

Fishbowls, Bowties, and Diamonds

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Abstract

Fishbowls, Bowties, and Diamonds is an original story about a small gang in 1950s New York. Through this project, I was able to create an introduction, or pilot, for my overarching story and showcase the personalities of the main characters. All characters in the story are object-heads, humans with an object for a head, allowing the story to stand apart from other narratives. The story revolves around a motley crew planning heists and running into rival gangs while uncovering the city's mysteries. I have been researching graphic novels, authors, illustrators, and the history of the 1950s to help me write and illustrate my comic. This design project will act as a step into the comic and publishing industry, as well as a branding and networking piece. I've always been enamored by stories when I was young and have worked for years to bring one of mine to life.

Fishbowls, Bowties, & Diamonds (FB&D) was a relatively new idea for a story I created over time. I began writing notes, making characters, and creating plot points nonstop for this ragtag group of characters. The idea came to me shortly after I created a mascot/persona for my brand as an artist. My name, Gillian, pronounced Jillian, has been mispronounced as Gill-ian since high school, like the gills of a fish. To turn that negativity into something positive, friends at the time gave me the nickname 'Gills'. Over the pandemic, I thought to create a character from this nickname, and thus, Fitz, the main character of FB&D was born. Once the character was created, I knew I wanted to

create a story using characters like him. Taking inspiration from stories I admire and adore, such as Monkey Punch's *Lupin the Third*, and Diaz Canales and Guarnido's noir graphic novel, *Blacksad*, I set out to create my own noir heist graphic novel.

I started by writing out a script for the pilot comic. I already had a general idea of how I wanted this story to play out, but I figured that creating a separate, introductory story that took place before the narrative I created would be best. I decided that my motley crew of characters would attempt to rob a pilot but had already failed and are retelling what happened to the leader of their gang who left them in charge for a couple of weeks. Once

that idea was set in stone, I began writing a script with notes of where the characters would be moving, which specific scenes and perspectives I would experiment on in the future, and what should be happening in the background. Despite the serious subject matter of a high-stakes heist, I wanted the characters' clashing personalities and humor to shine through in the situation. What I enjoy about writing is showing rather than telling, and I like to do so through dialogue. There is no better way to understand a character than through their actions and how they address the people around them, strangers or not. That was the main element I wanted to achieve in this comic, and I was able to explore and practice this element by taking the time to focus on my writing.

After the script was completed, I started thumbnailing the composition for each page of the comic. I used a variety of perspectives to make each page visually interesting to the viewer but advance the pace of the narrative. I pushed myself to be conscious of interesting panel layouts and word bubble placement to make each page legible for the reader. I've never done thumbnailing on this scale before; it was overwhelming and frustrating because it made me realize the size of this project and the looming deadline approaching. There was so much I wanted to include, but I had to scale it down in order to showcase my skills. This project was a huge endeavor but offered so much to learn. It was also very uplifting to look back at a day's work of thumbnailing to see how far I had gotten and see my story unfolding in front of me.

Once the thumbnails were completed, I uploaded my sketches into Procreate, a drawing app for the iPad, and began inking each page. During this process, I would trace over my sketches to have a clear outline of each character, object, and panel. Using these

guidelines, I moved on to color each page. My coloring process has three parts: flats, shadows, and highlights. Flats refer to "flat color," a color that is solid, uninterrupted, and completely uniform in brushstroke depth and shading. I blocked in each color for the characters while following the color palettes I previously made for them to make sure each figure was unique and stood out. For the setting and the background, I wanted to keep the tone warm and inviting by using yellows, browns, and reds since the setting is a high-end party. After making sure the flats were correct, I began adding shadows. I used a multiply adjustment layer that multiplies the colors of the flats, resulting in a darker color. Using this method can create harmonious colors to emphasize shadows. For highlights, I needed to pay attention to where my light sources were to add lighting in its proper place. I used an overlay adjustment layer that mimicked the shine and glow from light sources. Finally, I added word bubbles and dialogue on top of my illustrations. I enjoy adding character to the word bubbles to push the tone of what is being spoken and to add even more personality to my characters.

I've been told that my dreams had been far out of reach for a long time. I've stared dreamy eyed at television shows and movies, hoping one day I could create something just as amazing. I've read books and comics of adventures, battles, and mystery hoping to hear whispers from the pages as to how to write in such a moving way. Now, I can only stand tall at where I am in my life and what I have accomplished. This comic is a love letter to the medium and to the artists, authors, and comic artists that motivated me to pursue the craft myself. I hope that my creation can push others to pursue their dreams even when the world is against them.



Illustration of Iannuzzi (left) and Fitz (right)



Illustration of Dinah (above) and Windsorknot (below).



Illustration of (left to right) Lansky, Bellamomo, and Yaku.

Recommended Citation

Gurney, G. (2023). Fishbowls, bowties, and diamonds. *Made in Millersville Journal*, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.mimjournal.com/>