



THE CREATION OF A COMIC STRIP FROM AN EXISTING NOVEL




Introduction

This lecture is about the creation of a comic strip. It will not explain how to learn to draw or to write a script. I expect that you have some basic knowledge of comic strips. Through this short lecture I will try to explain what skills you need in order to create a visual narrative like a comic...

Adapting a complex, linear story like Metro 2033 into a comic is hard work. Partly because the original novel has some off-track content that can disturb an adaptation in visual form. In the original novel the author Dmitry Glukhovsky uses many pages to describe a part of the environment or even social situations. For a novel this can be useful. This is not the case for a visual adaptation/adjustment. As a reader you may already be able to understand it already by observing a panel, in case of the artist decides to use some of the descriptions in the original novel. Sometimes it is not necessary at all. Because it does not always help readability...





Like literary fiction or movies or other media, contemporary comic books can spotlight any subject. They are bold and dark, or funny, or inbetween and have the same narrative power that other mediums create which is to move you to tears, make you laugh, break your heart, or give you a thrill.

Once it was an underrated and underappreciated art form, but comic books today are enjoying a renaissance in contemporary culture, thanks in large part to the success of the US blockbuster superhero films.



Comics and Graphic Novels

The term graphic novel is initially only a chic expression for “comic book”. Yet there is a very clear difference between the current commercial standard comic and the often non- or semi-commercial graphic novel. How to choose your expression: which type of visual story telling you prefer? There is no fixed rule. In my opinion it depends often on taste, possibilities, technical skills etc....



Comics and Graphic Novels

Comics are just a visual form of storytelling that pairs images, with or without text. These images are often presented sequentially in panels; grouped or in a consecutive rhythm. And which are self-contained frames that tell one story beat (for example, one moment, one look, one establishing shot of the scenery). The medium is conducive to innovation and artistic expression, allowing comic creators freedom to experiment with the structure on each page.





As the popular author and comic book writer Neil Gaiman says: “When you get to comics you have a whole different area of territory...We get to use the pictures and the words to try and do things inside the head of the reader that you might never be able to do in prose or in film.”

Preparing a Comic Project:



1 Motivation

2 Skills

3 Fantasy

Step 1: Write down an idea for a comic

Step 2: Draw some very simple sketches of this idea

Step 3: set up your story in pages with more detailed sketches

Step 4: Add speech and lettering (for a rough idea of the final page)

Step 5: Add more detail to your sketches

Step 6: Trace it (here: traditional inks & colors)



Distinction

Standard traditional comics:

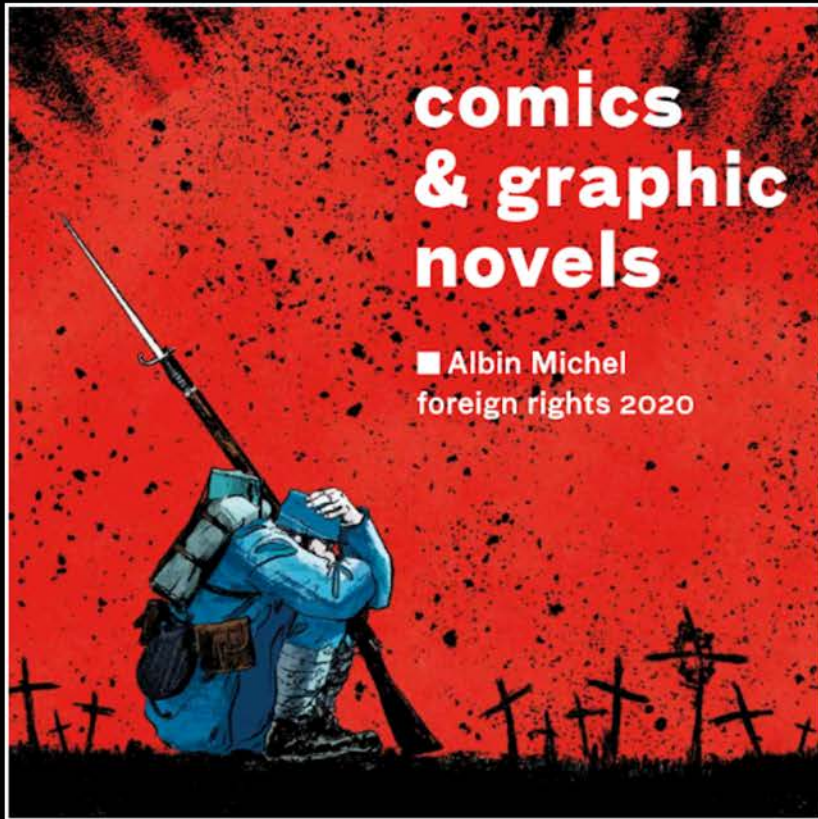
- linear or parallel story
- diverse shapes long or short in size
- within a certain structure and pattern
- recognizable style
- reaching a larger amount of readers

