

Workshops



ImagineFX September 2007



Photoshop DRAWN OF THE DEAD

Artist PROFILE

Aly Fell

COUNTRY: England
CLIENTS: Eurocom, Core Design, Cosgrove Hall Films, Warner Bros



Aly's worked in the video games industry for five years.

Previously he was a freelance 2D animator and character artist, primarily working for Cosgrove Hall.

www.alyfell.com

DVD Assets

The files you need are on your DVD in the folder called Aly Fell in the Workshops section.

SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS3 (demo)

Aly Fell creates a vintage horror pulp fiction cover in the style of EC Comics

Science fiction comics, pulp fiction and horror have always appealed to me. Growing up in the 70s reading comics such as Nightmare and Psycho and watching Christopher Lee flashing his teeth as Dracula gave me a taste for the macabre. When I got the desire to recreate the mood and feel of these wonderful stories that dominated newsstands from the 30s though to the 60s and 70s, I found I could

do it easily with Photoshop. Here I'll take you through my process. I won't be concentrating on the technique as much as explaining the choices you make when choosing text, colour and mood, because these comics were all about mood.

A good idea before starting something like this is to look around the internet for comics and covers that inspire you. Creating a convincing look for something like this requires a degree of research into

your inspiration, and an understanding of what the covers were trying to achieve. I'll start with the basic production of the image for the cover, from sketching through to final image.

Then I'll show the techniques for ageing and presenting the finished cover as a complete image. This is a dark and scary workshop, so only continue if you're prepared to find out what made that scraping noise in the attic...

1 Getting started

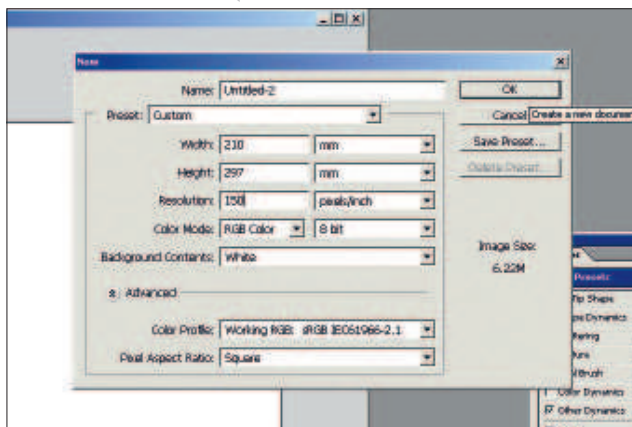
I normally start with a few thumbnails, but in this case I had an idea of what I wanted to do from the beginning, so I sketched the rough out straight away. I create a new document in Photoshop, usually A4 at 150DPI. It's easy to upsize later to 300DPI doing this, as you just double it. If the composition seems to be growing as you draw, you can always stretch it out using the Crop tool.

2 Sketching

I rough out using the Conte Pencil in Photoshop with Shape Dynamics on, as this gives you some nice, sketchy 'thicks and thins'. I'm going for a fairly straight-on composition, with a simple background. The covers of old detective novels used to concentrate on the figures and lighting for feel, and kept the background simple, as text would usually cover much of it.

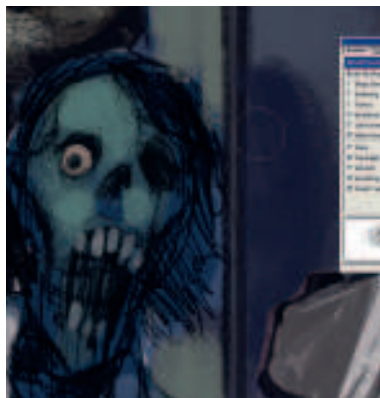
3 Initial colouring

My first colouring is often fairly messy! I create a new level and set the layer mode to Multiply. I don't worry about detailing yet, just where I want the light sources and how I want colour to set the mood. I use a custom brush to blob in colour, which is easy to make: Hard Round, with Spacing set to 10, Wet Edges on, and a Dual Brush option with a heavy texture such as Plastic Wrap Light. ➔



