down the middle of 81? That's the Linear Grad Tool as I start dragging it down - you only see the end of it - the beginning is above the screen capture. Grads do not have to start and finish within the boundaries of a selection.





82. I removed more of the original selection, leaving more areas in partial shadow tones. Here you can see the Radial Grad Tool being drawn down from the shoulder, right past the panel edge. If you do a radial grad too small, it can look like a spotlight, instead of 'natural' lighting.

83. The resulting grad.



84. Time for some airbrush action on the sleeve. A grad tool won't work here - I've made selections all the way down from the shoulder to the sleeve - any grad I apply is going to lighten areas I don't want lighter - such as the front of her jacket, below her left glove. So I airbrush in the highlights on the sleeve of the jacket, making them almost as bright as the shoulder.

85. A few more selections for highlights. Again, I will use a combination of Grads and airbrush.



86. I grab a hard edged brush, and add a little texture and more highlights to give MJ's jacket a different feel than Peters. I don't use any selections here, just 'painting away.' It may be subtle, but it's there.

One common mistake made by beginners is rendering everything exactly the same way... one result is that everything starts too like the same material and texture - cloth looks like skin, metal looks like cloth, and so on.

You need to vary how you render things in order give them texture and visually make them feel different.



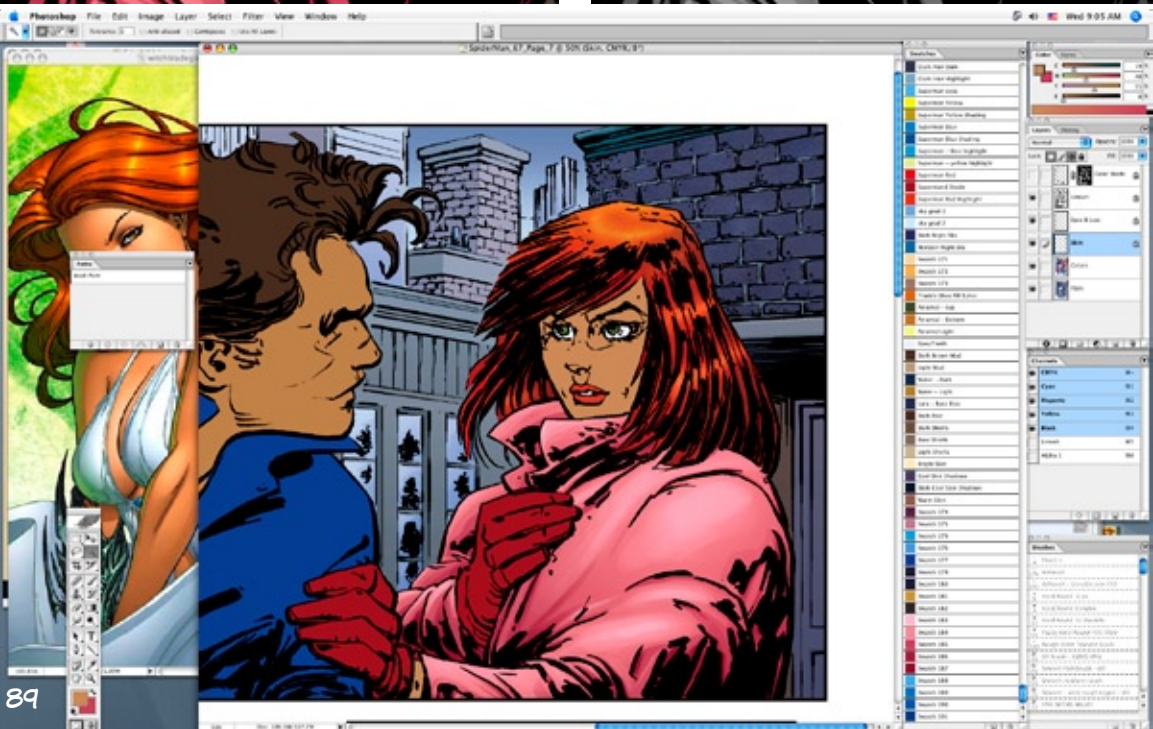
87 & 88 - Checking out the values of the finished Jacket again, along with everything else that's rendered, and making sure things pop, depth is established, and so on.

Don't wait until you're done a panel, or, God forbid, a page before checking your values.... you want to catch problems as they occur. Head them off at the pass, so to speak, instead of spending a lot of time later

fixing and re-rendering things again.

89. A screen capture of my desktop, showing my palettes, workspace, and some gorgeous coloring by Steve Firchow I saved from a web site for inspiration.

You know it's sad when you start thinking a 23" wide-screen monitor just isn't big enough any more.





RENDERING FACES

90. Faces are always fun. I usually start with a radial grad, following a light source established by the artist. So here, I go from the crown of her head, down, working from dark to light.

91. I select the entire face, and remove areas around her eye sockets, below her nose, and under her bottom lip. Another Radial Grad is applied.

The shadow edges look a little harsh, but I'll take care of them in a little while. For now, I'm just trying to build up the form with gradually increasing highlights.

92. The front of her nose, and forehead are selected, and another Radial Grad. Her face really starts to look three-dimensional, but it's still flat, and the edges are a little too harsh. But at least her nose and forehead are just about finished.



93. After de-selecting, I grab my airbrush, and start smoothing a few things out. I start with the edge of the highlight on the right side of her nose (our right), and slowly blend it in with the rest of her nose. This gives her nose a more pleasing shape.