Comic types are: European Franco-Belgian, US superhero, Manga and some today's fashion styles evolved from those three

Regular graphic novels:

- usually long stories, linear or parallel told stories
- sometimes more complex in structure
- have an artistic approach
- not bound by the existing main stream comic strip conventions
- reaching a smaller amount of readers

There are Numerous Shapes of Graphic Novels and Comics today

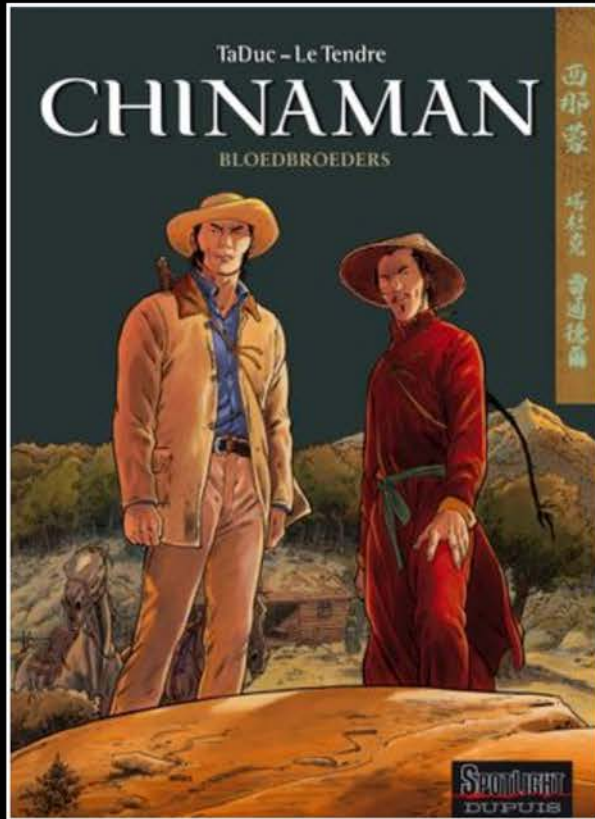


Announcement about comics & graphic novels

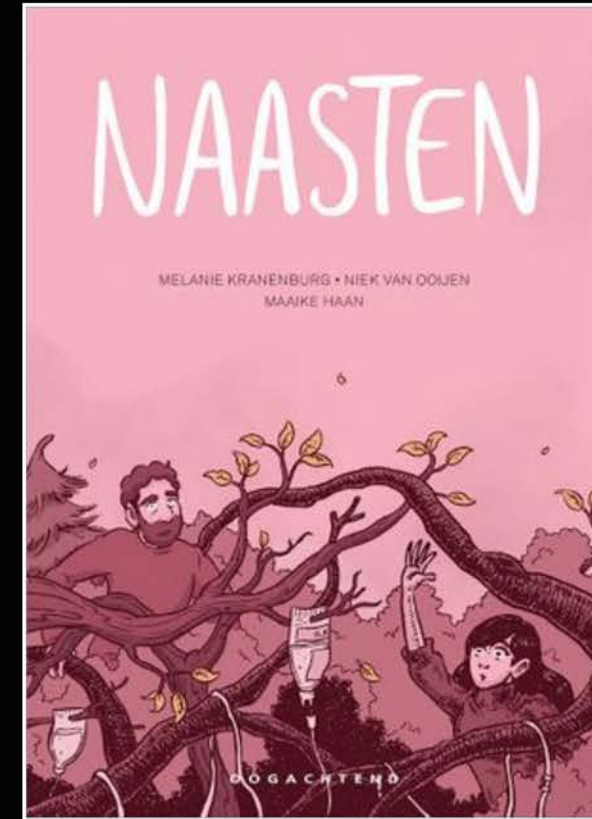


Expressive US comics style

There are Numerous Shapes of Graphic Novels and Comics today



Typical commercial Franco-Belgian comic



Typical non commercial Graphic Novel



What Style to Choose?