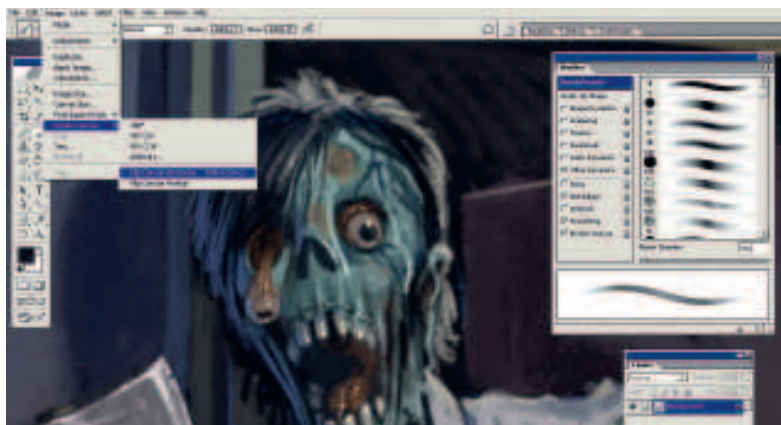
4 Body colour

From here on it's a basic process of building up the colour. I work my image up by starting with the faces and working out from there, painting skin and textural information to build up tone and shading. It's better to work out of dark into light, with the final painting stage being highlights. Because I'm after a fairly cartoony image, my detailing will be very selective; concentrating on faces and accessories, leaving brushmarks to provide a suggestion of detail in the other areas.



5 Flip the image

A good tip to make sure there are no glaring errors in the drawing/painting process is to constantly flip the image, giving you a new perspective on how you are working. I've set up a personal shortcut for this which you can do yourself in the Keyboard Shortcuts in the Edit menu. This way I can flip as part of my work flow and it becomes intuitive as I work, constantly switching back and forth. It also eases brush making when working against your natural left- or right-handedness.



6 Flatten the layers

At some point, I flatten the layers – usually after I've laid down the body colour to avoid focusing too much on the original drawing, but this is personal preference. You can carry on making decisions on new layers – if they work, flatten them. This keeps the working file size down too, and speeds up Photoshop.

7 Changing your mind

As the image develops, certain things don't always work. Don't be afraid to change your mind. For example, the axe in the sketch was hanging at the zombie's side. I decided to bring it up to head height, giving him more intent. I brought out the girl's hand holding the zombie's finger to make it clearer what she was doing. I lassoed the original hand then cut and pasted it into a new position.

8 Character design

Deciding how your characters will look can date them specifically. If you're setting them in the 60s, make sure they at least have a 60s look: researching outfits can be very important. The zombie wears a generic shirt and trousers so could fit almost anywhere, but the girl's clothes and hair are essential to the period. She's dressed in a pencil skirt and tight blouse that put her in the right time.

9 Highlighting

Particularly with the zombie, highlighting is very important. I want him to look rotten and glistening. With the main colour on him fairly subdued with desaturated tones, it's satisfying to select a hard-edged brush with Shape Dynamics on and add highlights. A dab of bright colour on areas such as the eyeballs and guts makes them appear wet.

PRO SECRETS

Enlarging images

The Crop tool isn't just there for making the canvas smaller. Drag the Crop tool over the whole image, and using the little boxes on the sides and corners you can stretch the canvas out to a larger desired size. Make sure your background colour is what you want, or matches your existing one, otherwise you'll be undoing it straight away!



10 Shadow

I often leave my final lighting till the end. If, like me, you end up always working a little toward lighter rather than dark, a good way to achieve dark shadows and moodiness is to flatten the image and duplicate the layer. Set the top one to Multiply and desaturate it a little. The whole thing will now look too dark. Select the Eraser with a fairly soft-edged brush and maybe a Dual Brush option for a bit of texture (once again Plastic Wrap or a similar brush will do for this), and start to erase the areas you wish to stand out from the shadow. The characters will start to appear out of the darkness and you can control the areas of shadow with the pressure you apply.