Then I grab a shadow tones and blend the edges of the shadows around her eyes, smoothing out the edges of the grad, giving them a smoother, rounded shape.

94. I grab a slightly darker shadow tone, and add a little more around her eye sockets, and to the side of the bridge of her nose.

95. Sticking with the airbrush, I grab a nice highlight tone and start building up the her cheekbones, rounding out her features, adding a dab or two to her chin, and a touch more on her nose, and just above her upper lip.

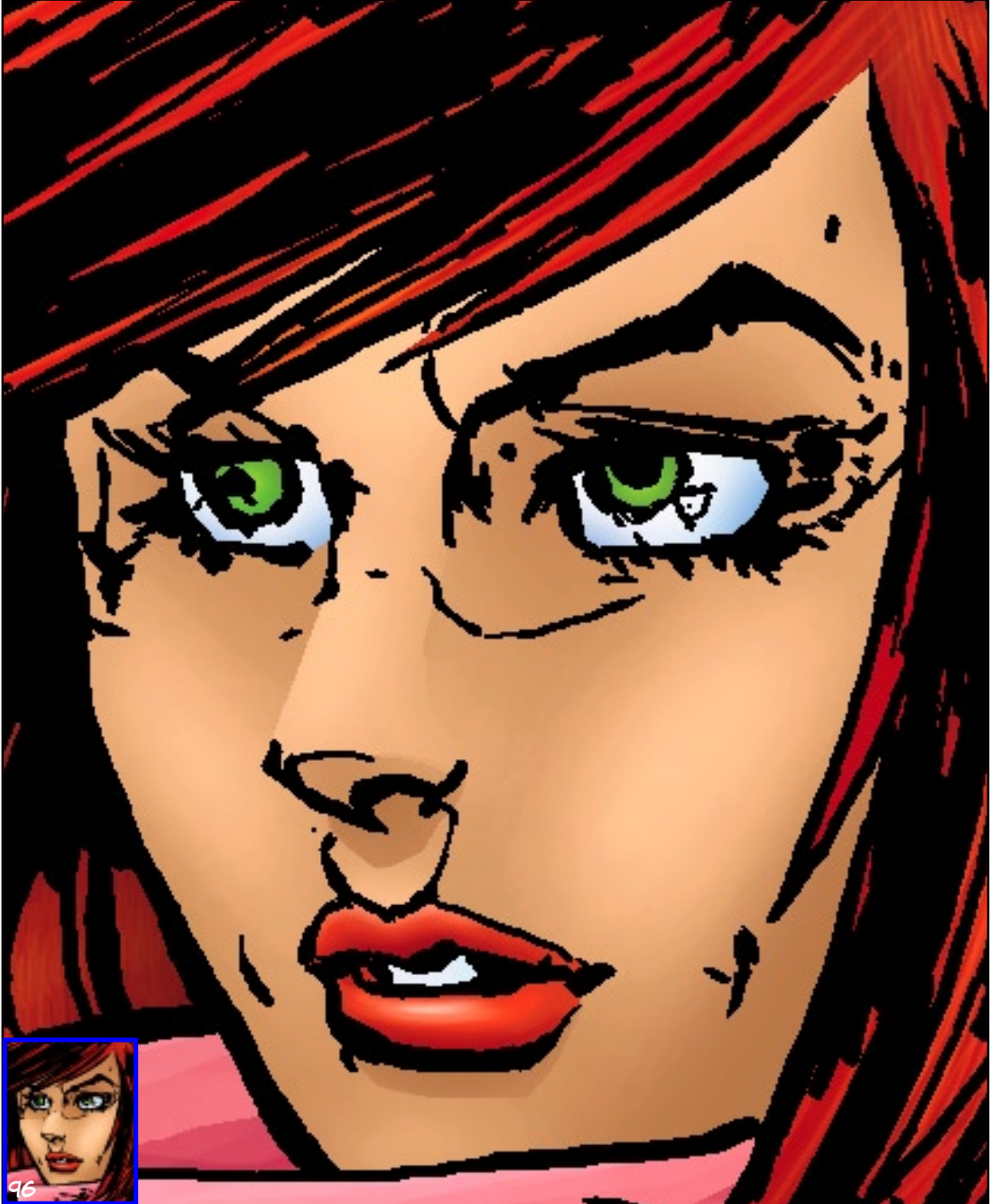
It's easy to over render woman's faces. On MJ's skin, I stop here, so I won't over-render, and smaller details won't be seen.



96. Adding the finishing touches - rounding out the whites of the eyes, and a little shape and gloss on the lips, some highlights on the iris'.... and her face is done. I could add more touches and details..... but take a peek at the inset picture in the bottom left.... that's the size this actually print at..

That's one pitfall of working on high resolution files... you can end up zooming in so far, and adding tons of details no one is going to see.

So remember to zoom out to printed size once in a while, and make sure you're not wasting time noodling sub-atomic details.