Comic- or strip books in general can be created as one book only: so called “one shot”, multiple parts, (long-running or short series). A graphic novel can be very voluminous, usually with consecutive images or even one image pro page, with or without text. Comics and graphic novels can be also moderately structured. Artistic images can be very diverse, drawn or painted. And similarly, the texts can be very free in form.

In my case I preferred a traditional, realistic comic style approach, a Franco-Belgian style. Let's see what we should do now ...



Writing and Drawing...

But first you need a talent for drawing. But that is not enough. You have to keep up a certain quality to draw a *storyline*. That means you create a visual narrative in an amount of images which are connected to each other on different levels like scenes with dialogues, different scene sequels, all different kinds of panels you need to tell a certain moment etc.. But of course, first there must be a script. A kind of story direction. Although there are some artists who work without scripts, or create their strips while writing drawing at the same time. Together with a convincing page design the artist must search for a balance between all those aspects which we call strip. What elements is a strip built on?



Author and Artist...

But before we go any further, it is “common rule” that most comic strip artists in the world can't or won't write at all. Most of them prefer to work with an author. And even sometimes there are whole teams of writers and artists working together on one project at the same time. Some publishers prefer to connect an artist with an author. So, everything is possible.

I prefer to produce my own stories because the connection between script and drawings is far more easier to develop for me. In my career as an illustrator and comic artist I have worked constantly with separate authors together but after finishing a particular project, I always felt a kind of unsatisfied afterwards. Often due the involvement of an author during the duration of the project...

Let's Talk About the Elements of a Comic Book

A comic book is typically composed of a number of elements which all work together to tell the story. It is used both in traditional comics and graphic novels as well.



Panel. One illustration on a page usually surrounded by a border. A comic book page is made up of one or more panels. Each panel moves the story along, by depicting an action with figures and speech bubbles.



Gutter. This is the space between the panels. These spaces can be large or small, impacting how easy it is to read the pages. Of course there are even comics without a gutter, although it is rare. Late Dutch comic artist and illustrator Jan Kruis was known by his gutterless comics.

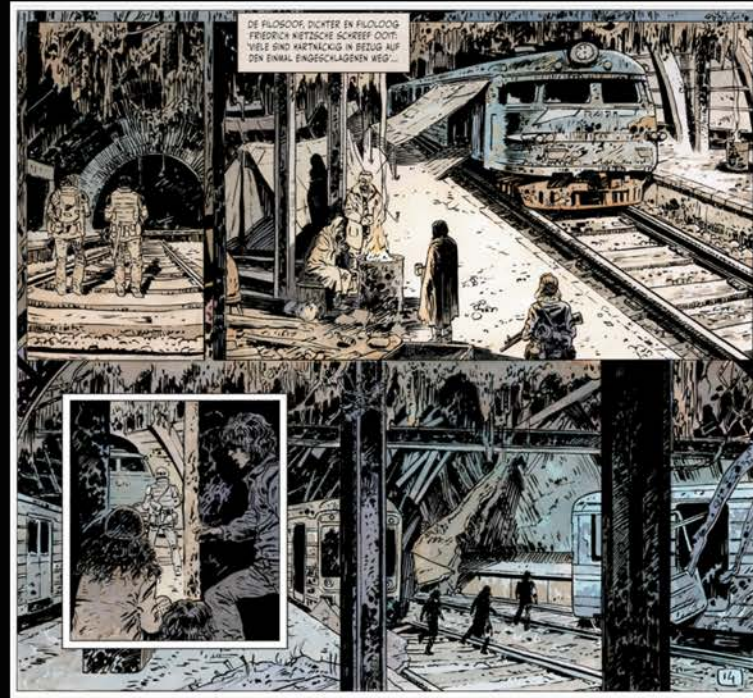


Tier. A single row of panels. In some panels we can find speech balloons, because comic contains the dialogue of the characters inside the panel. Each balloon has a “tail,” which points to who is speaking the dialogue. Some comics have no balloons at all. And some comics have no texts.

