DINNER UPSTAIRS

A Collaborative Sci-fi graphic novel

Martin Prose Prospectus

TOPIC

"Dinner Upstairs" will be a graphic novel that follows the events leading up to a spacecraft destroying a planet through orbital bombardment.

As the ship prepares to fire, wealthy officials and diplomats, some of whom have used their influence to escape the planet itself, eat and drink together on the bridge. Citizens of the planet coordinate with those that have snuck onto the ship and are attempting to stop the calamity. Partygoers attempt to hide their status as planetary citizens and debates over the bombardment continue until the moment it is initiated.

Two primary characters will be on the bridge socializing and deep in the ship attempting to sabotage respectively. It will not be clear where they are from until close to the end of the story.

It is a story full of character interactions pushed forward by the impending calamity. It is written as a personal project by my friend Benjamin Colby. He's going to do great. He will be drawing from his experience writing and reading fiction since he was young.

MOTIVATION

Develop my skills

Connect design and illustration

Collaborate with my friend

This project offers many opportunities to me. I can combine my page layout skills from my design background with my personal passion for illustration. I draw outside of my design studies at PSU and I want to realize a synthesis between my hobby and my work. I also want to further my skills in regards to that passion. Learning illustration takes a lifetime of practice and incorporating that into my schoolwork would be nice and efficient.

I also want to collaborate with my friend whose work I have always admired. Creating a story that is wholly unique is a goal that me and Ben share and I am confident he can accomplish this. We will both use this project to develop storytelling, worldbuilding, and concepting skills, as well as the other necessities to create a published graphic work. I am looking forward to the experience we will gain as a team.

PROJECT

I will illustrate a collaborative graphic novel. Sequential art is a unique synthesis between written storytelling and illustration. I will be using this format to communicate various themes of class warfare, morality, and deception through a dramatic science fiction narrative. It will be a collaborative work that my friend writes and I adapt and illustrate. We will both use this project to develop storytelling, worldbuilding, and concepting skills, as well as the other necessities to create a published graphic work. I am looking forward to the experience we will gain in terms of working as a team on a hypothetically professional project.

"How can I produce a collaborative
sci-fi graphic novel?"

RESEARCH SYNTHESIS

  I will begin with my secondary research, the books by Scott McCloud. "Understanding Comics" and "Making Comics" are fairly similar but one is more conceptual than the other. Understanding Comics reinforced the unseen value of the medium that I have. What was most valuable to me was its description of the unique format of sequential art. By paneling my art on the page correctly, I can guide the reader through the pacing, energy level, and timeline of events of the story in whatever way I please. At the same time, the sequential form of the art lets the reader experience the story at their own pace. Making Comics on the other hand clarified, among other things, general recommendation of sketching and outlining a story before inking it, and adding color at the end. As well as how outlines and all other brush strokes in illustration contribute to the mood and energy within each individual panel. It also greatly discussed color and the ways its combinations can enhance and change the story through their intrinsic emotional implications.

  These aspects are also touched on in my secondary and visual research. I asked three different illustration professionals in Portland the same set of open-ended questions about process. Joaquin Golez, a PSU art student who fortunately had the time to communicate with me during the school year and has finished a graphic novel. Molly Mendoza is a professor at PNCA and illustrator/mural artist who has made ten separate graphic novels. Jonathan Hill is a freelance illustrator who has published four graphic novels. Joaquin and Molly wrote responses to my questions, and Jonathan dictated his answers. I emailed all three of these artists the same set of questions that prompt them to discuss their creative process in relation to writing, illustrating, and working with others. I learned that collaboration with an author on this kind of project can be delicate and communication and clear goals helps keep everything smooth. I also learned that the outlining and sketching phase of a planned illustrated work can also be used in writing and worldbuilding to give one the creative freedom to recall and excise elements before committing to any.