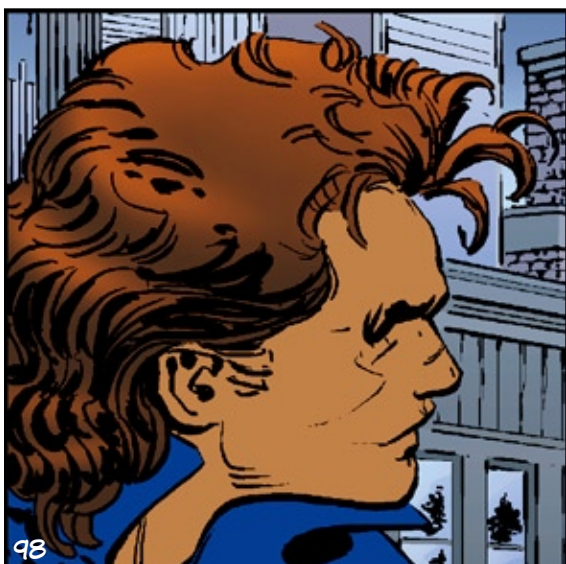
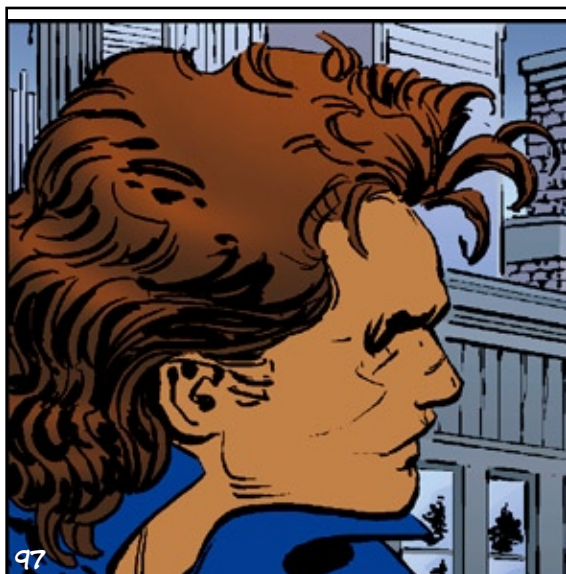
HAIR.... PART 2

97. More hair. I start with building the form and shape, adding in lighter colors, building up the top of Peter's hair, and his wavy mullets. I don't build up the highlights equally, keeping them brighter at the top of the head, and darker down at the bottom

98. Building up highlights, airbrushing in the shape, building up the waves, curls on the front, and more on the mullets. The top is pretty open, in the centre, and I'm going to let strokes of hair build that up more.

99. Here's where I start with stroking the hair, down in the bottom of the mullets, following JRJR's lines that established the direction of the hair. I use much thicker strokes for Peter's hair than I did for MJ's, to make their hair look different.

100. I keep building up the strokes, working my way up the hair, and making the strokes brighter and lighter on the highlights of the wavy parts of his hair. This also adds to the shape of the hair. You don't want every strand to be the same brightness all over his head... that just flattens the hair. That's why I change the colors to something brighter as I work my way up. The color Palette shows two different colors I used for hair strokes.





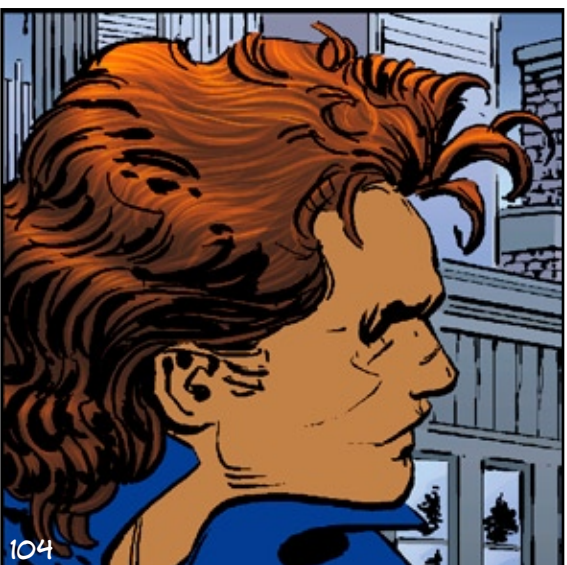
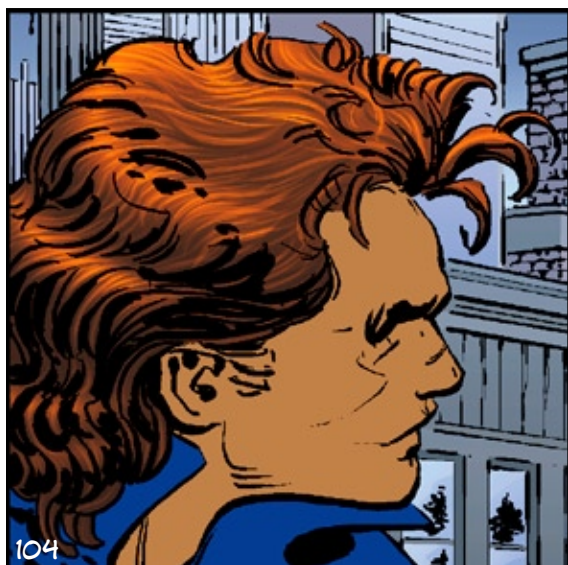
101. I keep building up strokes of hair, working forward, working the brush from the end of previous strands, forward.

102. More and more strands - now we have thick wavy hair.

103. I use the Dodge Tool to pull up the highlights a little more. It's worked... but now the hair is too orange.

104. I open the Curves dialogue box, and begin fiddling with the C, M, Y Curves, putting the brown back into Peter's hair.

105. I use the Airbrush, set it to Darken, and sample a color just outside of the highlights, then use that to tone down the highlights a bit... back to rich, brown hair.



