

Terrible Claw

Hashem Bhatti

I have always found delight in comics and manga. There is a whole world to be immersed in within every comic. As I got older, I slowly realised that anyone can make one, even completely on their own. I have been drawing throughout my life for as long as I can remember, thus, I decided that for my major I would make a comic of my own, as it would be a great way to force myself to learn. I've dabbled in comics before, but it's always been intimidating to me to take on a full project. I realised at some point, though, you just have to start, or the skills will never develop.

My final body of work consists of the cover page, two completed pages, one inked page, all character designs, and a completed storyboard/draft for the first chapter of my comic '*Terrible Claw*'. While I am accustomed to drawing human characters, I wanted to try something different. I have always loved dinosaurs, with my fascination only growing with time. So, I wanted to tell a sort of Disney-style story of a baby deinonychus (raptor) who, when rebelling against her mother's warnings, is plunged into the outside prehistoric world of unknown dangers. The story can be considered as a metaphor for growing up from a child to an adult, and the difficulty of navigating a world that seems so unforgiving. I also included themes of family, love, the brutality of nature, grief and guilt.

My inspirations come from many places. Some comic and manga artists I admire include Kamome Shirahama, Yasuhiro Nightow, Hiromu Arakawa, Posuka Demizu, Peter Wartman, and Faith Erin Hicks. I think their art styles are beautiful and appealing, excelling in clarity, panelling, and creativity. Particularly for this story, in terms of stylisation and atmosphere I was inspired by the animal movies from Disney such as 'Bambi' and 'The Lion King'. Additionally, I had to do a lot of research on the life of dinosaurs in the Cretaceous era, making sure to reference many paleo-artists like John Conway and Sergey Krasovskiy to make sure my depiction of the dinosaurs was accurate and realistic even despite its stylised nature.

My finished art pieces (cover, pages 1,2,3) were first sketched on paper using a mechanical pencil and then inked with a Tachikawa G-Pen (Dip Pen) with black ink, on A4 Bristol board paper. I then scanned them, edited, and coloured them on Clip Studio Paint. I liked this hybrid style of working. For my style, I kept it fairly detailed while also being as simple as possible. This is because in comics, you have to create so many pages while drawing the characters over and over, so they need to be quick and easy to replicate. I used very thick, bold lines because I like how expressive and fun it feels. I mixed the traditional anime/manga style to make expressive animals, evident especially with the big and shiny eyes.

My cover artwork portrays the protagonist, the baby deinonychus, in a lush forest at sunrise. I had a lot of trial and error with the cover, as I wasn't sure what sort of tone to emphasise. The comic does start off with a 'tragic twist' for the inciting incident, but ultimately the message is meant to be uplifting and beautiful. So, I decided for the cover to look very peaceful but also as eye-catching as possible, showcasing the beauty of the natural world. I used a very heavy pink colour palette, as it symbolises unconditional love, harmony, and peace. It makes the image feel warm and comforting. My intention

with making it set at sunrise was to imply 'a new beginning', as the story is about the deinonychus entering a new stage of her life.

My comic pages I have completed so far serve as the introduction to my comic. I chose to have no dialogue because, even though the dinosaurs are drawn with expressiveness, I wanted my story to feel grounded in realism. I also think this forced me to learn other ways to portray my points and understand the importance of 'show don't tell.' The first panel shows the feet of the dinosaur as it takes footsteps towards something. The next panels show the eyes of the dinosaurs, the head, and then finally the head to torso shot of the mother and her daughter peering through the vines. I did this because I wanted it to feel like an exciting build-up to the reveal of the main characters. The bottom panel is the largest, and is also bleeding through the margins, since it is the most important panel on the page.

Page two shows the pack of raptors entering the cave and inspecting it to make sure it's a good home for them. I used values a lot to properly guide the eye. For example, in the top panel, the brightest part is on the right, because that's where I want the viewer to look first. For the inside of the cave, I employed a cool, blue-green tone. My intention was to make the cave feel safe, stable and serene with the use of the colour symbolism. The protagonist trying to eat the bug and then failing is meant to portray her inexperience with hunting, and her grumpy response represents her lack of understanding of the world (she can't obtain whatever she wants so easily).

Ultimately, I am happy with the result of my finished works. It was a wonderful learning experience for me. I learnt about how to plan and organise such large projects, how the process works etc. I developed my skills in so many aspects such as in my stylisation, anatomy, expressions, linework and colouring, as well as learning a lot about comic production such as the use of margins, developing my skills in panelling, staging, composition, and of course, storytelling. As I continue to work on completing this comic in my spare time, I believe it will provide me lots of continued growth as an artist.