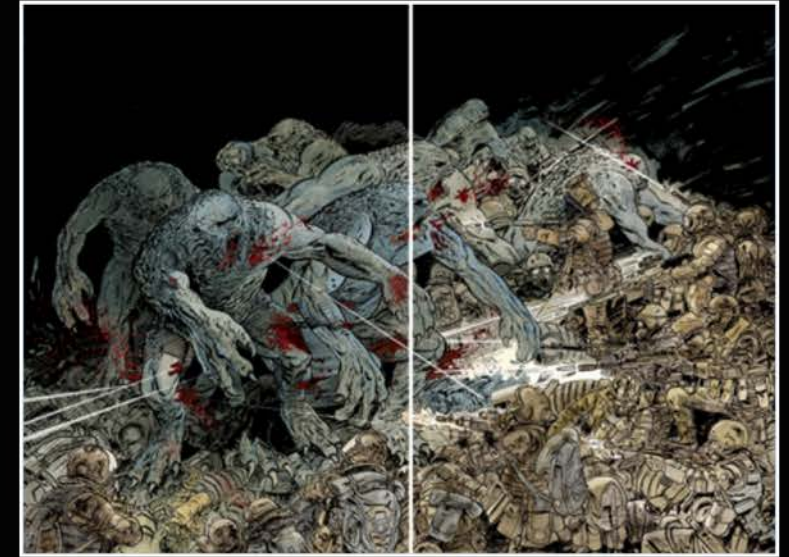
Elements of a Comic Book



Splash. A full-page illustration which is often used at the beginning of the comic book to introduce the story and establish setting and mood.