FACES.... PART 2

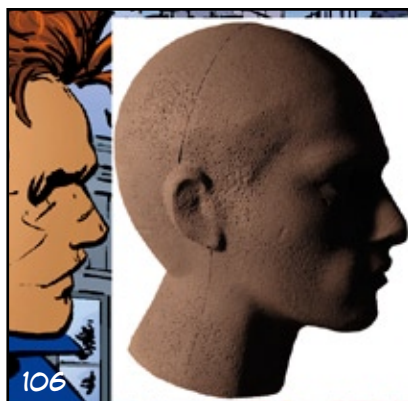
105. I start with the Radial Gradient again, up high and to the left of Peter's ear, dragging it right on past his nose. This is another one of those situations where most of the face can't be done with simple gradients... so I'm going to be adding both highlights, and shadows, building them both up. going back and forth between highlights, and shadows.

106. This is my mannequin head, posed for the lighting I'm trying to follow - so I drop the image right onto a layer above Peter's face, turning it on and off as I use it for reference.

107. Adding in the shadows. I make cuts, and use both gradients, and airbrush, building up the shadows and trying to keep the tones and values consistent as I build them up all around the face, under the chin and around the neck.

108. Now I start making selections for the highlights, following the reference as a guideline... I don't follow it exactly - it isn't quite positioned as exactly as I'd like, or lit quite exactly as Peter is. I use these as reference, not models to trace light and shadow from.

109. You can see the resulting grads I ran over the selection, using a Radial Grad, still building up lighter as we get to the top of the head.



110. Another selection, another grad, building up a few more highlights.

111. The last of the highlights are added in, and his sideburns are now fixed.

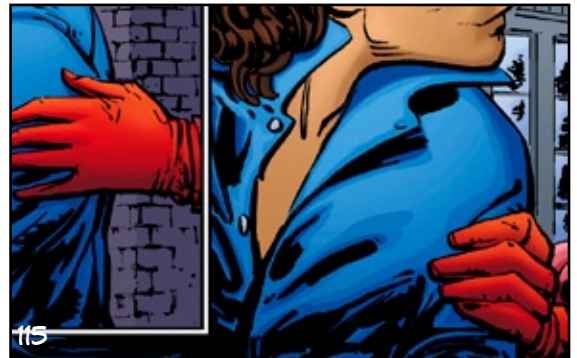
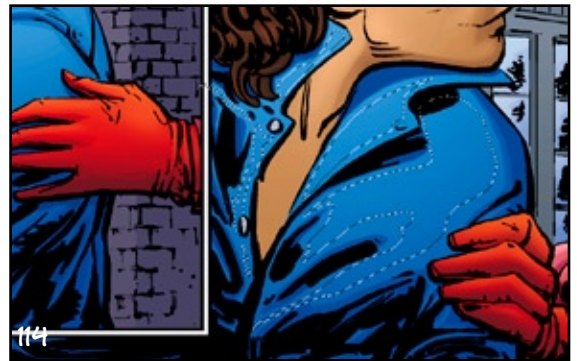
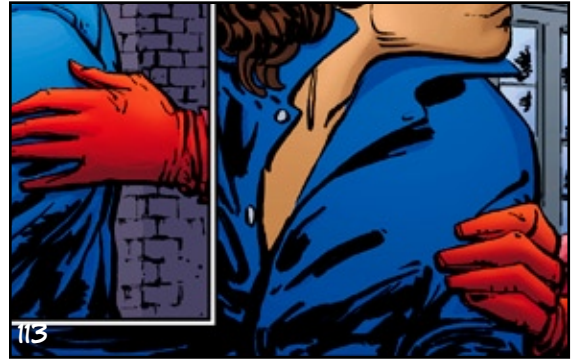
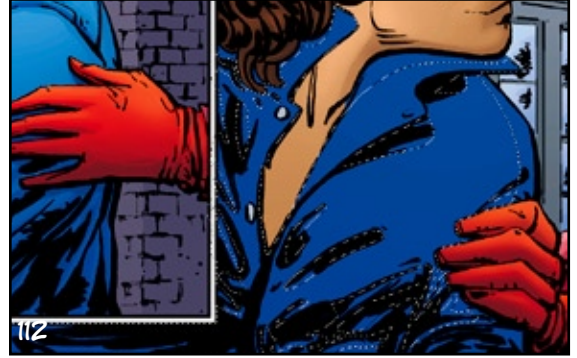
112. Starting in on his jacket. I've already made a subtle Linear Gradient.

113. Applying a Radial Gradient this time, the highlights starting to bring out the shape

of Peter's jacket.

114. The last selection for the jacket (after having made another cut and grad before this one).

115. The last gradient. Building up the jacket in four easy steps!



HAIR.... PART 3

116. Building up shape with the airbrush.

117. Adding in strokes of hair with the hard-edge, variable sized brush, following the flow of hair established by the lineart.

118. Adding in more strokes, bringing out the highlights, switching to brighter colors

as I move further up the head.

119. Using the Dodge Tool to pull out the highlights even more.

120. The hair starts to look too orange, again. So I open Curves, and load the same settings I used last time to adjust his hair.

121. I use the airbrush, set to darken, and pull some of the highlights back a little.





122. I change the color of MJ's hair to a darker red I use as the base color, then run a light, Linear Gradient.

123. With the airbrush, I start building up highlights, both on the crown of her head, and the two reflections on the side of her head, as indicated by the artist.

124. Building up the hair strokes - once again using a custom brush that makes several strokes in one draw. This brush is also set to vary in size with pressure, and is set to Direction, so that the strokes of the brush follow whatever direction you drag it in.



125. Building up the brightest highlights in the hair a little more, adding a little darker areas, still use my custom hair-stroke brush.

126. Building up the shadow areas a little more, still following the flow of the hair..

127. I pull back a little bit on the highlights on the sides - they're almost as bright as the one on the crown of MJ's head, which gets the most light.