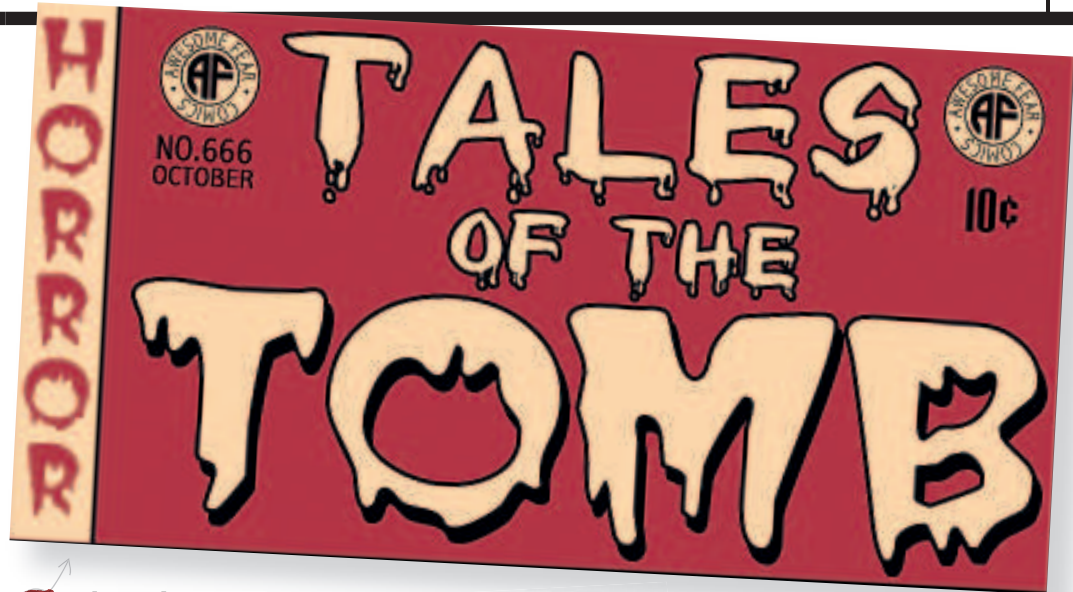


11 Texture overlay

Before I finish this section, I want a bit of texture on the walls to break up some of the flatness of the colour. What I use is a personal texture that's basically a photograph of damaged plaster with a green hue, broken with white. I drag this over my image and stretch it to cover the whole area. Set this layer to Overlay at about 55 per cent Opacity. I erase the areas I don't want to have texture on, in this case leaving the walls. It breaks up the colour and gives more depth to the image. Texture overlay is fun and can bring some interesting results, but shouldn't really be overused as it can be distracting, and is only there to enhance your existing mark-making.

12 Upsize image

As I said earlier, I tend to start working on an image at a relatively low resolution, so before I start adding text and graphics, I enlarge the image by about 50 per cent purely to add a few details and tighten up some of the edges that could look a bit blurry at a lower resolution. With a flat image it's now time to start adding the final touches.



13 Choosing text

One of the most important parts of a comic's cover is the text. Strong dynamic typefaces, often totally bespoke to the cover, are integral to the final look. Horror comics usually use fonts that are 'alive' with dripping blood and bold colour. A quick search for free horror fonts on the internet will bring back a copious choice, and I've selected a couple, Creeper and Wet Paint, from a website called http://simplythebest.net/fonts/horror_fonts.html. I'll use these with old favourites like Abadi MT Condensed, which is sans serif and easy to read.

I decide to emulate the EC look and have about a third of the image devoted to the text, which is usually on a coloured background. I cut and paste my image about a third down the canvas and on a new level fill in the empty area with a mute burgundy colour, and at the side a cream strip for the vertical text. I select Creeper as the main font for 'TOMB' and 'HORROR' and Wet Paint as the secondary one for 'TALES of the...' 'TOMB' is set to 190 points, and I scale 'TALES of the' using the Transform tool. I put a drop shadow on TOMB and start on the logo for Awesome Fear Comics.



Shortcuts

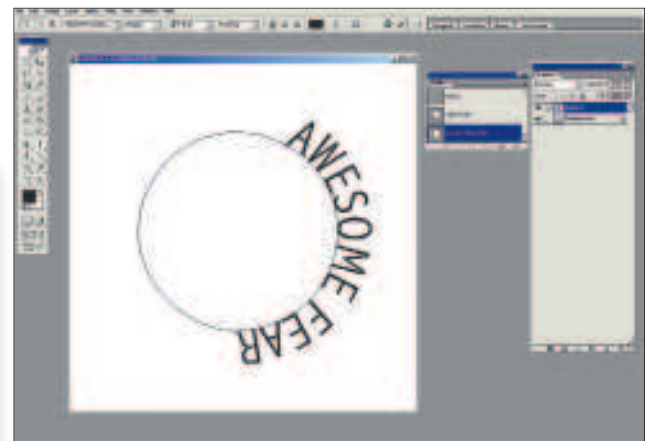
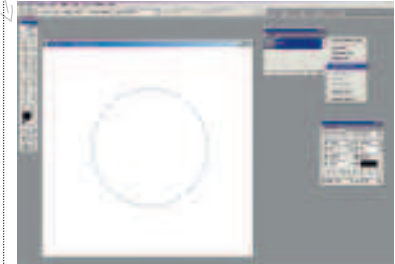
Hue/Saturation