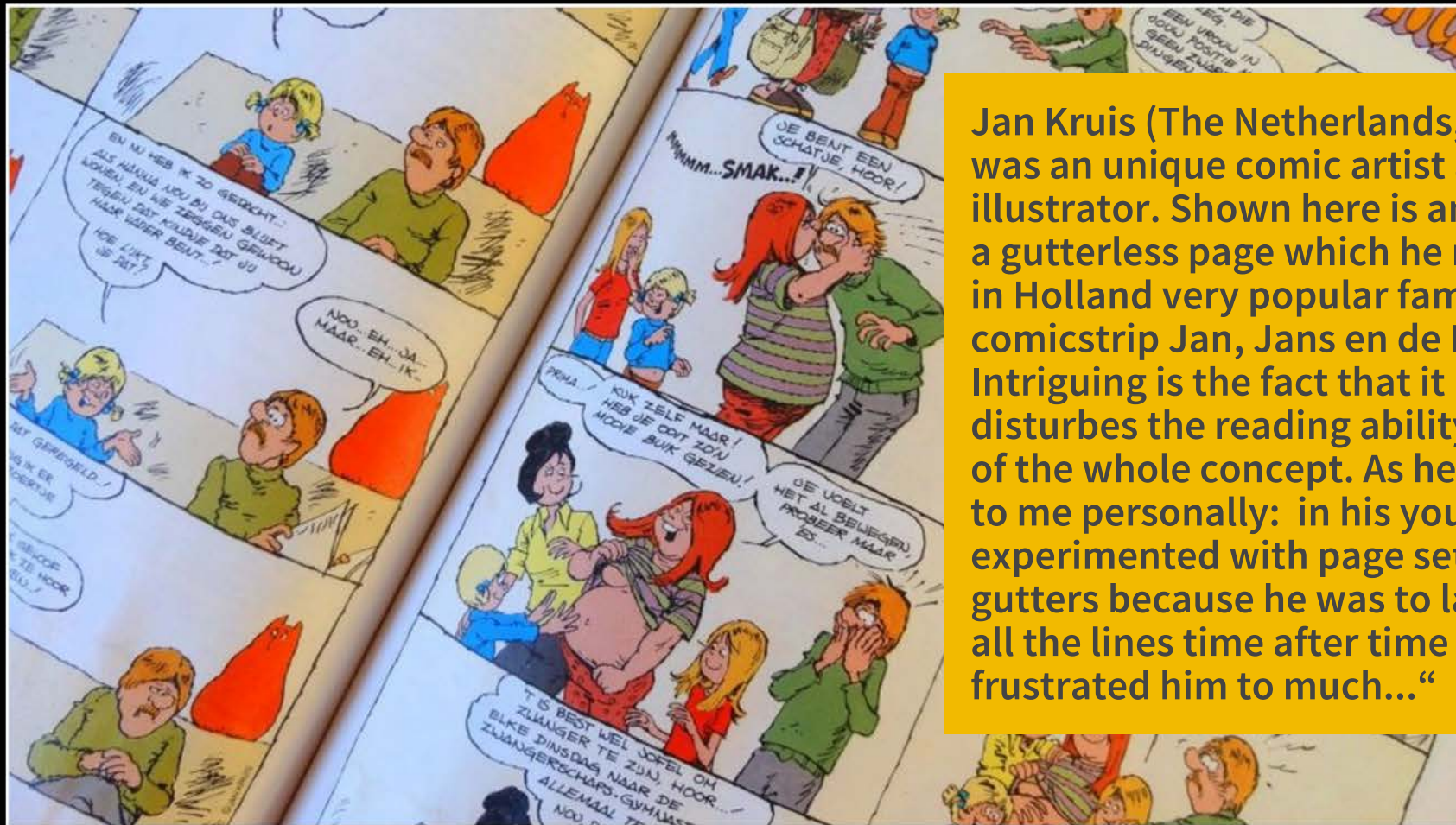


Caption. A box that is separate from the rest of the panel usually used to provide context for what's happening through the voice of a narrator.



Spread. A illustration placed on two pages

Elements of a Comic Book



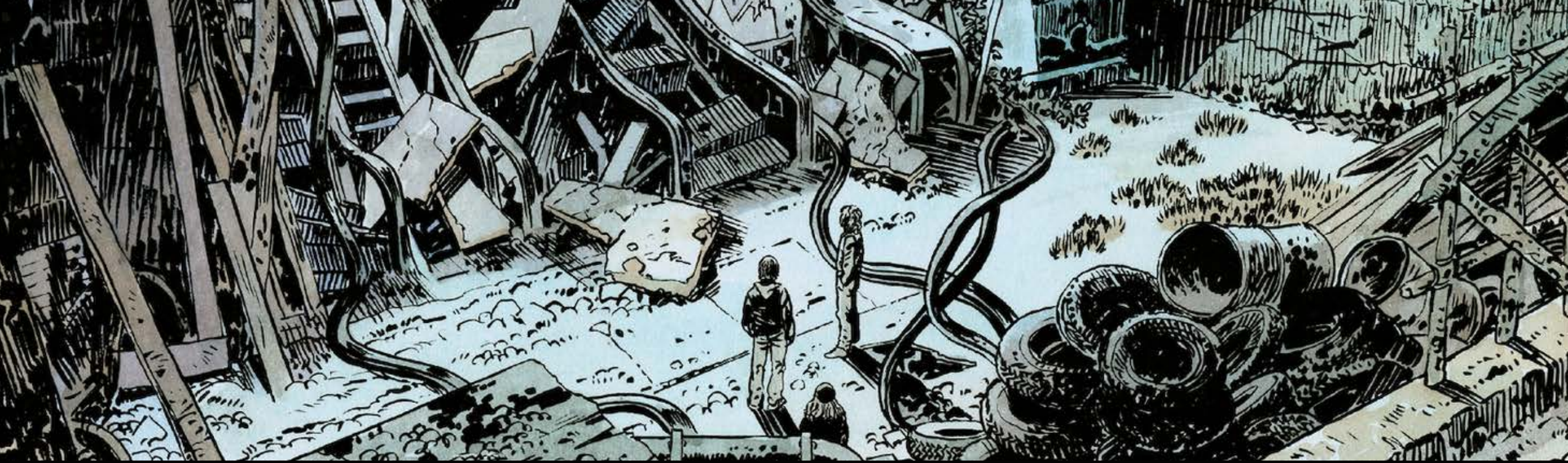
Jan Kruis (The Netherlands, 1933-2017) was an unique comic artist and illustrator. Shown here is an example of a gutterless page which he made for his in Holland very popular family comicstrip Jan, Jans en de Kinderen. Intriguing is the fact that it never disturbs the reading ability and quality of the whole concept. As he once stated to me personally: in his younger days he experimented with page setups without gutters because he was to lazy to draw all the lines time after time which frustrated him to much..."



