


A COMIC TUTORIAL


by: KaiJu

Part 1: Getting Started

So you have a story sitting around and you're thinking that it might be a darn good idea to make it into a comic. But the question is, how do you start? There's a lot of advice out there telling a creator to just start. It's good advice for someone who is already somewhat familiar with the craft but tends to lose themselves in a lot of planning. But what if you're a new creator and have no idea how to start a comic? Here's where this tutorial comes in! We've struggled for a long time trying to make a comic before we actually hankered down and succeeded.



Jen: I've started making webcomics in high school. While I learned a lot by jumping into a long project, it wasn't something that I could use in the future or continue without revamping the entire thing. That story has, since then, gone through several development changes. I'm still planning to redo it and share it with the world someday!



Kate: I'm one of those people that gets lost in planning, so jumping into it is a good idea for me! I too tried to tackle my epic in college and ultimately can't use the pages I did. But because I started, I thought about the story more and understand the kind of skills I need to develop to create my vision.

Recently we finally started tackling one of our epics, Novae. There are a few things we've learned along the way and among them, tips we wish we knew before we started. We hope this tutorial will help you get ready to start your own comic!

We know every creator has different types of comics in mind, gag comics, strip comics, long story format, scroll format, panel by panel etc etc. There's no one way of creating a comic, but it's crucial to figure out a method that you're comfortable with. After all you're the one who is running the marathon, finding the right pair of shoes can help you stay in the race and not get blisters!



First things first, get excited!

It's pointless to start something that doesn't strike a cord with you. If you're not excited now, imagine how gung-ho you'll be about the project a month or a year later? We started coming up with the concept for Novae almost 7 years ago, and it's only a year ago that we began working on the main story. We're still passionate about the project even after all that time, perhaps even more so. We've always relied on the feeling of excitement when choosing our next project, it helps us to stay interested in the long run. You may have a lot of ideas lined up, but really, go for the one that you can't stop thinking about.



Once you decide on your exciting new project, start doodling! Start with scenes that get you going! This is your story and your unique point of view, do what makes you happy. Design your characters, draw them interacting with each other, draw environments, explore concepts, draw everything that floats your boat! And if you're working on a gag comic, draw one of your jokes and think of more! Just have fun and immerse yourself in your story. Try not to get stuck on anything and go with the flow. And if you find yourself stuck, don't be afraid to start over or look in another direction. By drawing these scenes, you get a better understanding of the world and your characters, that is tremendously helpful when it comes to the next step.

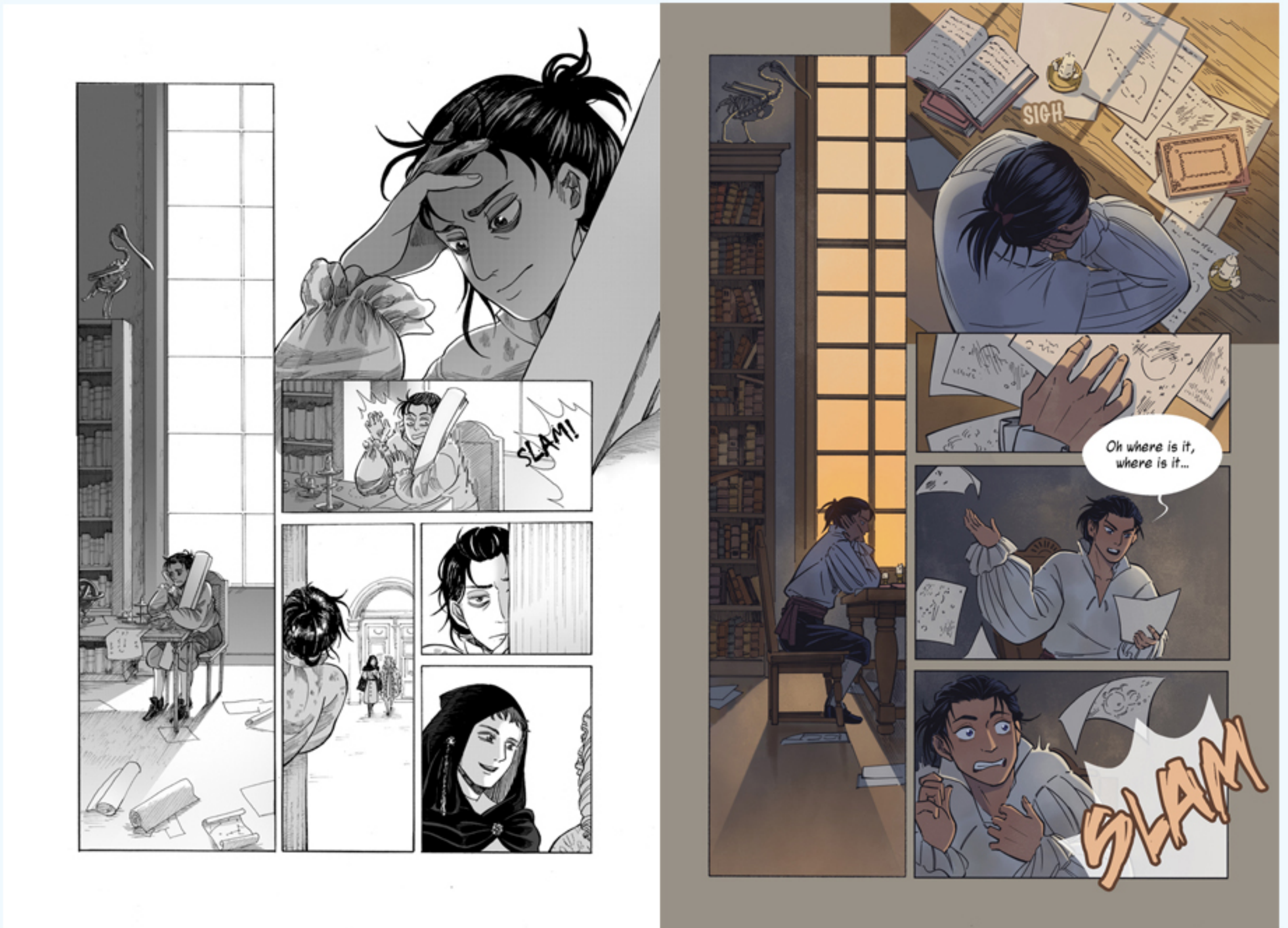
Here are some of our old development sketches for Novae!



