

Front: Poser 11 Comic Book render of FoRender's OV, Photoshop filtered.

VIS NEWS

Visual Narratives Academy Newsletter



No. 16

JANUARY 2021

COMICS • GRAPHIC NOVELS • ART-NOVELS • PICTURE-BOOKS • CARD GAMES • INTERACTIVE



Visual Narratives Academy

Online:

<https://digitalartlive.com/plans/visual-narratives-academy/>

Membership area:

<https://digitalartlive.com/visual-narratives-academy-standard/>

PAST ISSUES OF DIGITAL ART LIVE:

Our main *Digital Art Live* magazine has the following special issues and reviews, likely to be useful for comic makers:

Jan 2016: In-depth Poser 11 software review.

Nov 2016: Ugee 1910b pen tablet review.

May 2017: Sci-fi comics special issue.

Sept 2017: 'Public domain' characters survey article.

August 2019: Digital comics issue.

November 2019: Crossdresser software (easy Poser clothing conversion between figures).

September 2020: Review of the PzDB Poser Library replacement.

WELCOME to issue number sixteen of your monthly members' publication. It's another well-researched and information-packed issue and we hope you find it useful.

This month we're pleased to welcome for interview our fellow Brit Mark Innes, who has recently completed several imaginative graphic novels using DAZ Studio.

Digital Art Live is having monthly Visual Narratives Academy events online. Please tell your creative friends about this new Academy and send them a Web link!

DAVID HADEN

Editor of your VisNews newsletter
david@digitalartlive.com



MARKET TRENDS

WHO READS U.S. COMICS?

A journal article titled "The economics of the modern American comic book market" (*Journal of Cultural Economics* in December 2019) offers some considered statistics and insight into audiences in the U.S. comics market. To 2018 the industry had a "constant and limited consumer base" who had a relatively fixed monthly budget for buying monthly comics. Mostly in print, because that enshrines their much-enjoyed continuity (i.e. publishers can't tinker with storylines or characters, many years later). But surprisingly... "there has been no formal academic study of the comic book consumer demographic, and informal attempts to do so have been subject to sharp criticism". However the authors note the head of DC Comics remarking that their audience was "13-30 and largely male". Paid third-party adverts in comics were scrutinised and were found to reflect this, being focussed largely on "automobiles and credit cards", "candy bars and shaving products" plus videogames. Suprisingly, it was found that sale of "ad space is a vital revenue component to comic sales" and the "lackluster promotion of digital comics, which include no advertisements, is mostly due to the lack of ad revenue." On sales levels, the authors found strong seasonality... "Total sales within the market seem to decrease at the start of the Autumn [Fall] and continue to be low until the start of Spring." This probably reflects the influx of groups of young boys into U.S. comic stores in the warm months. On the influence of movies, "no statistically significant result" was found between movie releases and comics sales, and even blockbuster superhero movies... "do not have any great effect on increasing long-term readership of monthly comic book titles". Nor did publisher promotions have much impact... "special events, reboots and comic-based movies [tie-in] sales were shown to have little to no effect on single-issue comic sales".

HERE WE HAVE market and other key news, for now. But we hope to add a column in future with news of products made by members of the Visual Narratives Academy!

POSER 12 — ANY DAY NOW!

As I write it's likely that Poser 12 will ship for Windows and Mac in about two weeks from now, before Christmas 2012. What do we know? Firstly we should get the OS tedium out of the way. While billed as "Windows 10", Poser 12 also runs fine on Windows 7 and 8. Poser 12 also runs fine on the latest Mac OS 'Big Sur'. We also know it will run alongside an install of Poser 11 quite happily. There has been an 'Early Access' of 12 version available, but that is almost entirely a photoreal preview version. This preview has at least confirmed that the real-time Comic Book mode and Sketch rendering are still in Poser 12 and that they work as before. Key third-party content libraries will continue to work — P3DO Organizer has been fixed, and PzDB needs no fix. Many older PoserPython script-based addons will however be broken by the move to Python 3. What of the real-time comics rendering? Renderosity's trailer page for the Poser 12 Early Access webinar with Digital Art Live had mentioned... "new Geometric Edge Lines for Comic mode" — but regrettably these apparent changes were not shown or mentioned, and nothing more has been heard of them since. That's all we know at present!

NEWS!

Software: Clip Studio gets .ABR

Clip Studio is finally to get the ability to import **Photoshop .ABR format brushes**, though they may not work in the same way as in Photoshop. Import is set for the next release, 1.10.5, but only users of the expensive EX will be able to adjust and fix the .ABR brushes.

Mac issues: the 'Big Sur' OS update

Comic Life 3 and Poser 11 and Poser 12 have all survived the new and troubled Mac OS 'Big Sur' release. But **DAZ Studio** and **Vue** are both kaput until summer 2021, and any repairs are apparently likely to break many trusty plugins. Older versions of DAZ are also affected.

Paid 3D: Universal Anime Head

HiveWire has a big closing-down sale until New Year 2021. Look out for the \$11 **Universal Anime Head for Poser**, and a Chibi version. They're moving their content to Renderosity.

<https://hivewire3d.com/>

Software: GigaPixel AI 5.3

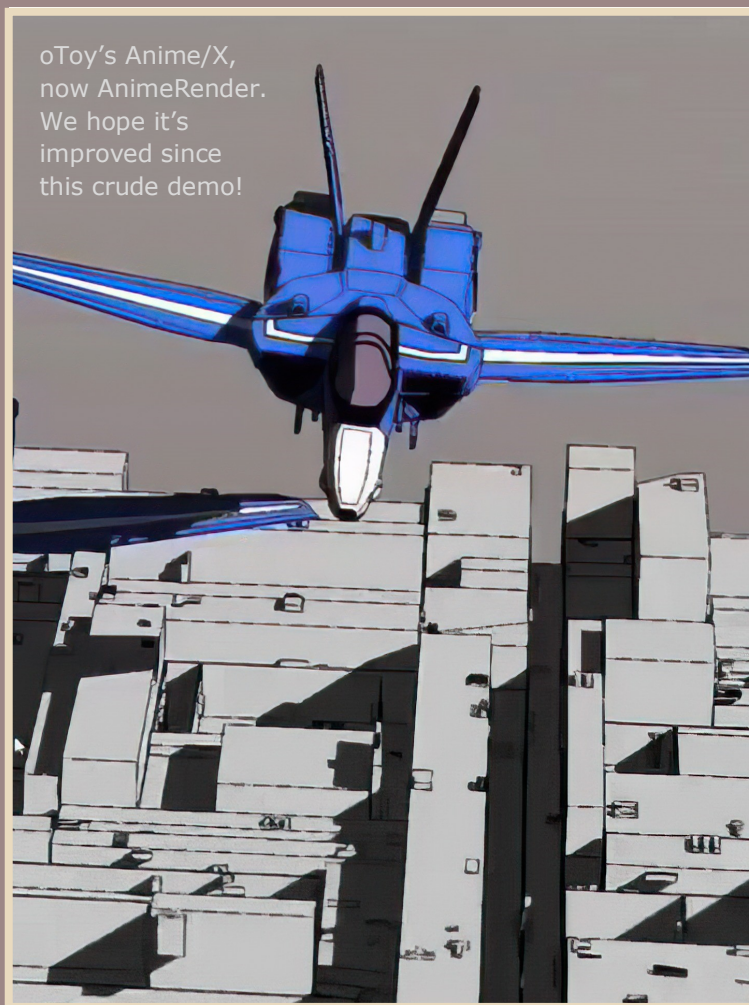
The excellent \$100 up-scaling software GigaPixel AI has recently added a new 'Art mode' — said to be "best for CGI imagery, paintings and drawings, and graphic design".