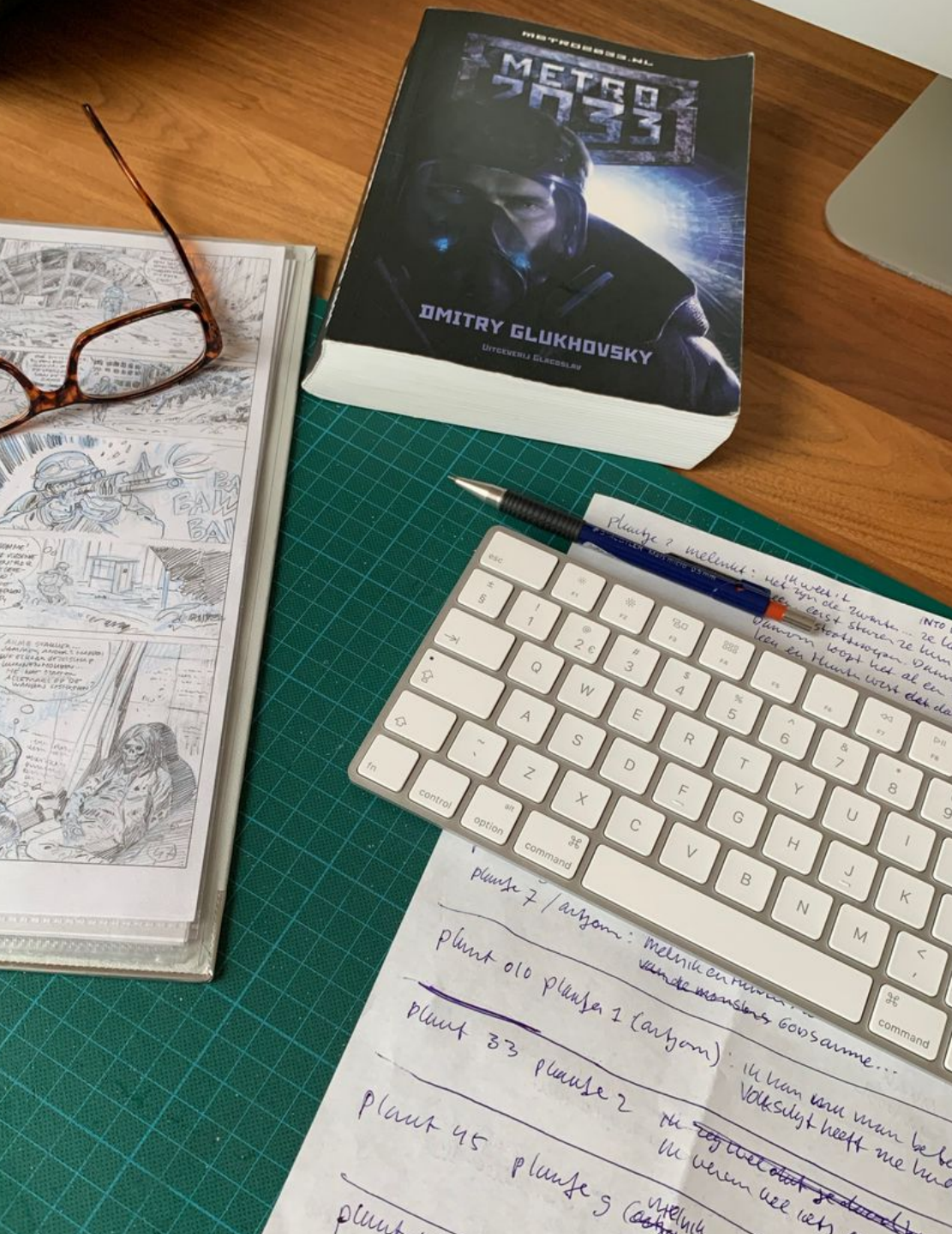
Border between Comics and Graphic Novels...

Today there is more tendency to create commercial comics in unconventional styles also. For example in paintings, digital or still on paper or manipulated as Photoshop images, etc...

Conclusion: The border between both art types seems very thin but they are still considerably different from each other.



So... in contrary to the diversity in main stream comic strip genres, graphic novels are mostly devoid all kinds of recognizable methodical or conventional narrative techniques and all kinds of representation or standard ways of building up stories. Although more conventional principles in storytelling are also used in graphic novels nowadays. So, the differences between the two are today are even smaller than ever...




Writing an Adaptation

OK, with this knowledge, let's see how one could create a realistic strip from a complex novel like Metro 2033.

Of course, you must read first and try to embrace the original as if it was yours. Very important because the atmosphere you are going to imagine will be the foundation of the rewrite of the original into a visual narrative.

In my situation I chose to create a commercial strip adaptation rather than to create a less commercial graphic novel.