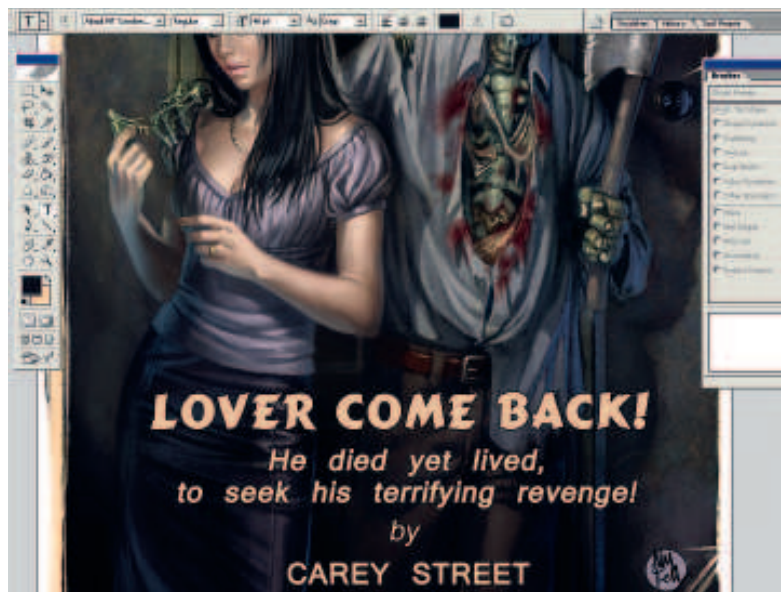
Ctrl/Cmd+U

A useful shortcut for adjusting the saturation, hue and lightness of any selected area.

14 Using paths

To get the logo text to go round the central circle, I use Paths. Firstly, bring up the Paths window from the dropdown menu. Using the Elliptical Marquee tool and holding down Shift, select a circle. In the Paths window create a new path and make it a 'work path'. Select the Type tool and click on the edge of the circle. The text cursor appears and all text you type will follow the edge of the circle. When you've done this, click Commit Edit, and you can now Transform this to fit. ➔





15 Final text

Once I've completed the graphical elements on the title area, including the text, I merge these layers, making sure the main image of the characters is still separate and underneath. I can then erase the area where I want the top of the zombie's head to go over in to the title area; a common feature of comic covers. Now those layers have been merged I can erase the drop shadow, a vector element, with no problems.

However, I still need to produce the title of the story, a strapline and invent a fictional author for it. Once I've decided on these elements it's a case of choosing a typeface and where they'll sit in the composition, which really decides itself with the darker area at the base of the image. When I've positioned these, I flatten the image.

16 Ageing

To age the cover, create a duplicate layer of the image so you have two the same. Fill the bottom one, with white, and make the canvas fractionally larger than the painted area. You should now have a white border to the image. On the top layer, choose Select>Load Selection. Old worn paper has a cream faded look, so make sure your background colour is set accordingly, and using a heavily textured eraser brush, (hard round with a texture such as Plastic Wrap), start to gently erase the edges of the image, occasionally cutting in a bit as though the paper's torn.



17 Creased up

Add more creases along the binding side as this is where any comic gets its main beating, and perhaps a fold or two on the corners. This requires a degree of research, so look at how old comics crease. The final tweak to ageing is a decent texture overlay with random marks, stains, folds and tears. Using one I've adapted from various sources, I enlarge it to fit the canvas and set it to Overlay in the layer modes and take the Opacity to about 60 per cent, erasing certain areas to give a randomness to the marks. Finally, I flatten the image, reduce the saturation a little and the picture's done.

PRO SECRETS

Transforming text

Once you've typed your text you can scale it and transform it with the Transform tool and it's still editable as text. Only when you rasterise the type (Layer>Rasterise>Type) can you no longer change what you've written. Rasterising essentially converts vector-based artwork, such as text and layer effects, into pixels that you can edit.