<https://hivewire3d.com/>

Free software: BdNF 1.5 released

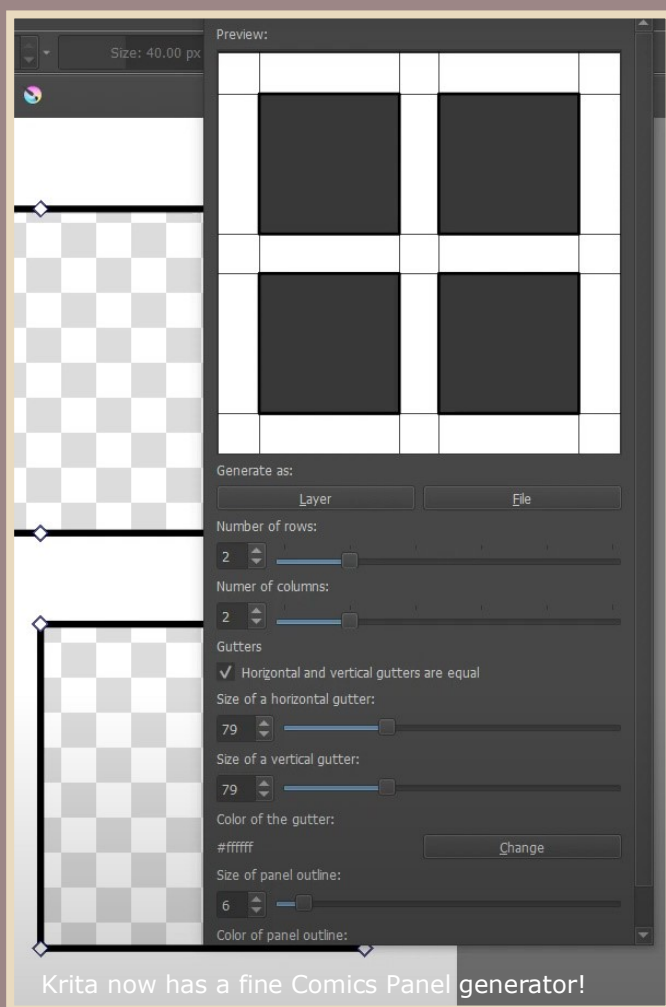
Readers will recall that *VisNews* recently had an interview with the makers of the French comic making software BdNF. This free software is now at version 1.5 and has added a **new Linux version**. There are also speech-bubble workflow speed-ups, the ability to load your own image-bank, and a clearer export module. The big drawback is it runs on the game-engine Unity and final renders are fuzzy.

https://bdnf.bnf.fr/EN/version_history.html



Engines: ProRender 3 / Octane 2021

Two major render-engines are sniffing around NPR/toon rendering. Sadly neither have current demo renders available. Graphics card maker AMD is pushing its new free **ProRender 3**, which is photoreal but said to also have "a new contour rendering option for non-photorealistic renders" from 3D. However, that's rather moot since most hobbyists are NVIDIA users and thus don't have an advanced ray-tracing AMD card such as the new Radeon RX 6000. ProRender 3 may, however, be of interest to those who only use Blender, and there is a free plugin for using it with Blender 2.9x. oToy has also announced that OctaneRender 2021 could introduce Octane's long-awaited **AnimeRender** feature, under development since 2018 as 'Anime/X'. OctaneRender 2021 recently entered a closed beta, and should come to DAZ Studio and Poser 12 (via new plugin) in 2021. However, note also that Octane is now a subscription service, and AnimeRender seems unlikely to be offered in the free tier in either DAZ Studio or Poser.



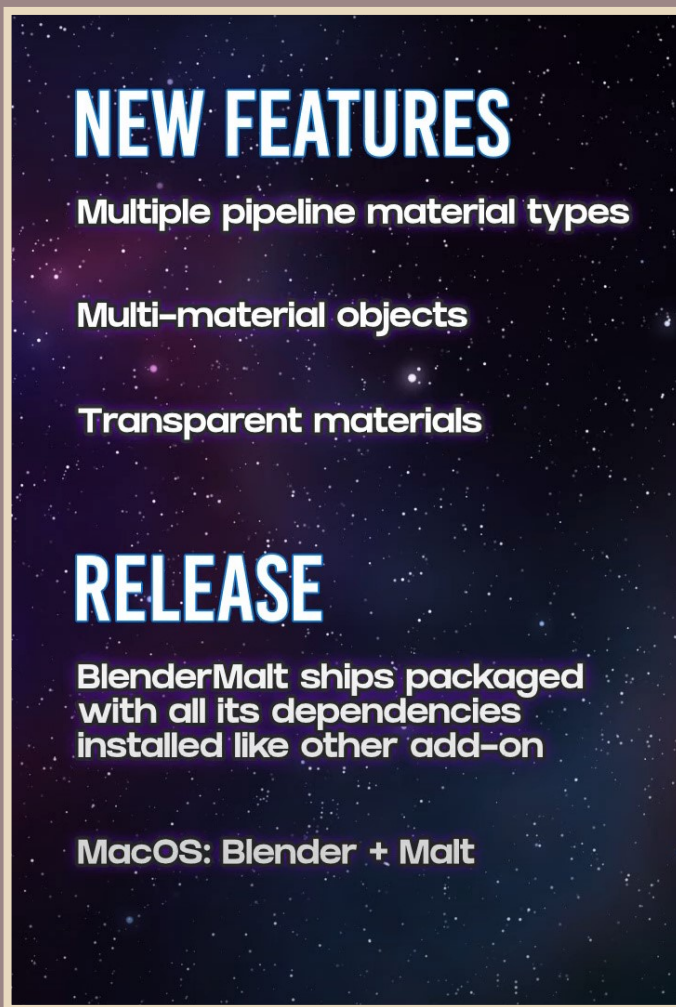
Software: Krita for comics

While the UI elements and odd naming conventions of the free open-source **Krita** are difficult to love, it is increasingly attracting developers of useful addons and plugins.

Summer 2020 saw the release of the powerful-but-easy **Comic Panel Generator** docker for Krita 4; the **Newspaper** plugin for applying half-tones and zip-tones to an image; and there was also a better-publicised **Charcoals** brush set — which compliments the improved watercolour features of the official Krita 4 release.

The next Krita will have Tools that “will now remember their settings” via **named saved presets**, along with the long-awaited **Storyboarding module** for animation.

https://github.com/rogudator/rogudators_comic_panel_generator and <https://krita-artists.org/t/newspaper-plugin-for-halftoning/6269> and <https://files.kde.org/krita/extras/charcoal/>



Software: Blender BEER/MALT

Blender 2.9.1 is now out, and sadly it leaves behind many AMD graphics card users. Blender now simply refuses to launch if your GPU is not deemed worthy. The GreasePencil changes, mentioned in previous issues of *VisNews*, are now official.

The big Blender news this month is the completion of development work on the free **BlenderMalt NPR plugin**. They’ve now completed their long cycle of development have have reached MALT v.1.0. Sign in to Github to download a version of Blender with this NPR plugin already set up. Follow the link below, and then you’re looking for: blender-2.90.1-windows64.zip

The next step for BEER/MALT will be to find a savvy interface developer and add a user-friendly layers system. Fundraising for the final stretch will begin in 2021.

<https://blendernpr.org/beer/> and <https://github.com/BlenderNPR/BEER/>



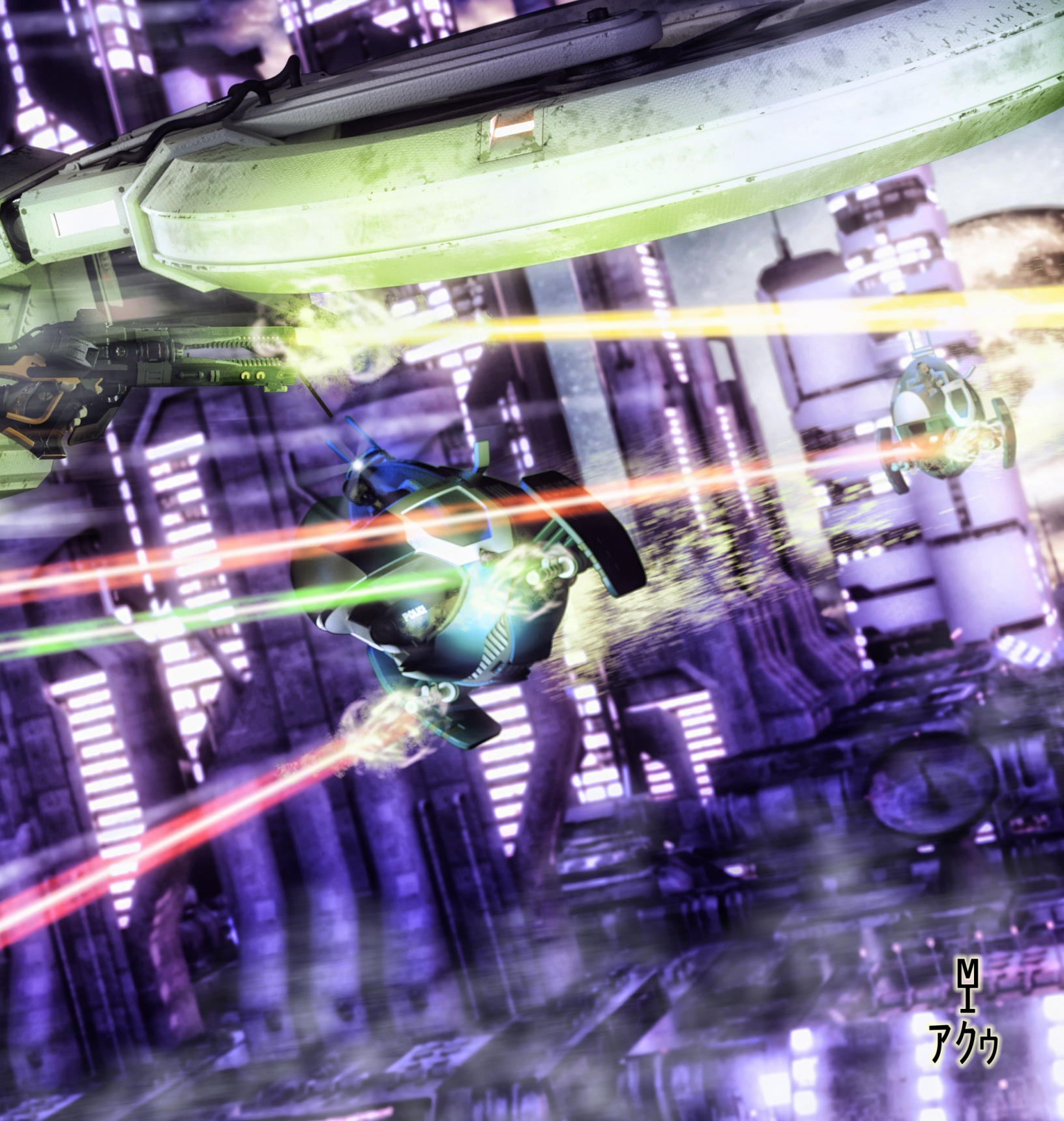
MARK INNES

We're pleased to present an interview with the UK's Mark Innes, on how he uses DAZ Studio to make comics that expand the universe of the game *The Secret World*.

VN: Mark, welcome to the *VisNews* interview. We recently featured your picture "The Hack" on the cover of *Digital Art Live* #52, and also in full in the Gallery of that issue. Then, when we found you had produced a substantial graphic novel or two using DAZ Studio, we thought you'd be a good choice for a *VisNews* interview.

How did you first find DAZ Studio, and why did you seek it out?

MI: Thank you very much for the interview! I'm really glad you've given me the consideration for inclusion in these pages. I will try to answer as best I can, without putting your readers to sleep.



M
アケウ

Yes, I first came across DAZ Studio when I re-started art, after about 18 years of not doing very much of it. It was a gradual progression out of a dark point in my life, I was always pretty decent at art. My grandmother showed me how to draw a 3D Cottage on paper when I was about 4 years old and it "clicked" instantly.

To get to DAZ Studio, I started into Serif's Drawplus X8, then to Adobe Photoshop and at that point I knew nothing about art created with the aid of 3D models and figures. This must have been about seven years ago. Overleaf you see the first Photoshop picture, which took about a month, of pain, to create.

After that I saw the very cheap Poser Debut version on sale, through Serif Software, and I got into Poser for a brief time then I changed over to the free DAZ Studio.

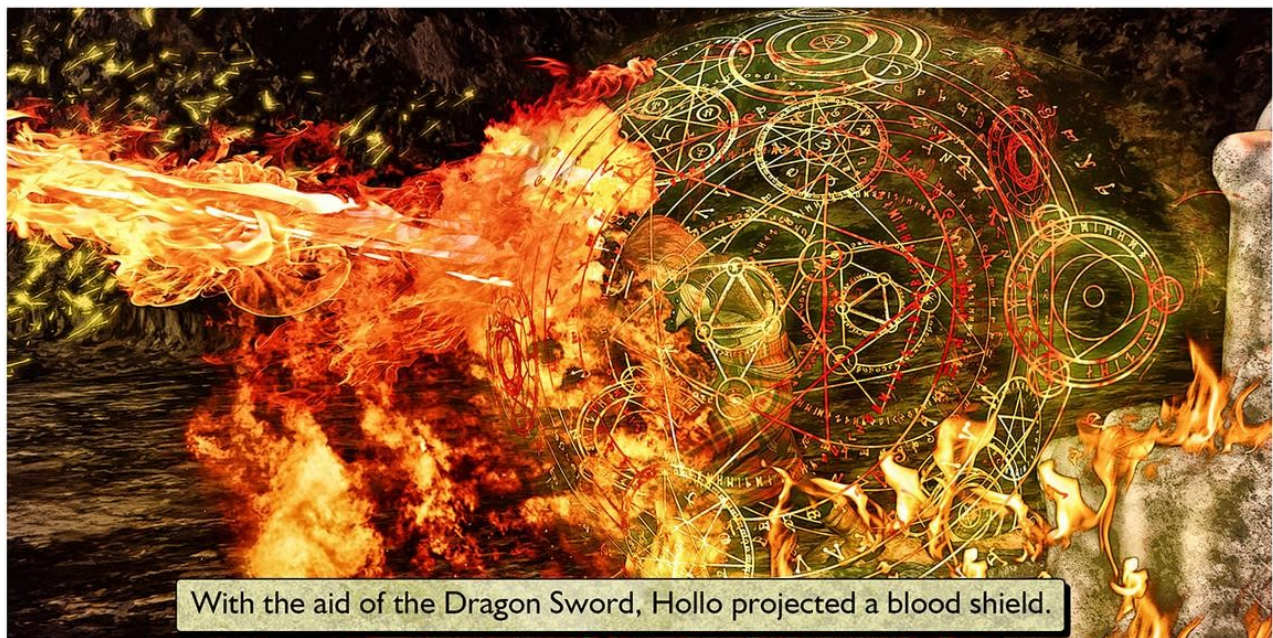
VN: I see. What were the barriers you had to overcome to use it, at that time?

MI: The initial barrier was sheer confusion. The interfaces of both Poser and DAZ were daunting. Coming into Photoshop and Drawplus was the same, but I did learn quickly, and I had the learned patience from these programs. Like, "It won't be bad after the confusion is gone" was a mantra repeated to myself a few times. Lighting in 3D was the main problem I had, also posing and all the sundry issues you have when you work up from the bottom and try to get out of the "uncanny valley" with posed human figures. A very early and basic DAZ render with some Photoshop actions run on it, "I Got a Can Opener!" In which a human faces off against a robot, armed only with a can-opener!

VN: Nice. You mentioned lights. DAZ Studios doesn't have the most intuitive interface in the world, especially for lights and its rendering controls. What learning resources did you find most useful, in getting to grips with it and learning it?

MI: A lot of my "evolution in understanding" was down to watching tutorials and webinars. As for lighting specifically, there were a few packages that I bought and studied. To see the size of the lights, the settings and then a lot of practising, with image after image. This is still very much something I have to figure out better. The BOSS lights and others were early purchases. I got BOSS package a bit later on and it helped a fair bit with understanding of mesh lighting and so on, due to the variety of lights in the package. Tutorials were generally from YouTube and then the two Digital Art Live / Drew Spence *Comic Book* courses were really helpful purchases. I should go back and have a further look at them.





With the aid of the Dragon Sword, Hollo projected a blood shield.



HMMMMMMMMMM
THE BABOON HAS
SOME TALENT!
INCONCEIVABLE!



FRRRRRAARRRR!

I do try a lot, I mean *a lot* of postwork! I feel a bit guilty if I've not added a ton of FX, mostly because I cannot really get that perfect render straight through iRay renders, not yet! A very good postwork tutorial is the webinar *Postwork: Essential Techniques*.

VN: Did you make any hardware upgrades during this time?

MI: Yes, as the years went by I upgraded and fixed my computer better and better for rendering and things went more smoothly.

VN: What was then your first attempt at making a digital comic, and how did it go? Did you just dive in to making a graphic novel, or were there smaller productions first?

MI: The first attempt was the basis of the *Nine Swords Evolutions* novel, named "The Return to Outpost 94". It was based in the game multiverse of *The Secret World*/*Secret World Legends* game, which is produced and sold by Funcom. It was terrible! *Laughter.* The rendering was complex for the machine I had at the time, but mostly it was the layout. Terrible. The processing of the images was not that bad though, looking back at it, I used a lot of layering and used Darkworld's Render Magic Photoshop actions, available at Renderosity. Mostly it was the resolution I rendered at and being "kicked" to the CPU all the time by iRay. I learned to love rendering progress bars!

VN: I see. Was it difficult to research/find and acquire the 3D assets you needed to match the game? As you mentioned, you needed to find content that matched Funcom's *The Secret World* games? Or does your *Secret World Legends* graphic novel move away from game somewhat, and so bypass that need to have content that looks like in-game assets?

MI: As the game *TSW/SWL* is based in the modern day, the assets were reasonably easy to come by. For the Lovecraftian / Cthulhu Mythos monsters I did limit the beasts that I included in the novel. Limiting them to more "ordinary" mythical monsters like dragons and werewolves. The novels were more concentrated on human interactions. I had been buying assets "for a

rainy day" in terms of my cash flow, so I had a fair few by the point when I attempted "The Return to Outpost 94". Sixus1 has a few great Lovecraft/Derleth Mythos figures over on Renderosity, I just did not need them for the first few novels.

VN: Right. And you do all the work on your comics, writing as well as art and lettering, FX?

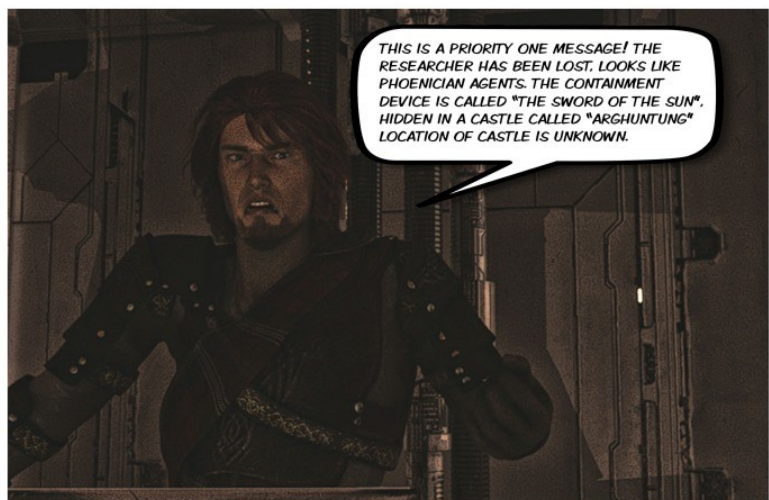
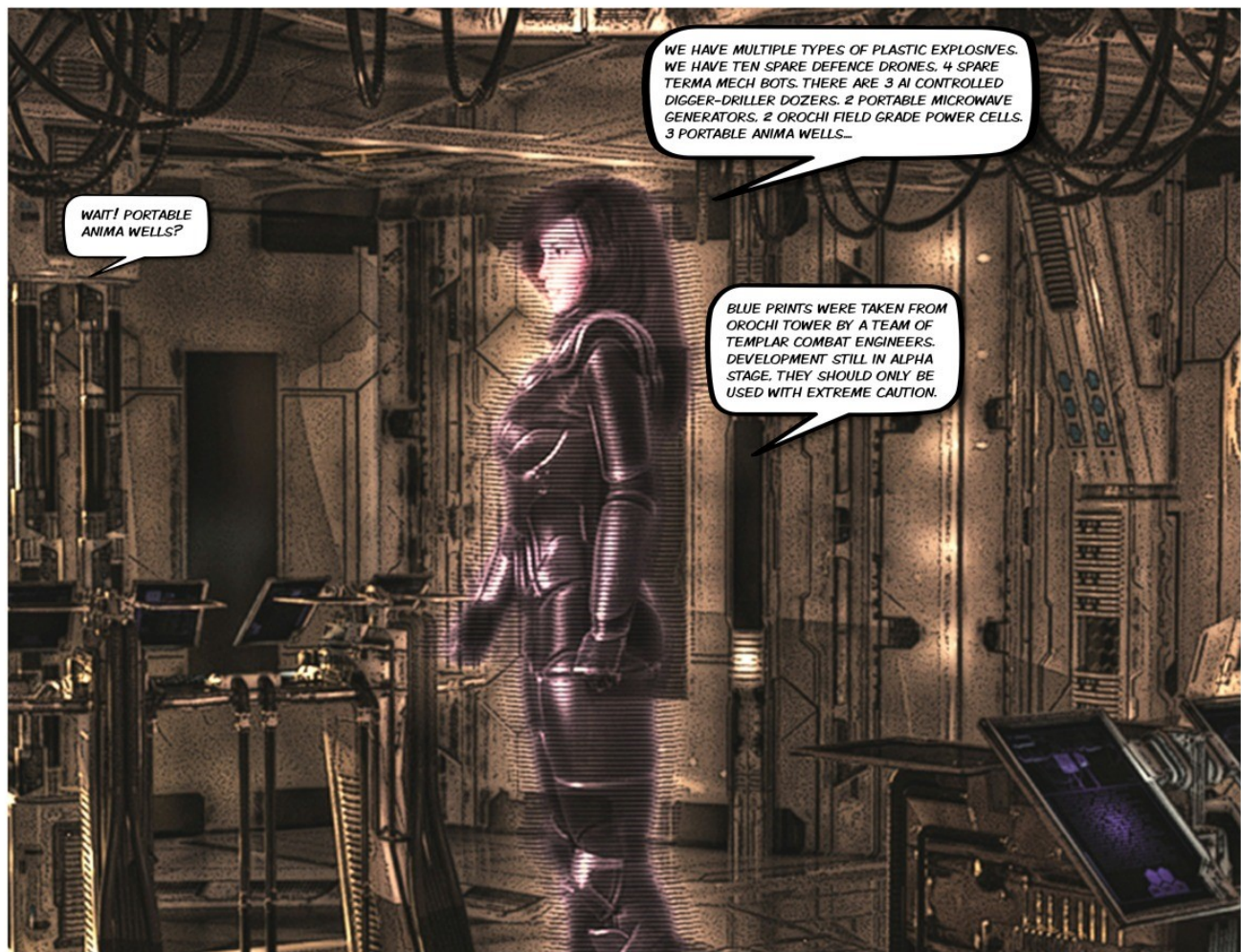
MI: I created everything in each of the novels by myself, although I did a fair bit of looking for free fonts that were in the comic book style. The major hurdles were the format and layout of each novel. The progression from the first attempt at "Outpost 94" to the 2018 update was massive. I still have to update the "Outpost 94" 2018 version, the information and dialogue boxes, mostly the size of the font for ease of viewing, all that needs to be fixed. This novel was also written with the reader having a knowledge of the games, so I'd need to add a fair bit of detail on the "Soldiers of Gaia" and the general workings of the universe. Layout is something I'm shying away from admittedly. Being able to get across the scenes better through the panelling is definitely something that will be an evolution.

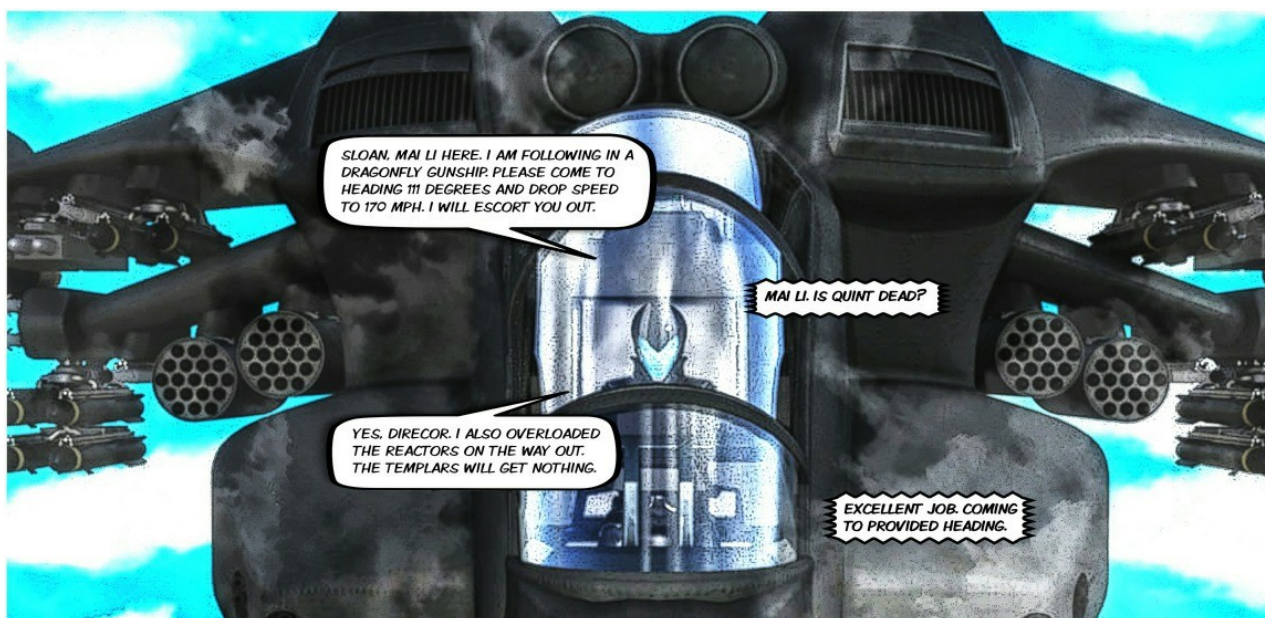
VN: Your graphic novel *Nine Swords Evolutions* was released a few months back, complete, at <https://www.deviantart.com/iceneuro/gallery/74990572/nine-swords-evolutions> What sort of feedback have you had?

MI: Everyone was very appreciative of the work done, my current "Cabal" or "Guild" were very pleased. General feedback has been very good. As it was the third novel in the series, although back in time slightly to the transition from "The Secret World" into "Secret World Legends". Funcom had decided to reboot the game and wipe everyone's progression...

VN: Ouch.

MI: ... so I set the graphic novel's story to explain what happened to the player's characters, the massive fight at the end with the Death Dragon "Shaiunshulu" I wrote into being a causality/anima shockwave which "transformed the universes into each other".







This might seem a bit metaphysical but, I've been reading Michael Moorcock books since I was seven years old.

VN: Ah yes, the *Jerry Cornelius* books.

MI: The game then basically stalled in terms of development...

VN: I'm not surprised, if they wiped everyone's hard-won characters...

MI: ... and that means that people are hungry for anything new that comes along, be it general role play storylines or the *Unofficial Legends* books by Blodwedd Mallory, which I did the covers for. Shameless plug for Blodwedd there! <https://blodweddmallory.com/>

I mentioned three novels, the progression was "The Return to Outpost 94" then onto the *Secret World Legends* based book "A Helluva Point", which is a revenge novel based on the character HolloPoint, the same as "Outpost 94". Then came "Nine Swords Evolutions" which is the polished result of the learning from previous novels. I have a fair amount of updating to do!

VN: Great. On the technical side of things, you render out in DAZ and then assemble in Photoshop. Do you always render as completed scenes, or do you render in layers — backplate, vehicles/props, character 1, character 2, shadows, atmospherics and FX — and then composite and arrange these in Photoshop?

MI: I render the whole scene, as much as I can... so that shadows are properly placed. This can be difficult in larger scenes with multiple characters. With such complex scenes, removing some characters that don't directly affect the area shadows to avoid going to the CPU and then spot rendering. I render — as masks — each prop/item/figure when and where I need to, for the fogging and mist effects mostly. I combine everything in Photoshop and post process when I'm happy.

VN: Creating a comic can be quite time-consuming if the workflow it's nailed down right. Is speed important for you? And if so, how do you achieve it?

MI: I do have time on my hands. All this is effectively training for a better job perhaps, so quality is the main focus. The novels are really fan-fiction but, there is nothing wrong with that if they are given focus to the story progressing based on the game setting. The great multiverse of *SWL* is a joy to work in. The story is fantastic in the game. The experience from the first two novels was massive and helped greatly when it came to "Nine Swords Evolutions".

Workflow, grouping figures and setting up the scenes as well as understanding of the capabilities of iRay and DAZ Studio has come a long way in five years. Five years? Gone by in a flash! — of render progress bars! The main problem is the scenes can become very large, and if one is deleting geometry then after a while the scene slows to a crawl inside of DAZ. With "Evolutions" I had scenes with 15 - 20 figures I think. Deleting one figure would be next to impossible. The figures were of course set to lowest render quality and subdivision. This did not make much of a difference to the overall look.

VN: Right. Sounds like you need the Decimator and Scene Optimizer plugins, although they are quite costly these days. What other ways have you found to improve the creation process? I'd imagine you have a *very* fast graphics card, for instance? And fast render presets?

MI: My computer setup has evolved to a huge extent. I was on a NVIDIA 960 graphic card to start with. This was ok for the learning process, and of course it was a limit of the time. I've gone through a lot of learning of hardware, aided by a good friend who is very knowledgeable about this. Current set up is the Thread Ripper 64 with the 2080 Ti and a NVIDIA 1080 SC as the cards. Rendering presets have come a little way, though I'm still learning on this. Mostly it is knowing what resolution to render at for each image in the novel. I also have a Cintiq 24 Pro. I originally intended to get into digital painting but the 3D side of things distracted me away from this, I do need to paint a lot more to increase my skill level.

THE RETURN TO OUTPOST 94 THE END



SECRET WORLD
LEGENDS

Painting skills do help massively in adding FX.

VN: Sounds like a great setup. And what other software have you found useful?

MI: I have to admit, ZBrush I find to be difficult. The interface and UV mapping are the main problems holding me back. iClone is very nice but to be honest most of the assets and addons are priced out of range for me, I am still effectively a hobbyist with animation. I am looking more at Unreal 4 to create animations, it's just a bit daunting at the moment.

VN: Yes, cost is the problem with iClone, the WYSIWYG is great but it's an expensive route to start down. For comics the best option is Poser 11 and the Comic Book mode, which is also WYSIWYG and real-time. But I suspect that iClone, fine software though it is, is likely to be swept away by real-time ray-tracing by 2022, once we all have NVIDIA 30 series RTX cards and the latest copy of DAZ Studio. It'll effectively be "what you see is what you get in the DAZ viewport". What's your view on that?

MI: The Shangri-la of evolutions! It will be a great step up for sure, even if it will disenfranchise a lot of people who cannot afford the technology, yet. I don't know too much about what is down the line and when it will come. I'm not holding my breath, although what is coming will take my breath away, I'm sure.

VN: Right. Going back to your comics, your panels are often quite ornate and detailed, taking full advantage of the fine detail that can be offered by 3D renders, for instance on your page with the dragon. Or they include added FX, for instance on the helicopter attack. You also add flames, interfaces and other FX. What's your method and software for adding these?

MI: The flames, firing and explosions are done in Photoshop using brushes — Ron's War Essentials and Ron's Explosions packages — from the DAZ Store. Ron was "the bee's knees" as we say, when it came to making brushes and packages like these. The magical effect of the "shield" I created using another asset and warping it to a bubble. Really with effects it is

doing what seems to be "organic" and what looks right. I've been trying for all these years to get the progression in FX to look professional.

VN: What do you use for final layout, Photoshop, or Comic Life?

MI: Now my freshness comes into play, I've not actually heard of Comic Life! I'll need to Google it but, again at present I use Photoshop. Simple white bars for the division of the panels. This is something I really need to work on to reach a more professional look. I'm studying a few tutorials to see how to better "action up" the panel layout and checking out a few graphic novel examples as I go.

VN: Yes, you mostly use the fixed three-panel landscape view for each page. I was assuming that was because you expect the comic to be read in an app offering a "guided view" with a frame-by-frame widescreen presentation?

MI: This set up I decided on with "Outpost 94", at the 2018 revamp. I was and perhaps still am very inexperienced with layout, as I said just above and a bit earlier on. I was thinking about physical publication at the start which was why the pages are portrait orientated. I wanted to have as much adaptability of the layout for when I learned more about presentation methods on the Web and for print. I really should "bite the bullet" and try to get a good panel layout, this is something I find daunting. I'm about to study your back issues to see what I can absorb from them to improve this :)

VN: Yes, there's quite an art to effective page layout, while also ending on the "beat" that makes the reader want to turn the page to see what happens next. Partly that starts with breaking the story into segments, and weaving in the sub-plots. But back to the art. Have you looked into dedicated comics production tools, such as Poser 11 with its real-time Comic Book mode, Clip Studio and suchlike? Or are you happy with your current production method?

MI: I am always looking to improve, and I have a copy of Poser 11 Pro, but I just have not looked at the Comic Book mode much yet.

Clip Studio is a possibility and I might, just might be tempted nearer the festive season to purchase. As it is turning out, graphic novel productions are becoming more of a thing for me. To step up in terms of quality a bit of investment would be a good thing.

create corridors and the other environments I'd need. If it can be done in a parking lot with wood and a lot of design brilliance, surely it can be done in 3D. This is a definite "For the Future" as I say, and as I quote from an actual episode of *Babylon 5*!



I have another novel in production "The Cat-Anna Chronicles" which is more cyberpunk-era *Secret World Legends* based. I could see how to use these packages for that. Thanks for the thought!

VN: Super. Yes, I highly recommend you give Poser's Comic Book mode and Comic Life a good try. Have you considered doing comics for other fandoms, such as back-stories for *Babylon 5* (also a favourite of mine) or perhaps even adaptations of short public-domain science-fiction stories? I see you're a fellow H.P. Lovecraft admirer, so those stories too, all being in the public-domain now. I can see "The Music of Erich Zann" suiting your style, perhaps with a cyberpunk update in terms of setting. It's the 100th anniversary of the story in 2021...

MI: *Babylon 5* back-stories? Hmm, now there is an idea! What a universe to play in! :) There are some ship models available now and hopefully I could progress my knowledge of ZBrush to

The H.P. Lovecraft side of things would be more difficult, but not impossible. With the coming "Cat-Anna Chronicles" Cyberpunk Novel, which is based on Lovecraft/SWL Mythos, this would be a great direction as well.

VN: Great. What else are you working on at present?

MI: Right now I'm updating and rewriting the aforementioned "The Cat-Anna Chronicles". Cyberpunk set in the year 2071 and based again on *Secret World Legends*. Gaia is dying. Countless years of decay, pollution and greed have exhausted the planet, the bee soldiers have become rare but Gaia musters one last soldier for the end game against the forces of darkness, the Cat-Anna.

The first revamp of what is effectively Book one, chapters 1 - 8 is done, I just need to finish up to the end of Book Two — which is the end of the first full novel of the chronicle.

Then I'm thinking of a second novel as progression on from the first chronicle, which will be.... watch this space! Funcom created a spin-off puzzle type game called *The Moons of Madness* in the Unreal 4 environment. It deals with the initial Mars colonization and of course,

Lovecraftian Mythos intrudes. So I decided to attempt the Cat-Anna novel to reflect this progression in time from the modern day setting.

VN: Super. We wish you all the best with that. Many thanks for this long interview.



Merry Christmas

Best of Wishes
VisNews and to a

MI: No, no, thank you for the opportunity to showcase what I've been doing. It has been great fun to condense what I've been up to for the last few years, 'cheers' again for the chance! Also, best of wishes for the coming Christmas season to you and all your readers!

Mark Innes (aka 'IceNeuro', 'HolloPoint') is online at:

<https://www.deviantart.com/iceneuro>



hulhumas!

to Everyone at All Your Readers!!

BACK ISSUES INDEX

With enough issues of your unique *VisNews* produced, we thought it was about time for a useful index of what has been produced so far.



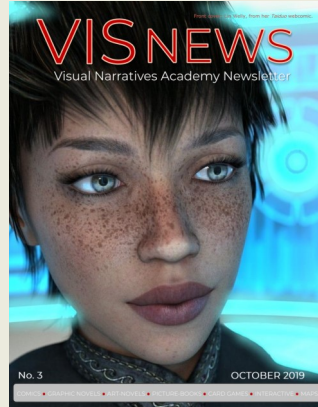
VisNews #1 | Aug 2019

- ⊙ "Treasured Stories" — your various options for making comics in 2019.
- ⊙ Interview with **Adrian Tooth** - the head of the UK's leading comics degree course.
- ⊙ "The Toolkit" - a survey of the key digital comics production tools.



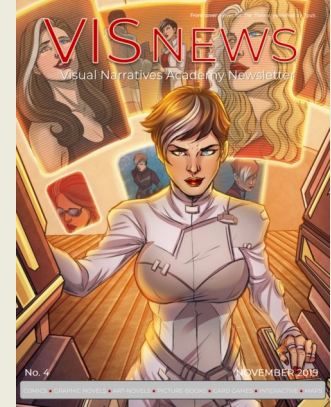
VisNews #2 | Sept 2019

- ⊙ "Mind the Gaps" — where are the opportunities in comics in 2019?
- ⊙ **Manu de May** - interview with a leading maker of DAZ Studio comics.
- ⊙ Useful freebies: NoName Doll and Zdog.



VisNews #3 | Oct 2019

- ⊙ "But that's cheating!" — is using 3D to emulate 2D really 'cheating'?
- ⊙ **Lin Welly** - interview with a leading DAZ Studio comics storyteller.
- ⊙ Freebies - a wealth of Krita comics production add-on tools.



VisNews #4 | Nov 2019

- ⊙ "Every Page Counts" — our survey of the usual page-counts across various formats.
- ⊙ **Neil Gibson** - an interview with the mastermind behind Tpub Comics.
- ⊙ Freebies - Comic Materials for ZBrush.



VisNews #5 | Dec 2019

- ⊙ "Big Hair Males" - which Poser male hair looks good in Poser's Comic Book mode?
- ⊙ **Georges Peters** - we interview a leading DAZ Studio graphic novelist.
- ⊙ Freebies - 21 day Poser trial, CMU's Motion files, Deeko font.



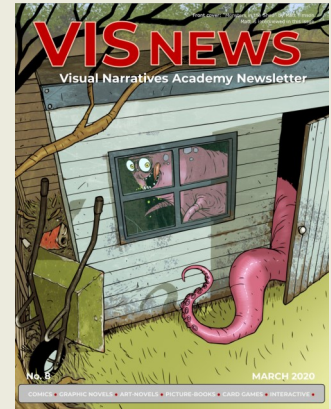
VisNews #6 | Jan 2020

- ⊙ "Storyboard Software" - we survey the options for comics.
- ⊙ **Shadow Corp.** - we interview an artist doing serious planning for a Blender graphic novel.
- ⊙ Freebies - Everything freeware, a full Poser Pro 11 training DVD.



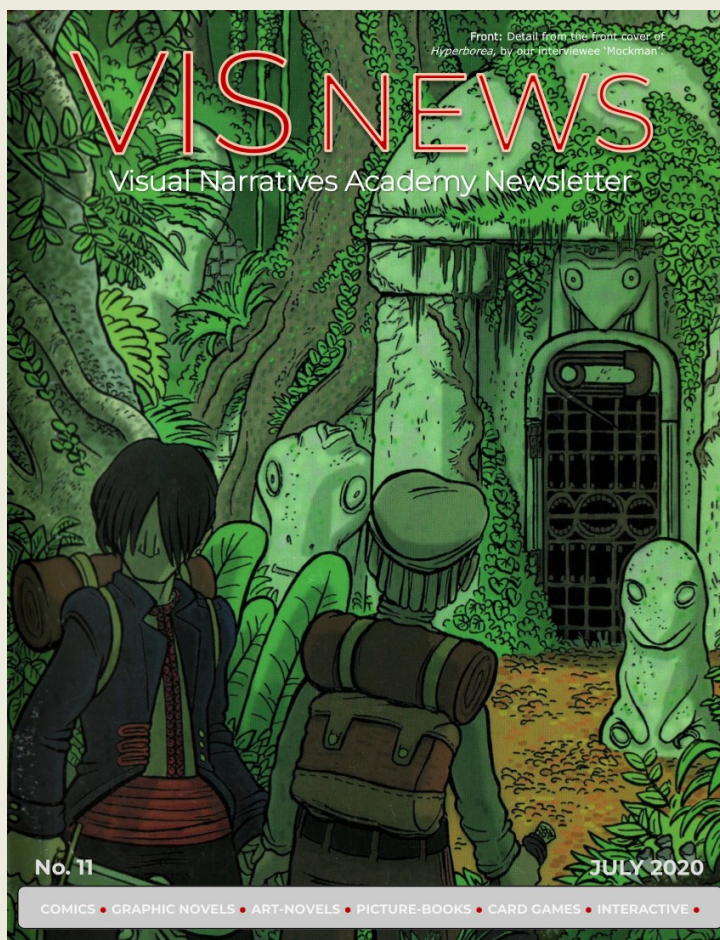
VisNews #7 | Feb 2020

- ⊙ "Dotting Hell" - we find a robust free solution to 'speckle removal' on art.
- ⊙ **Kaz Windess** - a leading maker of quirky 'goth' storybooks.
- ⊙ Freebies - Watercolour Shaders, Expressii, Desktops 2.0.



VisNews #8 | Mar 2020

- ⊙ "The Moebius Twist" - comics advice from Moebius, and how to emulate him in Poser.
- ⊙ **Matt Timson** - we interview an acclaimed maker of horror comics, also a spot cartoonist.
- ⊙ Freebies - Lightwell, MB-Lab for Blender.



VisNews #9 | May 2020

- ⊙ Help other creatives to survive in the lockdown crisis.
- ⊙ **Miriam Rivera** - we interview the world's leading maker of medical comics, with a specialism in viruses!
- ⊙ Freebies - better manage Sketch Presets in Poser.

VisNews #10 | June 2020

- ⊙ Instant SF planets. How the old MojoWorld can still be used to create instant and huge terrains for Poser.
- ⊙ **John Swogger** - we interview a leading maker of archeological "outreach" comic strips.
- ⊙ Freebies - get *Children's Picturebooks* for free.

VisNews #11 | July 2020

- ⊙ "The Art of the Flip" — how using simple inversions can help you devise a new story for your comic.
- ⊙ **Jason Bradley Thompson** - an in-depth interview with a leading graphic novelist and game maker.
- ⊙ Freebies - Poser to Clip Studio export script, for posed OBJ figures with textures. The long-lost official script!

VisNews #12 | August 2020

- ⊙ Poser 11 for Manga style art, practical demo.
- ⊙ **Damien Sueur** — of the French National Library, on their new comics production software.
- ⊙ Freebies - Skin Extractor, DAZ to Blender plugin.

VisNews: the first full year!

LINEART: SKETCH

Sketch loves to use many CPU cores at once, and was obviously designed to run fast on a multi-core Windows 7 workstation.

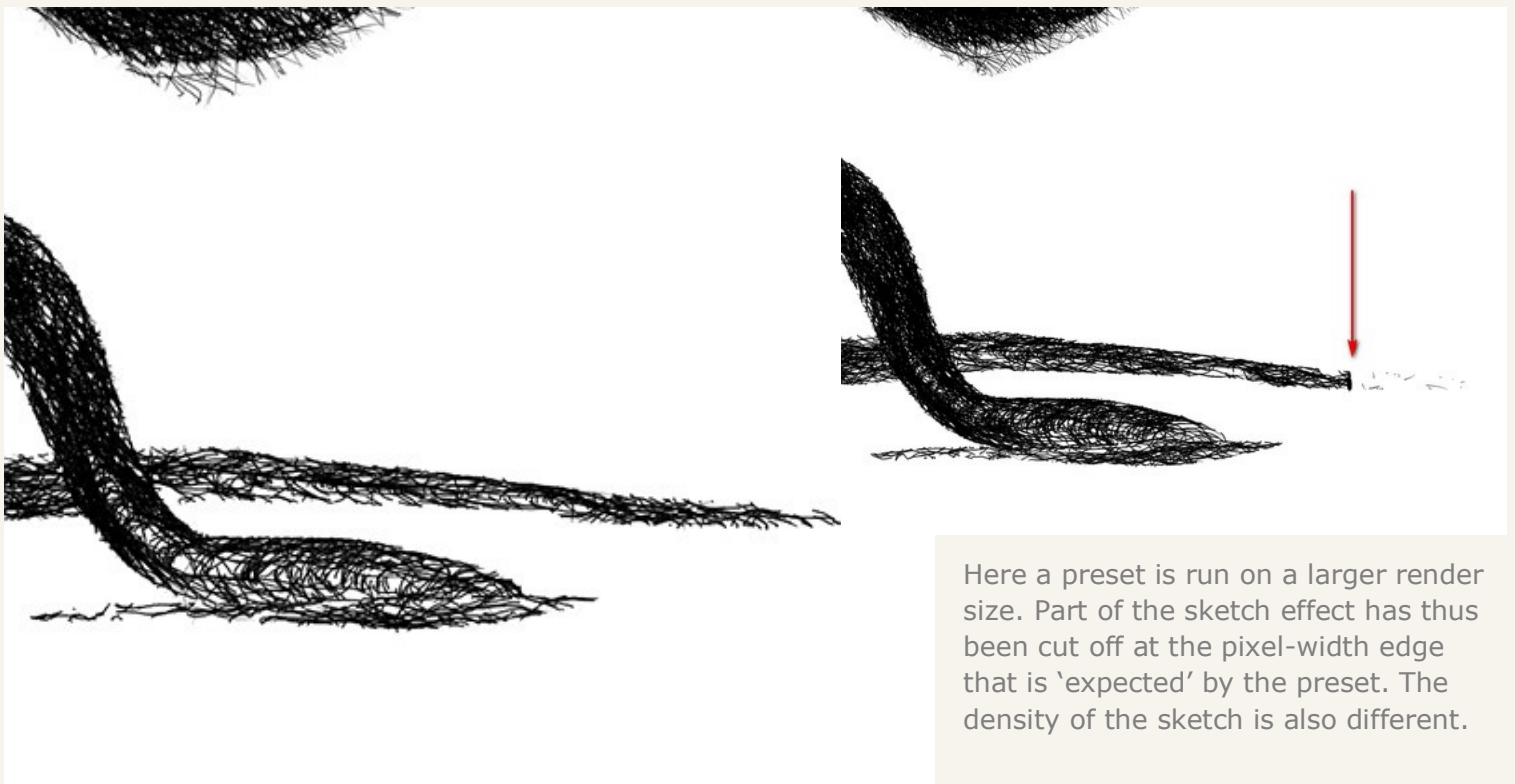
see our recent review of the £250 12-core / 24 render thread HP Z600 workstation in *Digital Art Live* magazine #47 (March 2020)., for more details.

Sketch is perhaps the most unknown and certainly the most mis-used feature of Poser. Yet it is also one of Poser's most powerful and unique features. It not only sketches your 3D models, it can also ink and even paint! Here are some basic tips for running Sketch in Poser.

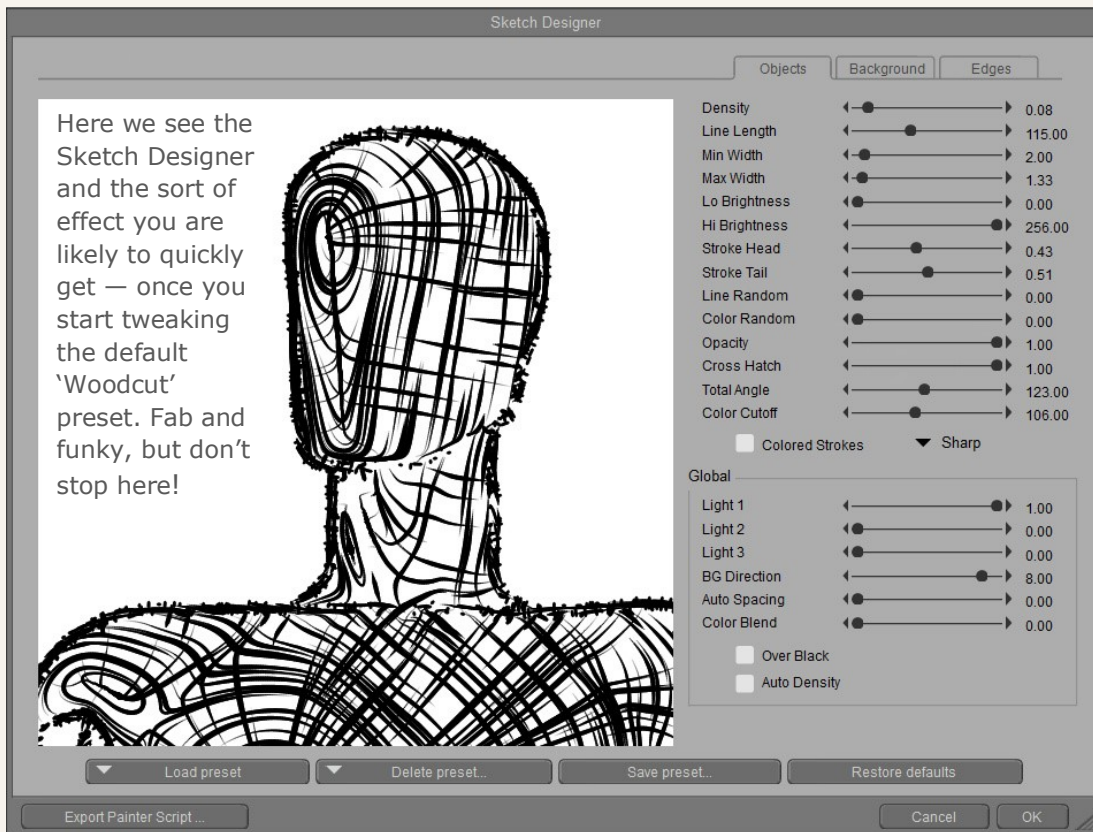
1. First, ignore the 'Sketch presets for newbies' and instead switch into the full Sketch Designer (you can set a keyboard shortcut to launch this Window: [Top menu](#) | [General Prefs](#) | [Shortcuts](#) | [Window](#) > [Sketch Designer](#)). Then load a good default Sketch Designer preset like Woodcut, and start to tweak it — first by turning off the Background sketching by moving all sliders on the Background tab. Turning off background sketching will speed up Sketch rendering enormously. Then start to gently tweak the various sliders in the Objects panel of Designer.

Here the speed-killer slider is the 'Opacity' — the further to the right it is, the faster the preset runs. Most people think Sketch is very slow, but it can be made to run very fast indeed.

2. Sketch rendering is render-size dependent. What looks great for a 1,800 pixel render will not look or work the same at 2,800 pixels. The look and spacing of the effect will be different, and you may even see an ugly "cut-off" as in the example render seen below. This is cured by rendering to the correct size for the preset.



Here a preset is run on a larger render size. Part of the sketch effect has thus been cut off at the pixel-width edge that is 'expected' by the preset. The density of the sketch is also different.



SCRIPTS:

If making many custom presets, you will want to get the free [Sketch Presets Manager for Poser 11.x](#).

You can also load Sketch presets individually and automatically via [a Python script](#), something not possible until now.

Where to find the custom Sketch presets you save? Poser 11 saves presets to one of its many obscure hidey-holes, this being...

`C:\Users\YOUR_USER_NAME_HERE\AppData\Roaming\Poser Pro 11\SketchPresets`

Be sure to back up this folder before moving to a new version of Poser!

The three "Global" light sliders adjust Sketch lines to run in the direction in which the scene lights are shining. If you have a single IBL light pointing straight at the figure, as when using Comic Book Preview, they will not do much for you.

3. To design and save Sketch presets for your intended render size, say 2,800 pixels, first make a Preview render at that size. Then press your set keyboard shortcut to quickly open the Sketch Designer module. The Sketch Designer's live preview window (seen above) will then pick up the size of the last render and will now take longer to load than before, as it is now loading the canvas at 2,800 pixels. As such you'll likely have to grab this canvas and pan wildly across the seemingly blank preview, to get your object back into view again. There is no "centre my object" button here.

But now you can use Designer to design your preset, and it very usefully gives you a live "What You See Is What You Get" preview of even your subtlest changes, which is very useful.

I am assuming here that you have your scene set up without background elements and with the Ground turned off. Sketch is best used on one or two figures and a blank background. Do not expect to Sketch an entire scene at once.

4. For future reference, save Sketch presents with names that indicate their size and nature.

For instance you might name a preset: "2800px_inky003_on_Smooth_Shaded_Display_Mode_with_Comic_and_Toon_Light_003".

5. Sketch can also work well with Poser 11's realtime Comic Book mode, and can render 'into' pure lineart made in that way. Such lineart is had by pointing one low-intensity IBL light at the figure, and switching the Comic Book mode to B&W, then moving the dial to "burn off" the grunge. Using the Gamma changing script, which ships as standard in Poser, is also a great way to de-grunge grungy materials in a quick way.

6. Note that a Sketch render can't be output as a masked or 'cut-out' PNG of a character, even if you fiddle with background and opacity in Sketch Designer. To get a basic character mask, to do the cut-out in graphics software such as Photoshop, what you do is to also output a straight Comic Book Preview realtime render of exactly the same scene in PNG — and then use that to make the mask in Photoshop. The process is a bit fiddly, involving masking, inverting, cutting out and changing layers — but can be recorded in Photoshop as a re-playable automatic Action.

CONTESTS:

The **15th Silent Manga Contest** is now open and is seeking "the next stars" of the manga comics market. Entry is free, and entrants are asked to tell their story without words. A manga-style comic of between 5 – 17 pages is expected, made digitally at 300dpi. Comics and their themes should be able to appeal to the discerning comics readers in the Japanese market, and the theme/prompt is: "Moments of crying, smiling, love", so emoting characters are a must. There are substantial prizes. Deadline: 27th January 2021.

<https://www.manga-audition.com/>

The **5th International Green Crescent Cartoon Contest** is calling for cartooning work that depicts the "transformation of technology use into misuse and addiction". It appears that the Green Crescent is the Arabic equivalent of the Red Cross. Deadline: 31st January 2021.

<https://cartooncontest.yesilay.org.tr/en>

The annual **World Illustration Awards** seeks "the great work being made by illustrators all over the world today". In 2021, they hope to especially celebrate the resilience of freelance illustrators and the industry during the long lockdowns. Entry fees apply.

<https://theaoi.com/world-illustration-awards/>

FONT OF THE MONTH: VILLAIN TEAM-UP

Each month we feature a **free** font, suitable for indie comics or self-published storybooks.

Dan Zadorozny's fonts... "are free for non-commercial use and are donationware for commercial purposes" (\$20 is required). His 2020 "Villain Team-up" font is "designed for smaller point sizes and not for titles or headings ... comes with 16 variations for different looks, and an extended character set."

<https://www.iconian.com/>



NEXT ISSUE: FEBRUARY 2021

Front cover:

Demo made with Poser 11's real-time Comic Book mode.