ARTJOM SUKOU WEISS VON SICH NUR, DASS ER AN DER OBERFLÄCHE GEBOREN WURDE. DORT, WO SICH SEIT DEM VERHEERENDEN KRIEG NIEMAND MEHR HINWAGT. EINIGE SAGEN, ER MÜSSE NOCH VOR DER GROSSEN VERNÜSTUNG GEBOREN WORDEN SEIN, IRGENDWO IN DER NÄHE DER TIMIR-JASEWSKAJA. WER WEISST DIE FLÜCHTLINGE, DIE IM UNTERGRUNDNETZWERK DER METRO ZUFLUCHT SUCHTEN, WÄRNTEN SICH JAHRELANG IN SICHERHEIT... ZUMINDEST BIS ZU JENEM UNSELIGEN TAG, AN DEM DIE NEOFASCHISTEN DES VIERTEN REICHES SOWIE VERSCHIEDENE SEKTEN UND SATANISTEN GROSSE TEILE DES ALTEN TUNNELKOMPLEXES BESETZTEN. UND ALS OB DAS NOCH NICHT GENUG GEWESEN WÄRE, TAUCHTEN EINES TAGES ALBTRÄUMHAFT MONSTER AUF, DIE GROSSE ANGST UNTER DER BEVÖLKERUNG VERBREITETEN: DIE SOGENANTEN »SCHWARZEN«. DARÜBER HINAUS WAREN RIESIGE, ABSCHUELLICH STINKENDE RATTEN EIN QUELL EWIGER SORGE, DA SIE GEFÜRCHTETE KRANKHEITEN WIE DIE PEST VERBREITETEN. GERÜCHTEN ZUFOLGE KAMEN SIE AUS DEM NORDEN, AUS RICHTUNG DES EHEMALIGEN BOTANISCHEN GARTENS. ABER NIEMAND WUSSTE ES GENAU...

Mood Sketches or Concept Art

I never taking notes while reading through a book the very first time while reading a book. This is important because I want to *inhale* the story first like a normal reader will.

But in between I do make some mood sketches sometimes. But this can be done later on too. Sometimes I produce even some specific concept art. It will help me to delve deeper into the world of the story.


A typical mood sketch can be something like this:





This is an example of a rough sketch and reflects a scene which isn't described in the book physically but some content in the original novel do suggest it. It helps me tremendously to create a new fantasy world. Although I produce just some, not many...





This is an example of concept art. Concept art can be made by pencil, brush, Photoshop, or whatever you need to create it with. Most important is the effect you want...



Notes - Research Synopsis

During your 2nd read I may take notes and write down certain elements I have spotted in the book. It helps a lot to take notes right away because it allows me to oversee the basics of the conversion from original to adaptation more quickly. During the 2nd reading I produce also some mood sketches or concept art as I mentioned before.

To be specific: if you do start taking notes it is always easier to start writing immediately a clear synopsis first, taking notes of all important names of persons and things, any useful descriptions of environments, and take note of some character analyzing or in other words unravel the different characters first. Further, if needed do some research. Sometimes a story can have some historical content or there is something else in the story which need more investigation. In fact it can be crucial for the story, so doing your research is essential...

Summmerized:

- 1 The first read of the original novel is always without taking notes or mood sketches
- 2 During second read you may take notes and/or draw mood sketches and/or concept art
- 3 Write a short synopsis of the whole story
- 4 Do some character analyzing, descriptions of scenes, environments, make a list of names etc.
- 5 If needed do some research (via several sources like books, all kinds of archives, the internet, at universities or others)



Adjust or Integral?

Please be aware that a narrative adaptation is a free adjust of the original. That means that besides possible changes in the narrative itself, whole chapters of the original could be changed or even disappear. Or sometimes complete new things can be written into it too. Even new characters can be introduced, new or other intrigues can be put in and so on...

Consider also that converting an original story into images with texts can be far more difficult if an author has decided to make a complete integral version of the original text, instead of an adjusted version, like the known Dutch artist and author Dick Matena did with a couple of Dutch bestselling novels over the last 20 years or so.