CUTS & GRADS, PART 4

128. More clothing! As usual, I start with a subtle grad, before making any selections.

129. The first set of Cuts and Grads, making the selection, and then chopping out areas from the selection that I want to keep in shadow.



130. After making several more Cuts and Grads, the jacket is nearly finished.

131. Once again, I grab a soft-edged brush, and add a little texture to make it appear a little different from Peter's jacket, and soften the edges on a couple of cuts.

132. Back to Peter's jacket. Like everything else I've worked on, I use my Copy/Paste action to isolate it on a new layer, and I merge it back when I'm done.

133. Here you can see the quickmask version of the selection. With complex selections I find it easier to view them in Quickmask mode. If you're in Quickmask, and you save the file, the Quickmask is saved with the file. You don't necessarily have to exit Quickmask, and save a selection to an Alpha Channel if you need to quit Photoshop for any reason.



134. The selection from 133, and the Radial Grad I about to apply. You can see where the origin of the grad is, and how it extends past the panel

135. The results, after all the cuts and grads.

136. It's a tad too dark, so I open Curves, adjust the highlights and mid tones so it's brighter. Using Curves, you can adjust Shadows, Highlights, or Mid tones without affecting the others.



FACES.... PART 3

137. One trick to make grads go a little faster when using the Copy/Paste action on a new layer, is to select the transparent areas, and Inverse Selection - so that only the face is selected. That way Photoshop doesn't waste any time figuring out the grad



isn't supposed to go on transparent areas.

I apply a Radial Grad - you can see the origin point above MJ's nose, and extending past the panel.

138. You can see a second, smaller grad being thrown from the top right corner of the panel, to brighten that part of the forehead a little.





139. I throw a darker grad on her chin, to make the lower jaw a little darker, switching from Radial to Linear Grad for this one.

140. I make selections to add in shadows under the nose, and under the lips.

141. Switching back to the Radial Grad, I add in the shadow below the lips.

142. Add shadow under the nose with the Grad tool again.

143. I use the Grad Tool again to darken the shadow under her nose a little more, this time dragging the Grad from a different direction. You don't have to make just one grad in a cut - sometimes several work better than one.



144. I darken up the bottom of the jaw just a little more, using the Linear Grad.

145. Now I start using cut and grad to build up highlights. The basic selection (I still have to cut out part of the selection that runs through the shadow under her nose).

146. The highlights after the first grad.

147. Adding some shadow tones back in darkening the skin in the top right corner of the panel.

148. Building up the shadows on the chin, underneath the lips a little more, making tight selections that follow the shape of the face.





149. Building up shadows under her nose. You can see where the grad is dragged from the edge of the shadow past the selection

150. Building up the shadow a little more, using the nostril as the edge of the selection.

151. The results of the grads.

152. Building the highlights on the cheek using several close-knit cut and grads.

153. Building up some shadow on the sides of the nose. The grad starts where it would be darkest, in the eye socket.

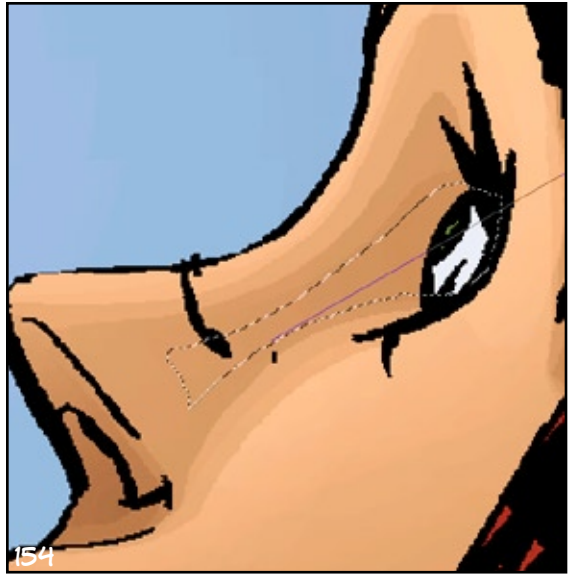


154. Adding one last cut and grad shadow on the nose.

Since I go from Foreground Color to Transparent, I don't drag the Gradient all the way down the selection.

I want the shadow to increase gradually as it gets closer to the eye socket, getting darker as it gets closer to the eye.

Dragging the Grad Tool all the way down would result in a hard line at the edge of the selection near the bottom of the nose.



155. Adding a little more shadow by the temples in the forehead, even though much earlier, I actually lightened it. Then I used one of my mannequin heads for reference to make sure I was rendering things correctly.



156. The last step is to use the airbrush to soften things a little, and remove the harsh, hard edges in a few spots, or tone them down, to give her that nice, smooth skin. Too many cuts on a woman's face will make her look older, and heavier. You've heard the camera adds 10 pounds? Bad rendering adds 20 pounds and 15 years.



FACES.... PART 4

157. I isolate Peter's face using my patent Copy/Paste action.

158. I start with a base Radial Grad, indicating where the light is coming from.

159. I start making selections for the shadow areas, picking them all out now. I won't be able to use just one grad to work on them all, but have to make a couple of grads to get the shadows I want.

I save the shadow selections as an Alpha channel - I'll be using them later to subtract from selections I make for highlights to make sure I don't mess up the shadows I've already established.

160. I start with an overall Linear Grad, from the jaw up, going past the forehead, laying in the groundwork for the shadows on Peter's face.



161. I make the cast shadow from Peter's hair on his forehead a lot stronger.

162. Now for building up all the highlights - making a tone of selections. Not show here is that I jumped into Quickmask mode to keep track of my selections. Once I have all the areas selected for the highlights, and filled in Quickmask mode, I load the shadow selections I made earlier, and subtract them from the Quickmask.

163. Hiding the selections, so I can see



how the different grads work. I sometimes leave the marching ants of the selection visible to make sure I haven't missed any areas I've selected.

164. Now you can see the first grad I make. It's a Radial Grad, and you can see it doesn't extend all the way down to the edge of the selections.



165. Another Radial Grad, building up more highlights on the front of his face and nose.

From here, I chop away at the selection, so the highlights keep building up smoothly, and then running more Radial Grads across the selections,

166. The finished highlights. The face still looks a little flat, so next I will add some deeper shadows.

167. All the selections for the deeper

shadow areas are made -about five different selections, and one with complex areas cut away for the shape of the ear.

168. My first grad - you can see it being dragged under the nose, from the nostril out. While this is an area that is in shadow, and a cast shadow, I don't want it entirely one solid tone - some reflected light will still bounce onto it.



169. You can see the first grad, from below the ear, going towards the cheekbone. This is another example of cut and grad that isn't one-size-fits-all.

170. Moving further down the jaw, adding another grad to darken the skin under the chin, keeping the dark areas consistent.

171. The last shadow grad under the front of the chin.

172. Hiding the grads so you can see the results., before chopping away at them a

little more to build up the shadows a little further.



173. Adding deeper shadows in the eye socket.

174. Another Shadow grad, for under his upper lip, and more under his nose.

175. Deepening the shadows under his lower lip.

176. Adding darker shadows to his ear and jaw.



177. Carrying the shadows forward under his jaw and on his neck

178. Pushing the shadows a little more under his jaw, forward of his neck.

179. The nearly finished face.

180. I switch to my airbrush, and grab a much cooler color, and begin cooling off some of the shadows a little - his lower ear, jaw, eye socket, and cast shadow on his forehead.



181. I make another selection, and run the cooler color out from his jaw and neck, building up the last of the cool shadows.

182. The finished face.

183. I add those same cool colors to shadows on Peter's face in another panel.

184 & 185. I make sure Peter's face is consistent all throughout the page, so I add the cool shadows to his face in every panel on the page.



186. The nearly finished page... Some final adjustments to the page and corrections



FINAL ADJUSTMENTS

187. Popping back into greyscale view to check the Values on the page. They seem pretty good here, but things can be tweaked a little more.

188. Another way to look at your page is to zoom out really far, and see what pops on the page, where does your eye get drawn to, on the page overall, and in each panel.

(Next Page)



187

189 & 190. Here's where I do overall tweaking to three panels - Panels 3, 5 & 6.

The skies all seem a little too dark, so I use the wand to select them on the Flats Layer, and use my Copy/Paste action to put the colored skies on a new layer.

I put them on a new layer in case I'm not happy with the results, or mess up. This way I still have the original version on the layer underneath.

Panels 3 & 5 are a little too dark and blue, so I lighten them and pull back on the saturation so it looks more like daytime.

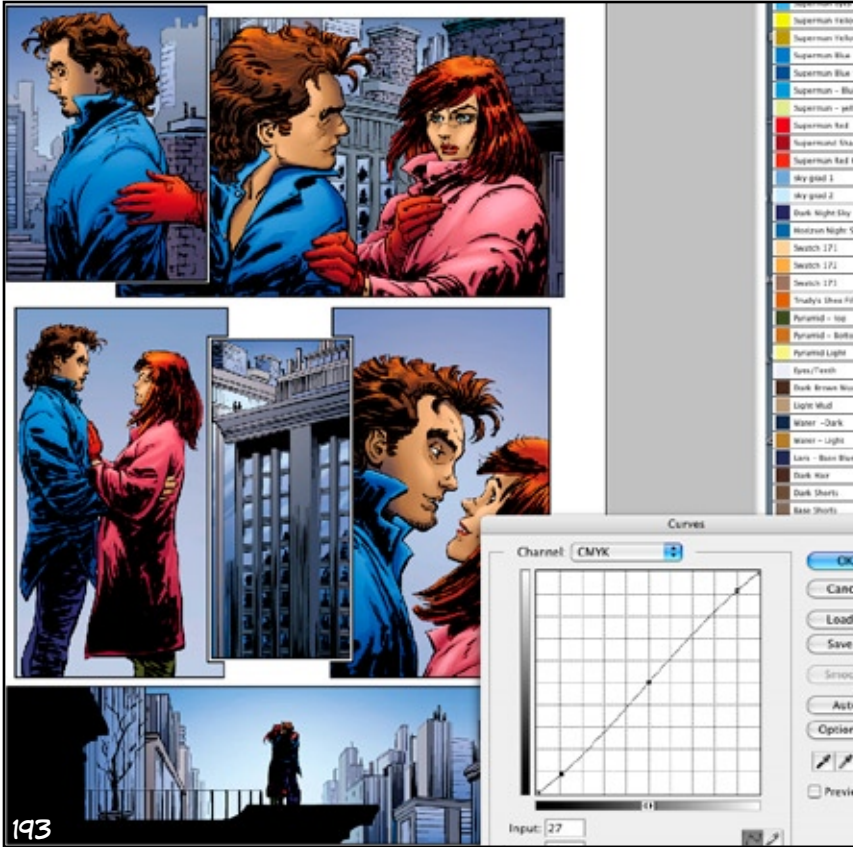
Panel 6, I want to bump up the contrast on the two figures, so I lighten the sky here as well, pulling back on the ratio of Magenta in the sky to make it cooler, so the warm hair on the figures pop more.

191 & 192. THESE ARE the greyscale versions of the 189 and 190, respectively, side by side comparison to see the difference in Values after making changes to the colors in the skies.



188





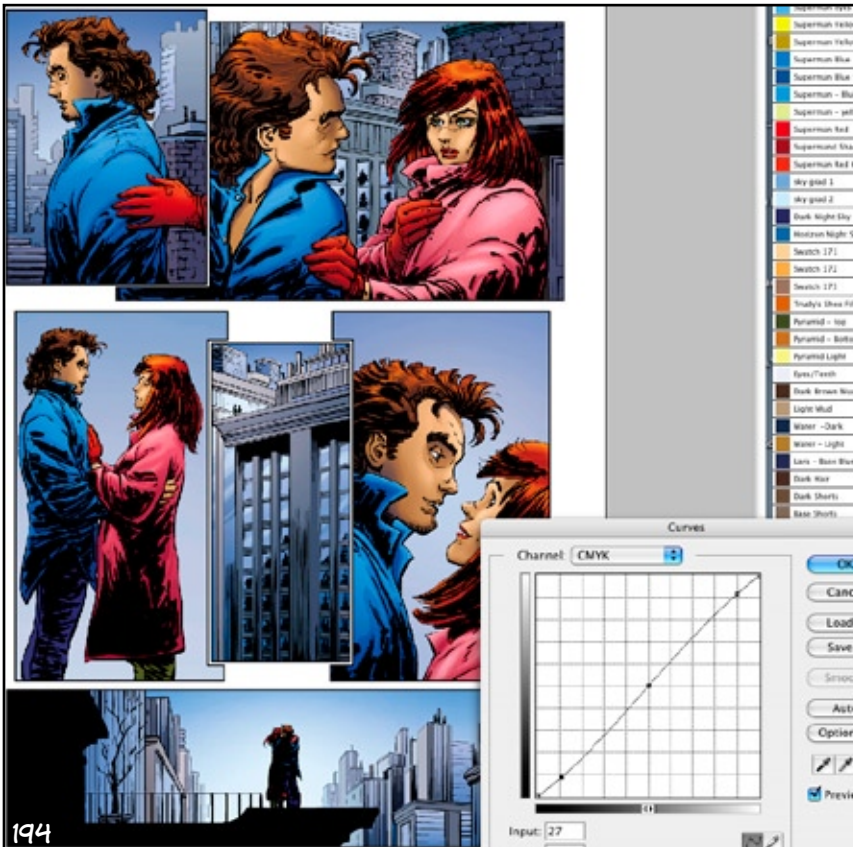
193 & 194. I want to pop the contrast a little more on highlights and the darkest shadow areas.

I use Curves for this.. I can not only tweak the entire image, but each color channel (C, M, Y, K).

With the Curves open, the first thing I do is lock the Mid tones - you do this by clicking, and making sure the point that appears has an Input and Output of 128.

Now you can work the highlights and shadows without changing the mid tones.

I usually drag the mid tones up, brightening them a touch, and then pull the shadow areas down, darkening them, giving the page a little more contrast overall. I don't use the Brightness/Contrast it's too drastic, and increases saturation, something you don't want, especially if you're working in RGB - you can end up with out of Gamut colors easily. Since I work in CMYK, it's a moot point for me.



195. I have used some Blacks in this page - not a lot, but I decide to pull them back a little while I have the Curves menu open. I grab a point at the top right, and drag it over a little.

This will drop the Blacks on the color layer back about 5%. Too much K-tones (Black) in the colors will start dulling colors, and on newsprint, really muddy colors up, so I pull them back a little just to be on the safe side.

But this is just a coloring sample.... not an actual page going to press, so why worry about it?

Because it's a good habit to get into. And if someone asks to see your files, they'll no-

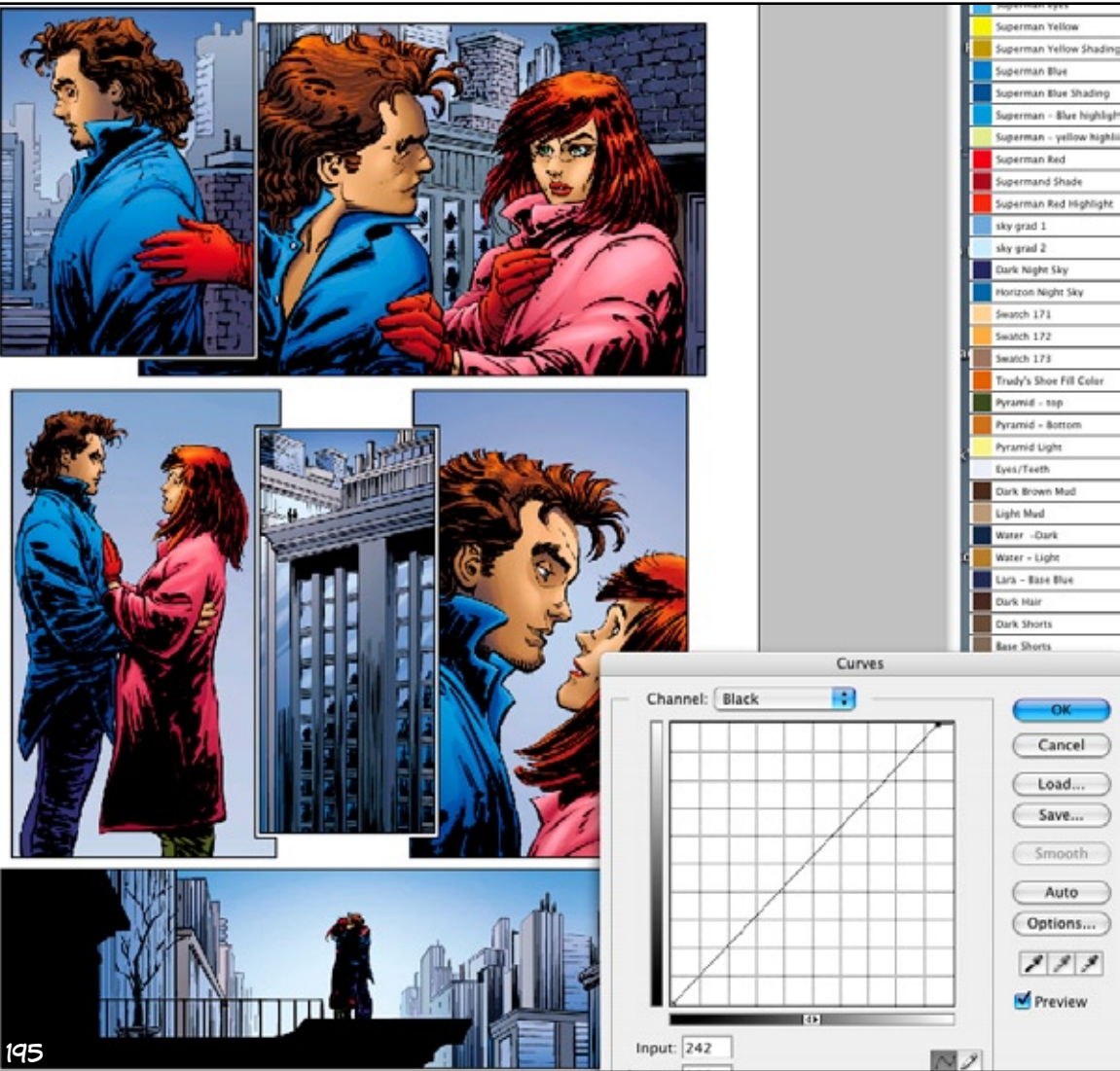
tice high K-tones easily.

Some editors also have a sharp eye, and can spot where you use blacks in the colors even when you print samples on a nice glossy stock.

The first thing that enters their mind is, "It looks great on this glossy, premium paper.... but is it going to print like crap on the regular paper we use?"

So even if it just for practice, or color samples, keep the end output in mind. You want your samples to look as good as possible, but editors are always thinking about the end results when it comes off the press.

Ideally, K-tones should never exceed 15%-20%. The less, the better.





MAKING CHANGES

195. One thing I totally blew was using Complementary Colors.... especially in shadows to give characters and clothing a richer range of colors.

I did use them a bit on Peter's face (cool shadows contrasting with warm skin), but I should also have use them elsewhere.

196 & 197. Adding some dark green to the shadows on MJ's coat gives it a wider range of color, and values.

198 & 199. Adding a tint of Orange to the dark blues of Peters jacket to round out the shadows.

200 & 201. Adding Orange to the shadow areas on Peter's jacket again.

I use either Darken or Multiply with an airbrush to do this - otherwise, using Normal Mode, you can end up making shadows lighter, orange colors, instead of a shadow with tints of orange.



202 & 203.

Adding some dark green to the shadows on MJ's coat again. Because the complementary color is darker than the magenta, I mix a little of Normal, and Darken modes on the airbrush.

If you're unsure what the complementary color is, sample a color with the eyedropper, create a new document in RGB mode, fill with the color, and Invert. This will give you the complimentary color. Don't do this in CMYK - you'll always end up with a lovely shade of Black.

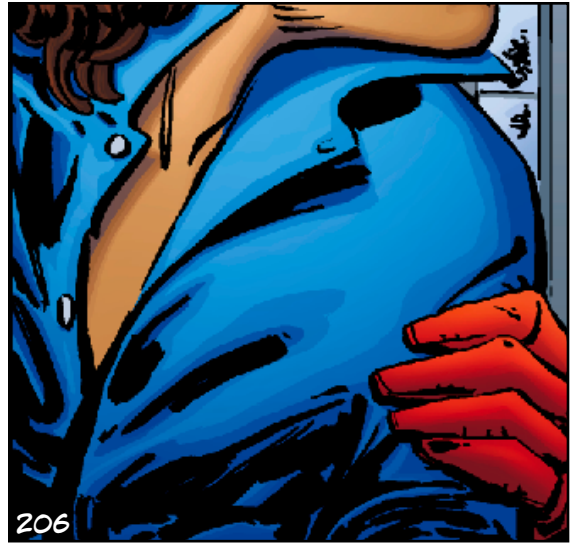


204 & 205. Adding some orange to the shadows on Peter's jacket again, both the areas in shadow, and cast shadows.



206 & 207. Adding a tint of orange to the blue shadows on Peter's Jacket again.

208 - 213. The figures on the roof need to pop more. I darken the foreground building, then its windows, using a combination of Curves and Hue/Saturation. I add yellow to the windows on the building behind, with the brightest part centered directly on the figures, add a little yellow to the building, and the ones behind it to keep consistent. Lastly, I make minor color shifts to other buildings to make them a little different.



Coloring - Step-by-Step

The finished page, with all changes. The only changes not shown are touch-ups on the skin, so the shadows are a little harder where they follow the lineart.



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