



Image by Patrick Yurick from Hipster Picnic ([hipstropicnic.com](http://hipstropicnic.com))

## Digital Coloring For Comics - GIMP Edition

By Patrick Yurick 12.18.2013

I still remember the awe that I was struck by when I first superimposed text, with effects, on top of a picture I downloaded from the internet. I was using an illegally pirated version of Adobe Photoshop 3.0 in my high school art room's brand new Gateway computer. I was completely filled with obsession after that point. I could finally make my own digital art for the work that I was producing and I was the only person I knew that could do that. I became so obsessed with the program after that, that by the time I was 18 I was co-teaching the digital arts class in my high school.

So much has happened since 1999. Now everyone I know knows how to do what I could do then. My mother knows how to place text within an image and I routinely see 8 year olds posting their digital creations on the web.

In my time as a ninth grade high school art teacher I have worked with hundreds of students to learn to create designs within computers. Everything has radically changed. Students learn faster and more universally the things I learned by myself in the corner of that art room.

One thing hasn't changed though, the only way for the students in high school to become proficient at Adobe Photoshop is to steal it like I had a decade earlier. This is world where knowing how to graphically manipulate imagery on some level is the ability that can separate you from a career in the arts. So why not have the industry standard, i.e. Photoshop, be for free for students? Heck, why isn't it free for everyone? Adobe would try and give you the line about dynamic improvements needing funding, or something along those lines. The truth of the matter is that Adobe Photoshop built its infrastructure on quality programming and a sales model over 20 years ago and now it would have a hard time adapting to becoming a universal and free program for all.

I taught to it as well. Routinely I try to give my students homework so that they could master the digital arts, and routinely they would return to me empty handed due to inability of access to the Adobe programs.

By the end of 2011 I was fed up and I vowed to teach and produce my own artwork in free and open source programs. I spent the year of 2012 working almost completely in [GIMP](http://www.gimp.org/) to digitally color and produce my own comics. In fact if you go to the webcomic I was producing at the time, [American BOOOM](http://www.americanboom.com/), and read the first 16 pages you will see the capabilities of digital coloring in the GIMP atmosphere. GIMP is extremely versatile and quick to learn. It has many of

the same capabilities as that of its proprietary cousin, Adobe Photoshop, and on top of it all the program is free.



An example of Digital Coloring in GIMP from "[American BOOOM](#)" by Patrick Yurick and Alonso Nunez

My year of digitally coloring in GIMP during 2012 was extremely difficult, but not because of the program of GIMP. It was difficult because I had been a Adobe Photoshop user since the age of 16. I first started bumbling my way around the program back when it was in 3.0 and the only way to procure a copy was to illegally install it. GIMP had a whole different set of quick keys and user interface that made it new to me. Teaching to it helped, and I learned a lot along the way.

## Why Digital Coloring in GIMP vs. Photoshop?

The digital coloring game has changed so rapidly and become so expansive that a comic is marked by its ability to appear to have an original style of coloring to it. From "[Darwin Carmichael is Going to Hell](#)" to "[Romantically Apocalyptic](#)" to the print stylings of [Justin Ponsor](#) the digital coloring game has become an art form to be reckoned with.

But we all start off in the digital coloring game somewhere and that is exactly where GIMP fits into the equation. Three years ago I taught a project call the "[Comic Project](#)" with my then colleague, now wife, Kay Flewelling.



Art by Drew M. Age 14, from the [Comic Project](#) taught by Patrick Yurick and Kay Flewelling

This project is an example of what I would designate as being perfect at taking a student with little to no understanding of how to tell a story and giving them inexpensive tools, equipment, time, and nurturing to move them to being

storytellers. My one regret from the the project was, that in the image above, Drew colored the comic in Photoshop. If she had colored the image in GIMP than the entire project would have been created with all aspects of it being available to anyone in the world.

When the [One Laptop Per Child](#) computers get distributed to developing countries they do not have Photoshop on them, they have GIMP. Programs like GIMP, that are free and open source, were created by people, like the Making Comics team, that want to see universal access and equality given to all people. GIMPs intentions far outweigh it's determinants.