Start with a short.

Imagine you are working on a TV series, the network usually ask you to produce something called a pilot. A 1 episode short that gives a good feel for the characters and the setting. Often times the pilot will look nothing like the final product. Same goes for comics, it's good to start with a 3 + page short story or a scene. And if you're planning something story driven, try coming up with a definitive narrative. A beginning, middle and end. Maybe a short that explores a side story or a side character. We pitched Novae with 12 pages and that helped us a lot when it came to figuring out our flow and how we wanted to work on our comic.

Example below! Here's the old pitch pages compared to the new finished one. There's a 3 year difference between the pages.



Between these 3 years, we also completed 2 short stories that are set in the Novae universe. It really allowed us to get a sense of what we were going for and helped us mature our style and art. In the end we started Novae being really happy with the first chapter and that eliminated some of the need to go back and redraw whole pages in the future.

Here are some examples of the shorts we've completed.



The Ring of Saturn 2014



Inhabitant of Another Planet 2016

Shorts will help you figure out the style you'd like to go for and what you're comfortable with before committing. It will also help you iron out production kinks before you tackle the bigger story. Overall it will provide you with a better understanding of yourself and your project!



Planning your comic

This section is just about things you need to keep in mind while planning your comic to help you get a clearer picture. If you don't understand all of it right now, that's ok! We'll go into detail for everything we mentioned below in each appropriate section. Thumbnailing, penciling, coloring etc.