Specifically according to Jonathan, using sticky notes to represent individual parts of a story makes this very easy and beneficial. They told me that the familiarity and tactile nature of traditional materials has unique benefits, and can always be combined with more advanced digital methods to save time. Molly, Joaquin, Jonathan, and Scott all said similar things in regards to this point. Finally, they gave me recommendations on materials to use, like Photoshop, and individual digital brush recommendations. The guidance I received from these sources was extremely valuable. Finally, I highlighted three of the most inspirational artists I follow and read. They all demonstrated to varying degrees the values of the clear line illustration style I want to use for my work. The style uses thin lines to create a sense of sleekness and organization that is very beautiful to me. It also leverages the power of color to elicit moods and energy as well as beautifully interacting between shades.

While Herge's work certainly touches on clear line style, it also provided me with reference to a good foundation of panel organizing and showed me how much can be done even with a simple template of rectangles and thin gutters. Again, these concepts were also stated in McClouds writings. What these artists also uniquely provided was a wealth of reference for complex and amazing fantasy character design like that of Gagne as well as worldbuilding, the latter of which was exemplified by the artist Abbadon (or Orbitaldropkick). The use of detailed costumes and color schemes to visually characterize was shown to be very important. Essentially, my research was comprehensive enough to give me guidance in every major part of adapting Ben's short story into a graphic novel.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

Making Comics by Scott McCloud

"Understanding Comics" by Scott McCloud has been very useful for me as I start to navigate the realm of comic creation for the first time. McCloud's exploration of the medium helps guide me, providing practical advice and a general solid foundation for my creative journey. The most important things I learned from this book are as follows. The comic medium provides unique storytelling opportunities. Its combination of words and pictures allows for information to be communicated efficiently. A single panel can describe entire scenes and characters completely, while text can cover sound effects, dialogue, and narration when necessary, and provides a crucial part of characterization through communication. Panels themselves can be used by an artist to add emphasis to something and manipulate how much or little time is spent in a specific part of the story. They also allow the reader to choose how to proceed with reading by moving from one panel to the next at their leisure, an interactive element unique to comics. McCloud also explains how comics are interactive by engaging the reader to mentally fill in the story between panels. In this way, the comic is a story-board for the reader's imagination. The conversational tone of the book has made it more accessible. "Understanding Comics" has been empowering to me, ensuring that my process will be a lot easier and more enjoyable.

# SECONDARY RESEARCH

Understanding Comics
by Scott McCloud

This will be an indispensable toolkit for me getting into comic creation. McCloud takes his time discussing complexities of panel transitions, page layouts, and the interplay between words and images that makes the whole process seem less overwhelming. His comic illustrations themselves to explain these concepts is straightforward and practical, at least for me. What he covered that was most relevant to me were certain parts of the production process. The differences in time between two panels, whether the same moment, scene, or even week define the pacing of the story. He also encourages me to organize my panels in a visually pleasing way for each page, which is engaging for my design background. Low line weight can define the intensity and mood of illustrations, in that heavier and more chaotic lines differ from thinner organic lines. He frames the difference between traditional and digital tools as the control and potential skill of traditional tools one is familiar with versus the utility and speed of digital ones. He encourages artists like myself to experiment and find what ultimately works best for us whether digital or analog. This advice is also seen throughout my primary research interviews. Finally, I appreciated his promotion of color as a powerful tool to define atmosphere, visual identity, and character emotion within the story as well as the more universal aspects of color such as temperature, schemes, and the emotion they elicit from the reader specifically. "Making Comics" is a good companion for me as I start crafting my own comic narrative.

PRIMARY RESEARCH

Professional Interviews

I interviewed three local published comic artists on their process for my primary research. Joaquin Golez, a PSU art student who fortunately had the time to communicate with me during the school year and has finished a graphic novel. Molly Mendoza is a professor at PNCA and illustrator/mural artist who has made ten separate graphic novels. Jonathan Hill is a freelance illustrator who has published four graphic novels. Joaquin and Molly wrote responses to my questions, and Jonathan dictated his answers. I emailed all three of these artists the same set of questions that prompt them to discuss their creative process in relation to writing, illustrating, and working with others. I will use the examples and guidance provided to better plan exactly how I will achieve my graphic novel.

Joaquin and Molly's responses are written below in full, but Jonathan's are abridged. His complete interview response is included at the end of the bibliography.
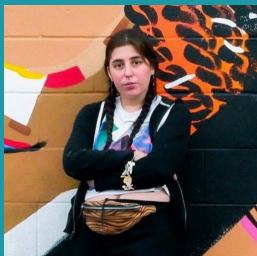
MOLLY MENDOZA
Comic artist, PDX local
www.mollymendoza.com

JONATHAN HILL
Comic artist, PDX local
www.oneofthejohns.com

JOAQUIN GOLEZ
PSU art major and comic artist
@bruisedfroot

JOAQUIN GOLEZ

Abridged interview

WHAT CHANGED ABOUT YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED ILLUSTRATING DIGITALLY AS OPPOSED TO TRADITIONALLY?

"It was awkward and felt impossible, like drawing with the opposite hand. I don't exactly remember when it happened but it eventually became almost completely natural."

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF COLLABORATING WITH OTHER ARTISTS TO CREATE A FINISHED PRODUCT?

"I think that an alignment of at least somewhat similar goals and a shared understanding of what goes into the process(es) may be crucial to synchronized success."

DO YOU EXPRESS YOUR PERSONAL IDENTITY OR EXPERIENCES THROUGH YOUR WORK?

"Yes absolutely, I mean who doesn't? ... I haven't really departed much from the little preteen nerd who was drawing gay anime angels on lined notebook paper."

IF YOU DO, WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU WRITE OR ADAPT WRITING SPECIFICALLY FOR THE GRAPHIC NOVEL FORMAT?

"... simplify both your writing and picture making with the knowledge that each contribution represents a part of a whole."

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROGRAMS AND TOOLS YOU USE TO CREATE YOUR WORK?

"Procreate, Photoshop, notebook, mechanical pencils with very soft lead, manga style ink pens with flexible tips, light table, pinterest and artbooks for inspo."

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE REASONS WHY YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT CREATING SEQUENTIAL ART?

"... illustrated media in general has made a significant emotional impact on me that will forever provoke enough reverence to catalyze my labors and focus"

HOW DO YOU LIKE TO STRUCTURE YOUR PROCESS OF MAKING A GRAPHIC NOVEL?

"Essentially I want to start with a rough storyboard of sorts and a script that's subject to change."

WHAT BRUSHES DO YOU USE? (JUST KIDDING)

"My favorite brush I got from a pack recommended to me by a way more commercially successful illustrator. It's the MaxU Tech Pen from the comics Max pack."

JONATHAN HILL

Abridged interview transcription

WHAT CHANGED ABOUT YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED ILLUSTRATING DIGITALLY AS OPPOSED TO TRADITIONAL-LY?

"Work on a much larger canvas and your mistakes kind of disappear when the piece is shrunk down digitally."

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF COLLABORATING WITH OTHER ARTISTS TO CREATE A FINISHED PRODUCT?

"You can push each other to do better and support each other by splitting the work. But you have to sacrifice your ego a little bit when you step aside to share that creative space."

DO YOU EXPRESS YOUR PERSONAL IDENTITY OR EXPERIENCES THROUGH YOUR WORK?

"Yes, Odessa is a love letter to my brothers and inspired by our families divorce we experienced. Referencing my own life is a great way to create stories that ring true for other people and have heart in them."

IF YOU DO, WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU WRITE OR ADAPT WRITING SPECIFICALLY FOR THE GRAPHIC NOVEL FORMAT?

"I write analog to ensure that I keep all of my thoughts saved before I refine them. I treat different aspects and strategies of writing a story like tools and try to use them to the best of their ability."

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROGRAMS AND TOOLS YOU USE TO CREATE YOUR WORK?

"iPad pro, Clip Studio Paint, a big Cintiq tablet, and Photoshop because of Adobe's color management. Even though I hate the adobe subscription. "

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE REASONS WHY YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT CREATING SEQUENTIAL ART?

"I love telling stories, and I love the intimacy of comics and how they play with time. I like creating for children because comics can inform them of many possibilities in life."

HOW DO YOU LIKE TO STRUCTURE YOUR PROCESS OF MAKING A GRAPHIC NOVEL?

"I ideate with sticky notes, it lets every idea exist and be rearranged and compared. Try everything and find a process that works for you."

WHAT BRUSHES DO YOU USE? (JUST KIDDING)

"I use about five of Rey Frienden's 800 brushes he has made."

MOLLY MENDOZA

Abridged interview

WHAT CHANGED ABOUT YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED ILLUSTRATING DIGITALLY AS OPPOSED TO TRADITIONALLY?

"In the past I only sumi inked my linework and texture then colored that digitally. Now, however, I've had to streamline my process for the sake of turnaround time on projects - especially editorial work. This meant that I'd now do my inkwork and color using Procreate"

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF COLLABORATING WITH OTHER ARTISTS TO CREATE A FINISHED PRODUCT?

" I definitely like working with writers who are good communicators of their ideas - Even if they include rough thumbnails with their scripts it can really make a huge difference in getting their point across. Some challenges are, again, that communication; when it's good it's good and when it's bad it's not great. Asking questions and looking for clarity is a must!"

DO YOU EXPRESS YOUR PERSONAL IDENTITY OR EXPERIENCES THROUGH YOUR WORK?

"I don't want to be too on the nose but the stories I tend to tell with my comics are evocative of personal experiences, emotions, and my gender/sexuality. They're not always at the forefront but they are certainly interwoven into the visual language, character designs, and even specific moments in the comics themselves."

IF YOU DO, WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU WRITE OR ADAPT WRITING SPECIFICALLY FOR THE GRAPHIC NOVEL FORMAT?

"Some of the knowledge that they imparted to me was outlining the story into distinct chunks and slowly building out scenes and dialogue from those chunks."

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROGRAMS AND TOOLS YOU USE TO CREATE YOUR WORK?

"Currently I work with sumi ink, procreate, and an Ipad pro."

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE REASONS WHY YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT CREATING SEQUENTIAL ART?

"Comics are also the manga I read as a kid that inspired me and moved me again and again - I can't not want to give back to that which made me who I am now and hopefully inspire others to make comics of their own and share them with others."

HOW DO YOU LIKE TO STRUCTURE YOUR PROCESS OF MAKING A GRAPHIC NOVEL?

"But one thing that did carry over to the comics I make now is to have multiple pages open at once so I can directly impact page turns, compositional balance, and the color story from page to page. I'm very interested in how comics tell a story from page to page but also visually evolve."

WHAT BRUSHES DO YOU USE? (JUST KIDDING)

"Haha I actually use Max Pack brushes!"

VISUAL RESEARCH

Comic and freelance artists

I studied three artists for paneling and general comic creation, worldbuilding and concept art, and general style in terms of adaptability respectively. Herge, a famous Belgian comic artist, has created Tintin comics whos volumes are all compilations of weekly one page spreads that were planned to fit together into a larger story. John Gagne is a freelance illustrator that I follow on social media. His style has simple line art and values, focusing on unique color combinations. Finally I have taken inspiration from the artists "Abbadon" or "Orbitaldropkick" on social media. He is an illustrator and concept artist with an active web and published comic series and does extensive worldbuilding for custom roleplaying campaigns available online. His concepting and world building capabilities are inspiring.
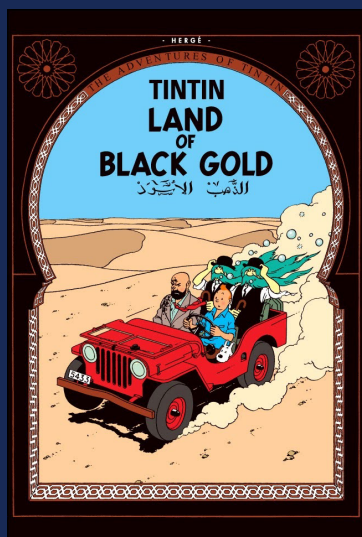
HERGE

composition

ABBADON

worldbuilding

character design

JOHN GAGNE

color

character design

HERGE

Herge is one of the pioneers of the "ligne-claire" or clear line illustration styles that focuses on thin lines, simple values, and expressive colors. However, for my thesis I primarily research his paneling because it was employed to be released one page at a time and then adapted into a single volume, the same way I plan to release my comic. I possess physical copies of all of his work, including his earliest and most flagrantly racist comics but those are for an entirely different research project, most likely a different major as well. Anyway, my favorite book of his is "Flight 714 to Sydney" so I reread it. These images are of my own copy I used for research.

ABBADON

I wish this artist's identity was more public so I could credit and expand on his work more, but he remains named only by his twitter handle and author persona on his comic's website. He is likely the most adept character designer and worldbuilder I have ever seen even across the internet with its near limitless visual content. He consistently releases new character illustrations for his comic, role playing games, and for fun on social media. A good example of his character and worldbuilding capabilities is the latest page released for his comic as of this writing. The illustration is not only well framed and colored, but has an immense variety of costuming for each background character. Studying even a single figure in any of his panels is invaluable to me. For example, the servers in the closer half of this panel all share the same uniform, but each have the face of a different kind of creature. Inversely the background characters everywhere else are mostly muted with earth tones but the detail of each person's clothes is meticulously illustrated. The perspective is advanced and the space of the market is correctly laid out three dimensionally. There is a wealth of knowledge for me when it comes to all of these aspects of worldbuilding in Abbadon's work because all of his illustrations share this level of detail.

GAGNE

John Gagne is inspirational to me in terms of color. I believe him to be a modern ligne-claire artist. Gagne uses vibrant colors within simple lineart with minimal shading. His compositions themselves are also reminiscent of the illustrations of Giraud, another one of the previous centuries ligne claire pioneers. In this composition, the green shades of the massive sky and clouds ensure a calm mood, and the cold tones of the central figure and horse strongly contrast with the warm cliff they stand upon. This is an especially developed piece, so there is a noticeable development of texture and values but it is still minimal compared to digital paintings in general. The work is also heavily stylized and seeped in fantasy and surreal imagery, again reflective of the ligne claire style and a consideration of mine when I develop the visual identity of my stories world.

AUDIENCE

SCI-FI & FANTASY READERS

Dinner upstairs can offer a more visually engaging format for their chosen genre.

COMIC & MANGA READERS

As well as animation fans. These are my primary audience and will be the most familiar with the project.

SCI-FI AND FANTASY MOVIE FANS

Dinner Upstairs is a way to enjoy a sci-fi story at their own pace and in a potentially more stylized way.

OTHER PEOPLE

Those unfamiliar but interested in the genre or medium, Dinner Upstairs will be an approachable graphic novel.

GOALS

- Commentary on weapons of mass destruction
- Commentary on class warfare
- Commentary on xenophobia
- Well developed characters and story
- Unique style and color use
- Unique character and environment design
- Some solid worldbuilding from Ben
- Physical printed work
- Online documentation
- Establish a process for professional illustration work in the future

OUTCOMES

The outcome of this project will be a serialized comic that will be compiled into a single graphic novel when it is finished. It's issues will be printed as a traditional comic, so it will be on comic stock and will include a few early 2000 era advertisements for immersion. It will be displayed online as a webcomic with a page viewing feature that is common to the medium. It may even get listed on that one webcomic library website. When it is compiled it will be printed paperback on a larger page size. Many copies will be printed and distributed to some people.

TIMELINE

Week 1: Adaption: Working with Ben to make the story right for a graphic format

Week 2: Design: Developing the identities of the world and characters

Week 3: Paneling: Laying out the format of the comic

Week 4: Storyboarding: Thumbnailing everything

Week 5: Sketching

Week 6: Sketching

Week 7: Sketching

Week 8: Inking

Week 9: Coloring

Week 10: Finalizing: Page layout, cover, printing, publishing

Annotated Bibliography

McCloud, S. (1994). Understanding Comics. William Morrow Paperbacks. McCloud, Scott, 1960- author. (2006). Making comics : storytelling secrets of comics, manga and graphic novels. New York :Harper,

"Understanding Comics" by Scott McCloud is a very insightful guide to understanding some of the more vague aspects of comics. McCloud, employing a comic format himself, clarifies these complexities, looks into their history, cultural significance, and the fundamental elements of the art form. The narrative unfolds in a comedic conversational tone, making it accessible to both beginners like myself. McCloud also covers the specifics of comics, from panel transitions and page layouts to the dynamic interplay between words and images. Specifically, how one can make up for the other in different ways. Beyond these technicalities, he also explores the psychological and emotional aspects of visual storytelling, explaining how much artistic choices impact reader engagement. By dissecting various styles and genres within the comic medium, He provides an overview emphasizing the versatility and richness of the art form. "Understanding Comics" is a deep exploration that helps to equip the reader with the tools to appreciate and analyze the nuances of this unique form of expression.

"Understanding Comics" by Scott McCloud has been very useful for me as I start to navigate the realm of comic creation for the first time. McCloud's exploration of the medium helps guide me, providing practical advice and a general solid foundation for my creative journey. The most important things I learned from this book are as follows. The comic medium provides unique storytelling opportunities. Its combination of words and pictures allows for information to be communicated efficiently. A single panel can describe entire scenes and characters completely, while text can cover sound effects, dialogue, and narration when neces-

sary, and provides a crucial part of characterization through communication. Panels themselves can be used by an artist to add emphasis to something and manipulate how much or little time is spent in a specific part of the story. They also allow the reader to choose how to proceed with reading by moving from one panel to the next at their leisure, an interactive element unique to comics. McCloud also explains how comics are interactive by engaging the reader to mentally fill in the story between panels. In this way, the comic is a storyboard for the reader's imagination. The conversational tone of the book has made it more accessible. "Understanding Comics" has been empowering to me, ensuring that my process will be a lot easier and more enjoyable.

McCloud, S. (2006). Making comics: Storytelling secrets of comics, manga and graphic novels. New York.

"Making Comics" by Scott McCloud offers a solid exploration into the world of comic production in turn. Because it is again written in a conversational tone, his approach is still just as accessible, making the book very useful for me as I get started on this project. It breaks down some of the fundamental elements of the creation process, like panel transitions and page layout as well as the psychological impact of specific artistic choices. McCloud employs his own comic-style illustrations to explain these complex concepts, which is impressive and makes the book very interesting. What I also like is its attention to both technical and creative dimensions. McCloud briefly examines the philosophical aspects of comics, like the power of symbols, the role of time in storytelling and its relation to the reader, and the potential for comics to be a deeply personal and expressive art form. "Making Comics" also encompasses a diverse range of styles and genres and helps explain how different techniques can work together to contribute to the overall narrative effect. He provides very good advice, theoretical exploration, and a lot of knowledge that enriches my understanding of the magic behind visual storytelling.

This will be an indispensable toolkit for me getting into comic creation. McCloud takes his time discussing complexities of panel transitions, page layouts, and the interplay between words and images that makes the whole process seem less overwhelming. His comic illustrations themselves to explain these concepts is straightforward and practical, at least for me. What he covered that was most relevant to me were certain parts of the production process. The differences in time between two panels, whether the same moment, scene, or even week define the pacing of the story. He also encourages me to organize my panels in a visually pleasing way for each page, which is engaging for my design background. Low line weight can define the intensity and mood of illustrations, in that heavier and more chaotic lines differ from thinner organic lines. He frames the difference between traditional and digital tools as the control and potential skill of traditional tools one is familiar with versus the utility and speed of digital ones. He encourages artists like myself to experiment and find what ultimately works best for us whether digital or analog. This advice is also seen throughout my primary research interviews. Finally, I appreciated his promotion of color as a powerful tool to define atmosphere, visual identity, and character emotion within the story as well as the more universal aspects of color such as temperature, schemes, and the emotion they elicit from the reader specifically. "Making Comics" is a good companion for me as I start crafting my own comic narrative.

Golez, J. (2023, December 3). Personal communication [e-mail interview].

Hill, J. (2023, December 4). Personal communication [recorded response].

Mendoza, M. (2023, December 10). Personal communication [e-mail interview].

Mccloud, S. (2006). Making comics : storytelling secrets of comics, manga and graphic novels. Harper.

McCloud, S. (1993). Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art. HarperCollins Publishers.

THANK YOU