When it comes to coloring comics, programs like GIMP have humanitarian goals in mind of providing universal access. As a teacher I know that teaching to GIMP is more in lines with my values towards wanting equitable access to knowledge for my students.

## Why did you switch back to Photoshop?

I am now back to using Photoshop, mostly because I learned about the vast differences between the two and I also learned that I am what I would call an "advanced user".

Here are my classifications of comic colorists by ability levels:

- **Beginner** - The Beginner has never really done anything artistic with a computer. They may have drawn a bit on paper, but hasn't ever really opened a graphics program before. They would like to get to be able to color their comics at some point, but don't expect to get their quickly. This tutorial series is perfect for the Beginner.
- **Intermediate** - The Intermediate is producing more and more of their own work. They find themselves knowing how to color in programs like GIMP and Photoshop, but there are still problems with their work. Their digitally colored comic panels lack depth, shading, and sometimes has white specks that show up in the final work. The Intermediate user is going to understand about 90% of this tutorial, but it is recommended that they go back and refresh on all of the steps whether in Photoshop or GIMP, and look through all of the steps. That last 10% is vital.
- **Advanced** - The advanced user is at a point where everything in this tutorial series is completely intuitive. They can color a comic page with solid colors in under 45 minutes, but need something more than basics to get around. GIMP worked for the beginning stages of their practice in coloring, but there was a definite ceiling. GIMP is frustrating for the advanced user because GIMP cannot do all of the things necessary to be able to have the colors like a pro.



**Beginner**



**Intermediate**



**Advanced**

“Head Comics” 2001, “Hipster Picnic” 2010, & “Evergreen” 2013. All by [Patrick Yurick](#)

## Why use these precise tutorials?

These tutorials have been created to cover the basics of digital comic coloring. The steps, and logic behind the steps, are something that someone could use across a number of digital photo manipulation softwares like Photoshop, Aviary, GIMP etc. They have been laid out for the beginning steps of work on comic coloring for flat art work.

## What do I need to be able to start the tutorials?

Materials you will need for digital coloring comics the open source way are:

- A computer that is running:
- - Windows XP (or higher)
- - **Linux** (don't know versions of this as well, but all are free and open source which means I will have comic related tutorials out for them in the future)
- - (ugh) Mac OSX (or higher)

**GIMP 2.8**- So there are other [free and open source alternatives](#) to Adobe Photoshop, but I prefer this one. All of my tutorials that are about coloring will be using GIMP directly. It is fun. It does almost everything photoshop does. I have been working on photoshop for almost 14 years and I have made the switch in the past 2 years over to GIMP. I am trying to do so in all aspects of my practice. Adobe sucks ONLY because it is part of the old model of keeping access only available for the upper class citizens. The wave of the future/now of all industries, especially education, is [crowdsourcing](#) and [opensourcing](#).

## The Tutorials



### [Digital Coloring For Comics - GIMP Edition Part 1](#)

This tutorial will instruct you on how to scan and save your comic book illustrations in order to use them with the GIMP Digital Coloring tutorials.



## [Digital Coloring For Comics - GIMP Edition Part 2](#)

This tutorial is designed to help get your scanned art files, which should be full of greys and multiple pencil/eraser marks, to the point where you have an art file that is pristinely black and white only (which is what you will color on)



## [Digital Coloring For Comics - GIMP Edition Part 3](#)

This tutorial will instruct you on how to color lineart made from scans within GIMP 2.8

<http://www.makingcomics.com/2014/01/25/digital-coloring-gimp-tutorial-part-1>  
<http://www.makingcomics.com/2014/01/25/digital-coloring-gimp-tutorial-part-2>  
<http://www.makingcomics.com/2014/01/25/digital-coloring-gimp-tutorial-part-3>  
<http://www.makingcomics.com/2014/01/25/digital-coloring-comics-gimp-edition>

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