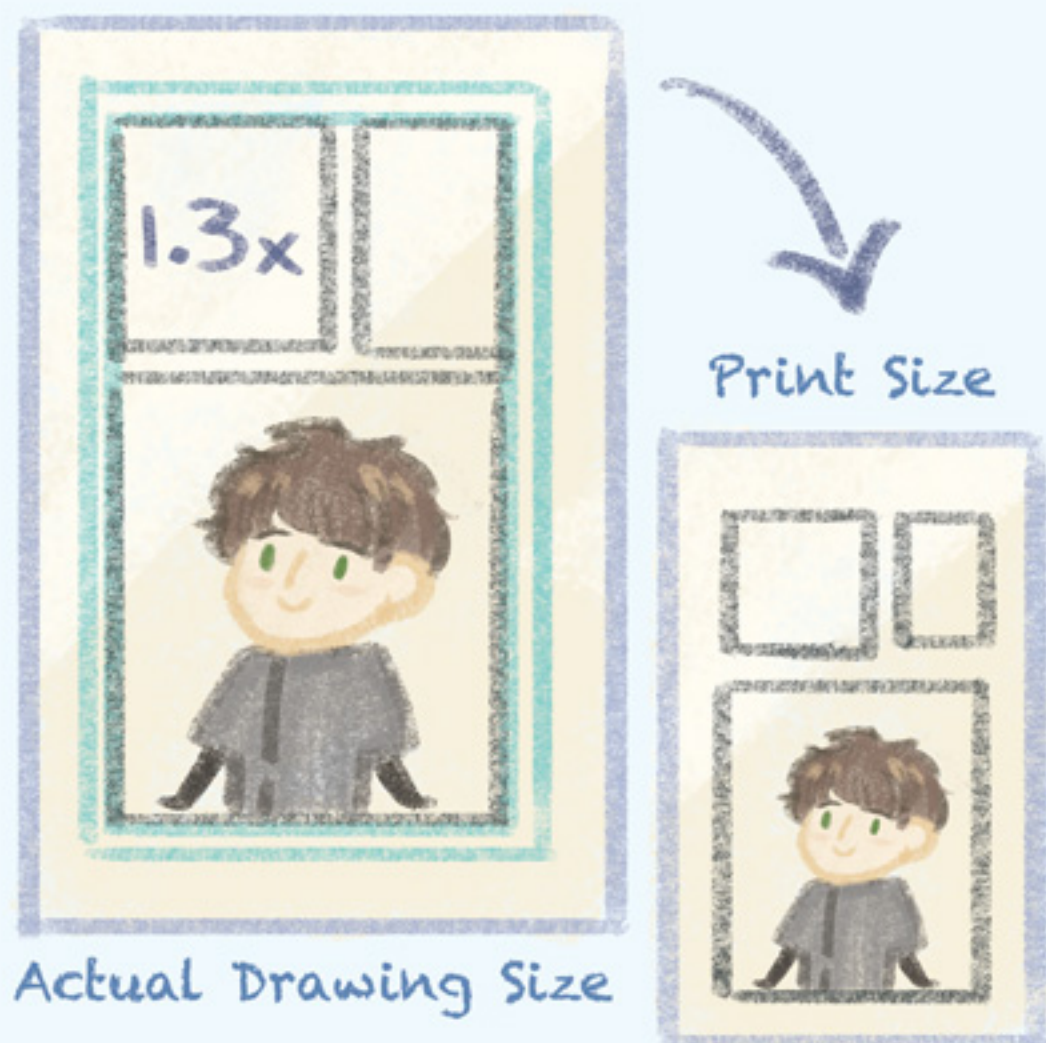
So now you're finally ready to dive into your first comic. But wait! A question you must ask yourself is, is this for print? Would you like to print your comic in the future? We would advise a new creator to always plan their project with printing in mind. It's easier to decide not to print it than going back to fix all the pages later. It's important to figure out your end goal before even starting.





Is the comic going to be color or B/W? Color tends to be more time consuming and when it comes to printing it can be more expensive. B+W is cheaper but if you're using zip tones, it can cause an unwanted moire pattern on the pages, both on the computer and when printed. So the pages have to be toned at actual print size. (No shrinking!)

What's the final size for printing? Manga size? American size? Custom size? Look at your library and choose a book size you like for a better idea!



Novae is created following American size templates. We draw the pages 1.3x larger than actual print size.

There are a lot of ways to structure a comic! Some prefer to draw on letter sized paper, some on the computer, some on bristol paper and some like to draw the panels individually and rearrange them afterwards. It's up to you to figure out what you like best!



We used to draw Novae pages on 14"x17" bristol paper, but it quickly got too clunky for us to maneuver such a big and heavy piece of paper. We had to make our own guides and the panels often turned out crooked. Then we switched to Japanese manga paper with printed blue guides. I still need to make minor adjustment to the guides, but it's a lot lighter and fits perfectly in a 11 x 14 portfolio. Making it really easy to travel with.



And if you are a digital artist. What are some of the programs that you like to use?



Novae is traditionally drawn and inked, but we use both Clip Studio and Photoshop to complete the pages.

You can always change your mind when you come to the actual steps. Switching a B/W comic to color and vice versa! Changing the size of a comic etc. But it's good to think about what your final vision is and start asking yourself some questions.

You'll figure out what you need while you work on your short and you'll find the right pair of shoes.

Next time, we'll talk about scripting and writing!

KAIJU CORNER!

Everyone gets their concepts from different things, here's how we come up with our different ideas!

First off, dreams! We both have really elaborate and story driven dreams and often times they turn into concepts for stories.

A lot of our inspiration also come from wanting to break tropes. Sometimes the media we consume makes us angry and we want to do something different! Haha.

We also watch a lot of documentaries about animals, nature and different cultures. The shows and the interesting facts they present become a big source of where our ideas come from.

