MAKING AND COLORING COMICS
Part 1: THE GRAND ILLUSION

Welcome to my very poorly formatted comic making/coloring tutorial. I'm going to split these up into parts because I think there's a lot here to go through. For now though, I want to start with **one way that that I think about comics** in particular, and why I think this way is helpful and interesting.

I'll continue in the next parts on the subject of layout and coloring (there's certainly a lot to go through) which will focus more on specifics, shortcuts, light, placement of characters, etc. I want to also mention something here - this is all **practical knowledge** or stuff that I've picked up during the course of drawing comics. I have no formal art training, though I have certainly studied it (and studying art will never, ever hurt your comics art).

Alright, what is this way of thinking about comics, and why is it so important? To get into details, I'd like to talk about **realism** and **symbolism**. Realism being an attempt at creating more 'realistic' looking art, and symbolism being a reliance on more 'symbolic' art. Comics tends to live on the more **symbolic** side of things.

Here's a good thing to keep in mind:

A good knowledge of realism **creates** good symbolism, and in fact is vital for good symbolism, I think. However realism is not actually better than symbolism, especially, I would argue, for comics art, which can make use of such rich visual language.

In a very strict and literal sense, all art is symbolic. Let's take a look at two heads here:

Which is more realistic? You'd have to say head A, surely. But both heads are actually **symbolic**. They are employing the visual language of comic art to convey the **illusion** that there is a head there, and not just marks on a page.

Working on your anatomy, realism, and artistic fundamentals is **very, very important** to the versimilitude, or 'realness' of this illusion. There is absolutely no way in which working on practices of realism and classic art will hurt your artistic skill, and a billion ways in which they are fundamentally important.

This all sounds a bit pedantic, certainly, but my point is this: your aim in drawing a comic is **not to realistically depict a scene, it is to depict a scene in which the visual symbolism of your art is both convincing and clear** to your audience.

Think about a theatrical or film production. They almost **never** use natural lighting to convey a scene, and make use of all kinds of stagecraft, props, make-up, and other visual trickery to produce the illusion of a scene. This is important to us because that illusion, unlike reality, is easily manipulated by us. We can make use of it, and its visual language, to convey certain feelings, moods, ideas, or relationships to our audience. **Comics is no different.** You are perfectly free to tweak the rules of reality in order to convey things to your audience. The ways in which you portray space, light, angle, position, and other visual elements of your comic are all **important tools for you to control** the way people engage with and read your work.

Check out the following panel and the different ways I've fiddled with the color/text here (with the exact same lineart) to convey different moods:

We get a different sense of context and mood from each panel even though the figure's expression, gesture, and lineart is exactly the same.

Going forward, try and keep this in mind with the rest of this tutorial! Don't **aim to color 'realistically'**, unless that is your goal. Thinking about each panel as a shot in a movie you are directing, and all the variables you can tweak to get the look or feel you want, is a really good way to make your comic read effectively and clearly.

Next up: **basic layout tricks!**