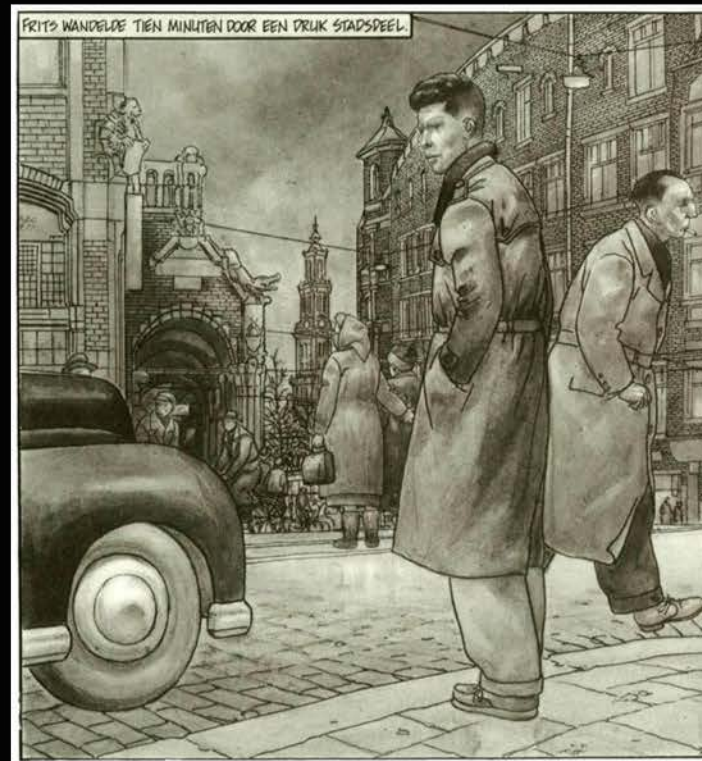
I take a short moment to look at some samples of Matena:

Dick Matena (the Netherlands)

Matena used the complete text from the original novel 1:1 and integrated it into his visualization. Thus he made no adaptations concerning the text. But within the pictures he offers his own interpretation.



De Avonden



De Avonden



Kort Amerikaans

Some Clarity on How to Express

Back to the creation of my adaptation of Metro 2033. In this particular scene which is taken straight from the original novel but it is in the original scene is way longer.

For readability's sake I shortened the scene and exaggerated some of the interaction between the two acting characters since the author Dmitry Glukhovsky didn't express it specifically in his novel.

Let's take a short moment to investigate that:



How to express

Look closely: expression means playing with camera angles, closing up, gestures, etc.... Ask yourself how to play with the original text and how to manage the context of it into something new. Film script writers and storyboard artists have exactly the same experiences when it comes to how to express the actions and environments in the story.

In this example page I played with the dialogues. Using a single medium long shot at the start and ending up with a close up. There are no specific rules to this. It depends on both your personal creativity and the readability of the finished page. You also have to take care where to put your balloons. That's very important because the balloons are an integral drawing element of the total page. However they may not disturb the images or panels.





By the way: always keep taking notes, look for example impressions you like, motivate yourself with ambition etc., it may help you to get through the whole process.

Concerning the main character design: try to imagine each character in context of the main scenes. Try to visualize one scene, then read the part in the original novel which is matching that scene. If the visual feels exactly as the original text then you can be sure it is OK.

Although a subjective matter, an adaptation could be what you expect personally but at the same time seem completely wrong to a specific reader who gonna read your adaptation.

A person in a post-apocalyptic setting, wearing a gas mask and carrying a rifle, stands on a muddy path leading towards a distant, hazy horizon under a cloudy sky. The scene is desolate, with industrial structures visible in the background.

Resume:

Phase 1: Before adaptating an original novel, always read the book carefully before you begin to recreate it again into a comic strip.

Phase 2: First prepare a basic working script which is based on the original book in the form of a clear synopsis, research included.

Phase 3: The synopsis must be evolve into a solid adjusted and comprehensive script.

Phase 4: While sketching, the rewrite is lettered directly into the balloons during the sketching of your pages.

Note: Many artists don't include balloons in their sketches at all. They put them digitally in afterwards when all inking is finished. I don't prefer that personally but it is possible.



End Phase:

- After finishing the sketching of all your pages, add corrections to text and drawings if necessary. Otherwise you can do it during your inking process but I prefer to do it before that.
- All sketched pages are scanned as 150 DPI and printed in light blue on A3 what is normal density, (in my case) on glossy paper of Schoellershammer. In case of paper types, there are other options too of course.
- After printed in light blue they are easy to be inked (I do not use light tables anymore).
- After that the inked pages are scanned via a scanner set in Bitmap, High Resolution, 825 DPI. More higher pixel density levels doesn't improve your image but your file will get far larger which is unnecessary. The scanner doesn't see the blue.

DMITRY GLUKHOVSKY ★ PETER NUYTEN

MEIRO

★ 2 0 3 3 ★

BAND 1 ★ WO DIE WELT ENDET



The End

Thank you for your visit and attention

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask!