Creating comics with CorelDRAW Graphics Suite

Zazo Aguiar

About the author

Zazo Aguiar is a Brazilian artist who began his career as an illustrator in advertising. He created cartoon illustrations for *Monica's Gang in an Adventure in Time* (*Turma da Monica em uma Aventura no Tempo)*, a very popular animation film of Buena Vista in Brazil. He has completed projects for Coca-Cola, Warner Bros., Globo Filmes, and Disney Junior Brazil. In 2007, the cartoonist Mauricio de Sousa invited Zazo to join the team responsible for launching the biggest publishing success story of Brazilian comics *Monica's Gang Teen (Turma da Monica Jovem)*, where Zazo designed characters and worked as a cover artist until the 77th edition. Nowadays, Zazo is a freelancer, and in his spare time works on his new online comic project InGameWeTrust.

Creating comics with CorelDRAW Graphics Suite

Drawing comics requires knowledge, skills, and tools. The comic book artist needs to know how to create characters and how to draw backgrounds, cars, guns, and other real-world objects. In addition to understanding composition and perspective, the artist must have a strong aesthetic sense to create beautiful pages with easy-to-follow narrative. Fortunately, CorelDRAW has all the tools needed to create professional-looking comics.

In this tutorial, I will explain how I draw comic characters and setting, and add panels and other elements to my comic InGameWeTrust, a project in progress with script and artwork created by me. I will focus only on the second panel of the first page because the creation process for all other panels of the comic project is the same.


Figure 1: The first page of my comic project InGameWeTrust

Figure 2: Second panel of the first page

Drawing the first character

I usually draw without prior planning so I start designing the character on the left of the second panel directly in CorelDRAW. I draw the shape of his face by using the **Freehand** tool †⸱ₘ (F5) to create a closed object, and then fill the shape with color right away.
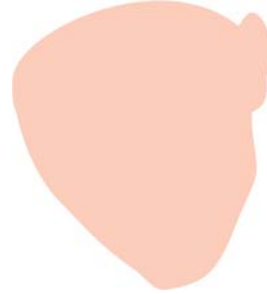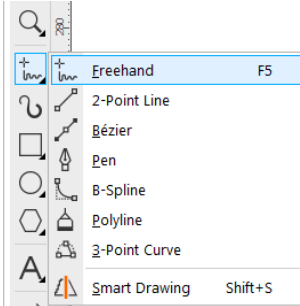

Figure 3A: The face shape filled with color

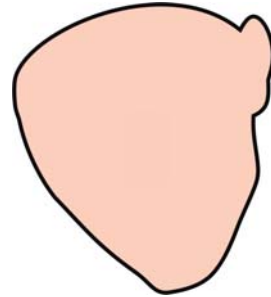Next, I press **F12** to display the **Outline Pen** dialog box ⎘ and add an outline.
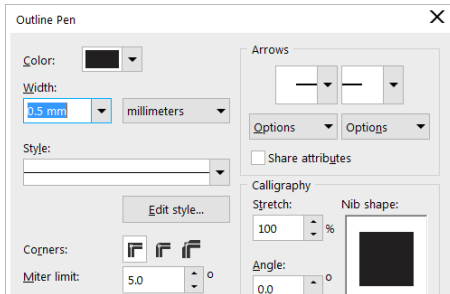

Figure 3-B: The face shape with outline added

To emulate drawing with an ink pen, I turn the outline into an object by using the **Object ▸ Convert Outline to Object** command (Ctrl + Shift + Q), and then with the **Shape** tool ⸜ₜ (F10), I manipulate the nodes to adjust the thickness of the outline. Later, I use this method for all external lines in the character's face, body, and hair.
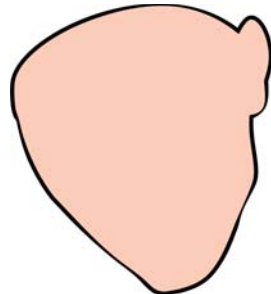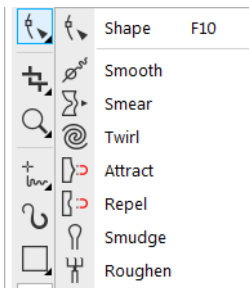

Figure 3-C: Face shape filled with color and outline of varying thickness.

Next, I draw the eyebrows, eyes and mouth with the **Freehand** tool ⁺ₗₘ (F5), shape them with the **Shape** tool ₍ᵥ (F10), and then fill them with 100% black.

Figure 4: Drawing and coloring the eyes and eyebrows

When necessary, I move objects in the stacking order to place them in front of or behind other objects. To do this, I right-click an object, click **Order**, and select the desired option. This method can be used for all other parts that are drawn separately.
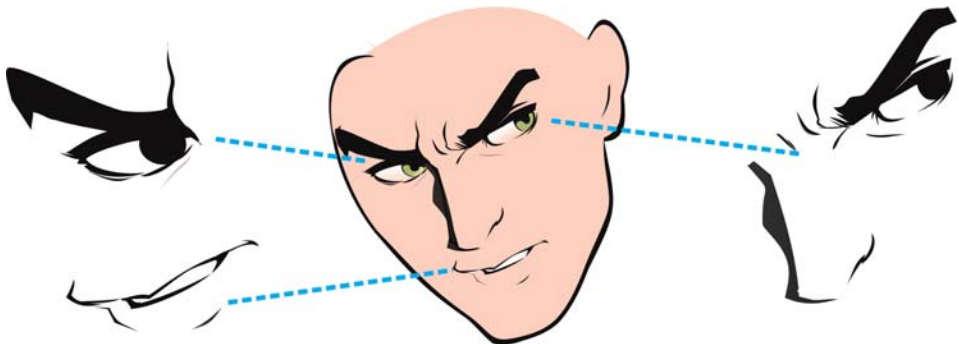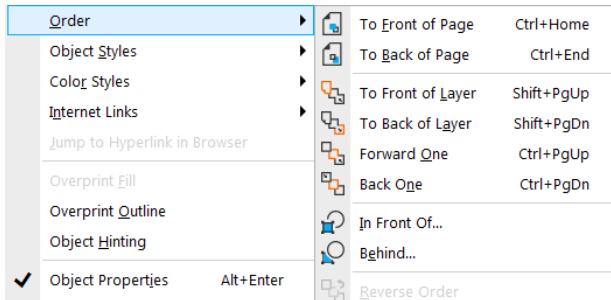

Figure 5: All face elements — eyes, eyebrows, mouth and nose — are drawn separately and then added in front of the face shape.

Note: You can switch the selected object by pressing **Tab**.

Again using the **Freehand** tool ⁺↳ (F5) and the **Shape** tool ↷ (F10), I draw and shape the different hair parts, making each lock of hair a closed object so that it can be easily filled with color.
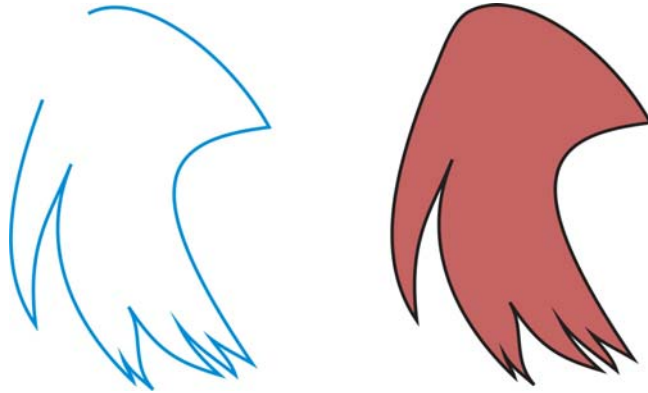
Figure 6: A lock of hair as an unfilled open curve (left). A lock of hair as a filled closed curve (right).

Next, I add each lock to the face to create the hair. To make the hair a single unit, I group all the locks by using the **Group objects** button (Ctrl+G) on the property bar.
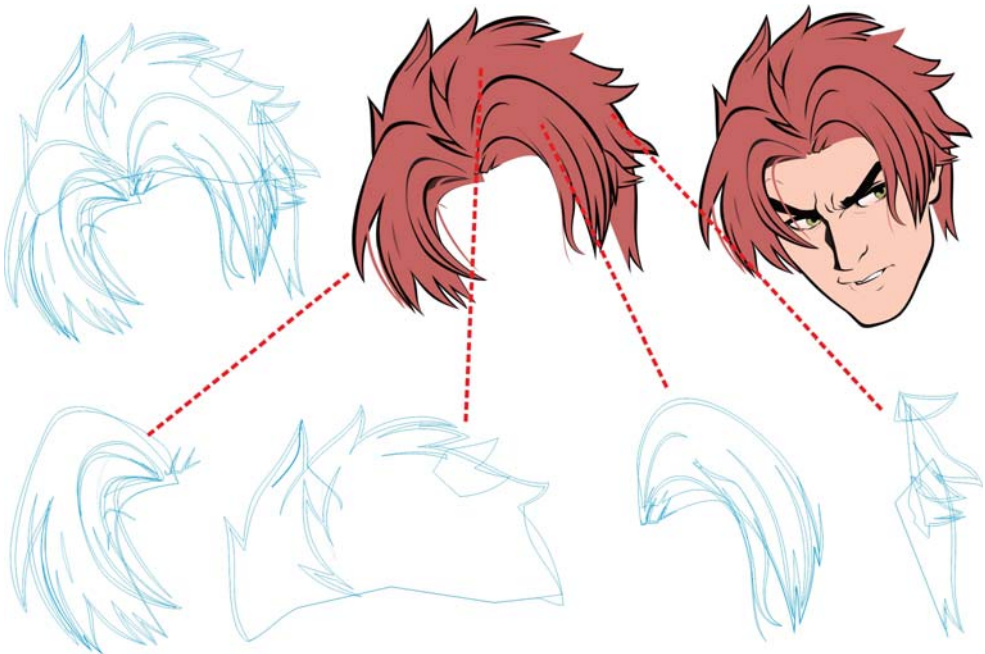
Figure 7: The locks of hair are added to the face and then grouped.

To draw the other parts of the character such as the body and clothing, I continue using the **Freehand** tool ⊹ (F5) and the **Shape** tool ⬚ (F10), creating closed objects that can be easily filled with color.

Now that I have a clean design (Figure 8), I am ready to add lighting, depth, and shadows.

Figure 8: Wireframe of the drawing (left). Colored drawing without depth and lighting (right).

To illuminate the face of the character, I duplicate the face shape by pressing **Ctrl + D** and fill the copy with a darker shade of the same color (Figure 9). Using the **Objects ▶ Order** command, I place the copy on top of the face shape, but behind the nose, eyes, mouth and other facial details. Then, I apply a transparency to the copy with the **Transparency** tool ▦ dragging diagonally upwards and from left to right, thus choosing which side will appear lit (Figure 9).
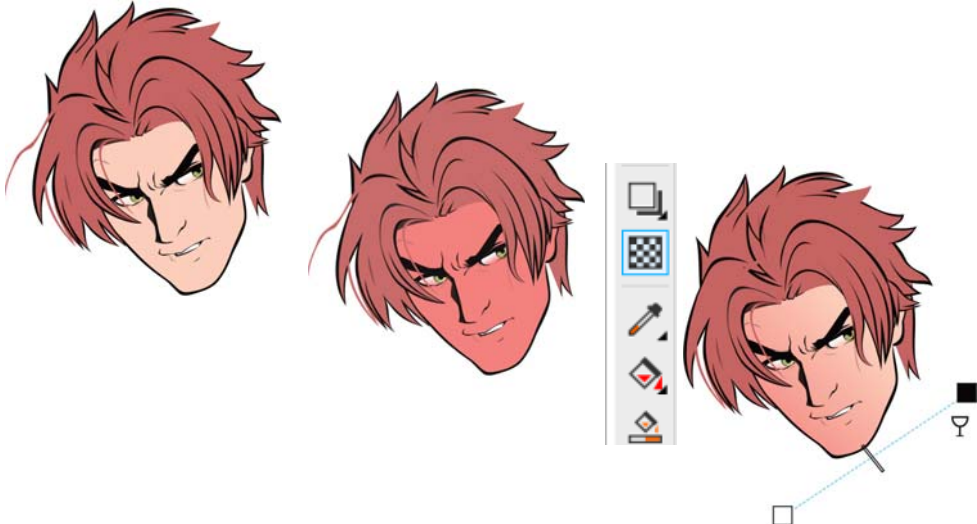

Figure 9 (left to right): The face shape filled only with the base color; a copy of the face is filled with a darker color tone; transparency is applied to the face.

To achieve the illusion of depth, I draw a circle with the **Ellipse** tool ◯ (F7), and then add a drop shadow with the **Drop Shadow** tool ◻. I choose the **Drop Shadow** tool because it gives a better smoky effect than the **Transparency** tool ▩.
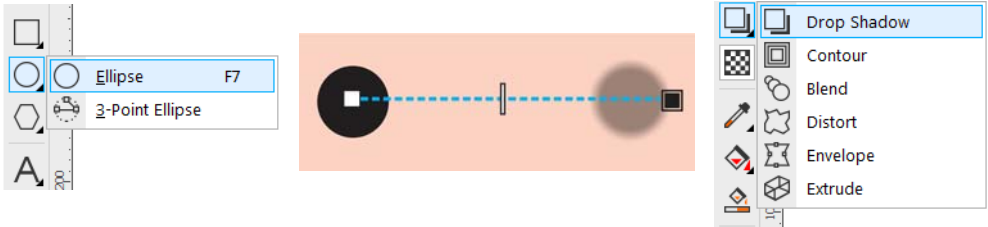

Figure 10-A: An ellipse with a drop shadow added

Instead of using a dark color tone, this time I add 10% yellow to the drop shadow from the color picker on the property bar, setting the merge mode to Normal.
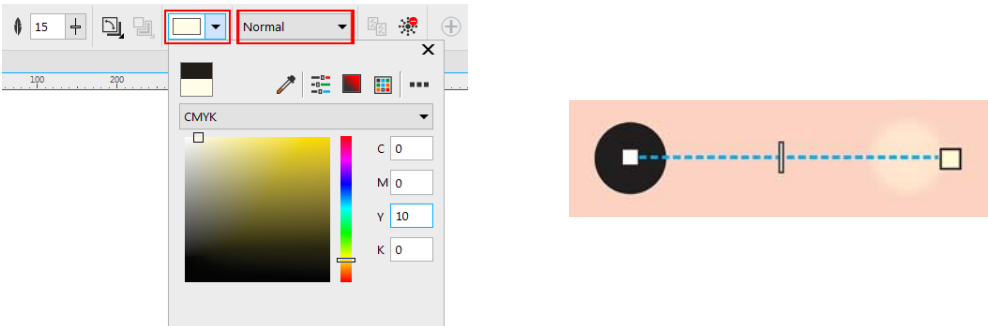

Figure 10-B: Yellow is added to the drop shadow.

When I am satisfied with the result, I select the ellipse, and click **Object ▸ Break Drop Shadow Group Apart** (Ctrl+K). Next, I delete the ellipse, leaving only the drop shadow. I copy the drop shadow and place the copies on the face (Figure 11).
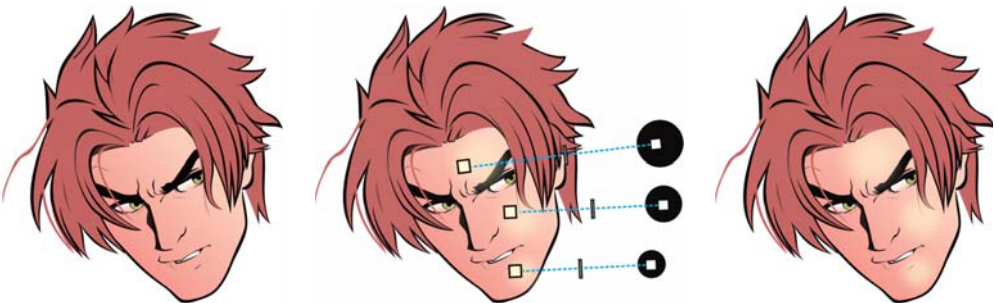

Figure 11 (from left to right): Face without lighting; adding light effects with the Drop Shadow tool; final result

Now that the design is already less flat, I will add shadows that complement what is missing in the lighting effect, namely the dark unlit areas.

Again using the **Freehand** tool ✝ₘ (F5), I create the shape of the shadow on top of the unlit areas of the face. I usually draw shadows similar to the ones that appear in Japanese anime.

Figure 12-A: A drop shadow shape is drawn on the character's face.

With the **Transparency** tool ▨ active, I select the **Multiply** merge mode, and click the **Linear fountain transparency** button on the property bar. Then, I drag diagonally (shown in Figure 12) similarly to how I created the lighting effect shown in Figure 9. The shadow can now be placed on the character's face (Figure 12).
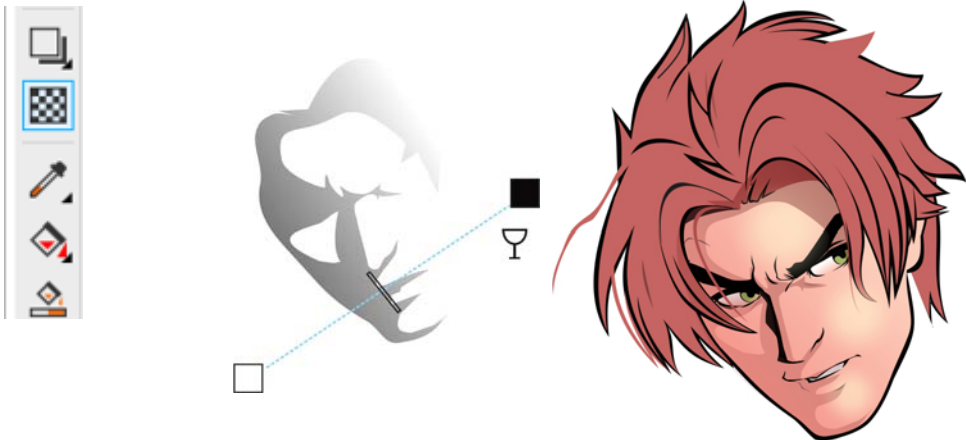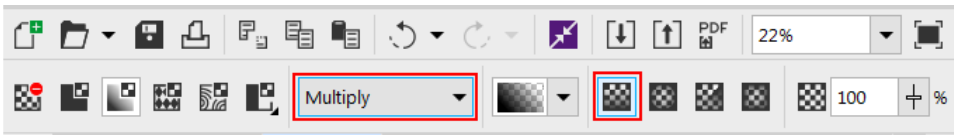
Figure 12: Using the Transparency tool to create a shadow effect.

Drawing the second character

To draw the second character, I use the techniques employed for the first character. The second character is holding a holographic projection that emits blue light (Figure 13), an effect that I create convincingly by applying transparencies to shapes (Figure 14).
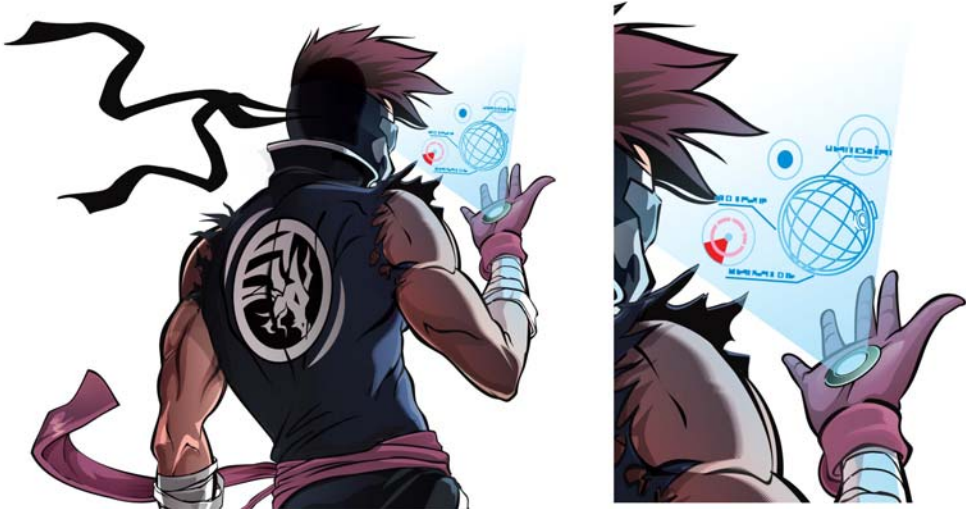

Figure 13: The second character uses an electronic device that emits blue light.

Figure 14:The effect of blue light is created with the Transparency tool.

To create the shadows (Figure 15), I draw shapes and apply transparencies similarly to the process shown in Figure 12.

This time, I need two shadows so I draw a shape and duplicate it. The first shadow shape shows the unlit areas. This is a safe way of applying lighting only to specific areas, without having to change the original design.

The second shadow shape uses a color close to the skin color and is designed to soften the darkest black of the first shade and create a soft color transition between the skin and the beginning of the shadow (Figure 15).

Figure 15: A transparency is applied from left to right to the shadow shape on the left (1); the direction of the transparency is reversed in the shadow on the right (2).

You can add more copies of the same shadow for a more intense shadow effect.

Placing the characters in the panel

After completing the characters and grouping them in two separate groups, I place them in the same scene by using the PowerClip feature. First, I draw the panel box with the **Freehand** tool (Figure 16). Next, I select the characters, right-click them, choose **PowerClip Inside,** and when a black arrow appears, I click the box (Figure 17).

To adjust character placement, I select the PowerClip object, and click the **Edit PowerClip** button on the floating toolbar that appears.
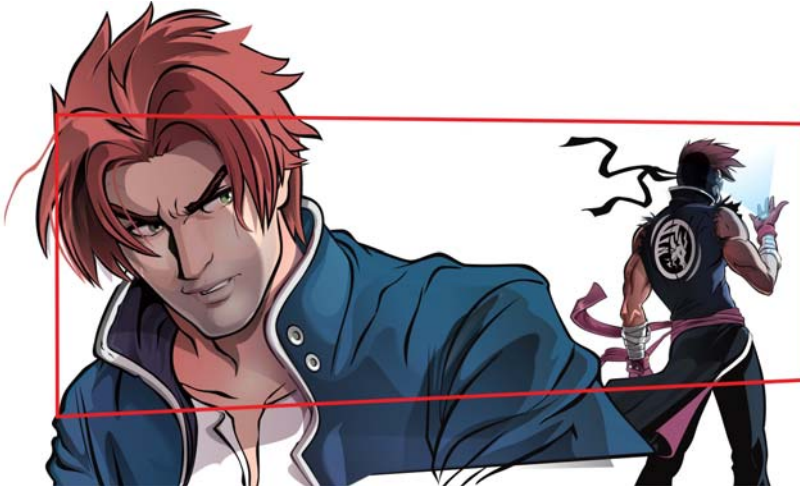

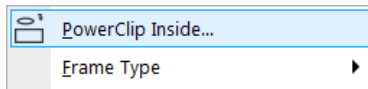*Figure 16: The two completed characters and the panel box in red*

Figure 17: The characters are inserted in the box with the help of the PowerClip feature.

Character placement

Next, I place a white filter in front of the second character so that it appears to be behind the first character. To create the white filter, I draw a rectangle with the **Rectangle** tool ☐, fill it with white, and then apply a transparency to the white rectangle.

Figure 18: The blue dashed line shows the white filter added in front of the drawing.

To add the white filter to the panel box, I right-click it, and choose the **PowerClip Inside** command. The white filter must be in front of the character that is supposed to be in the background so I use the **Object ▸ Order** command to place the filter between the characters.

Figure 19: A filter is added between the characters to create the illusion that they are on different planes.

Creating the background

Next I focus on the background, which in comics is as important as the characters. To draw the buildings, windows and terrace in this background, I mostly use the **Rectangle** tool ▢ (F6).
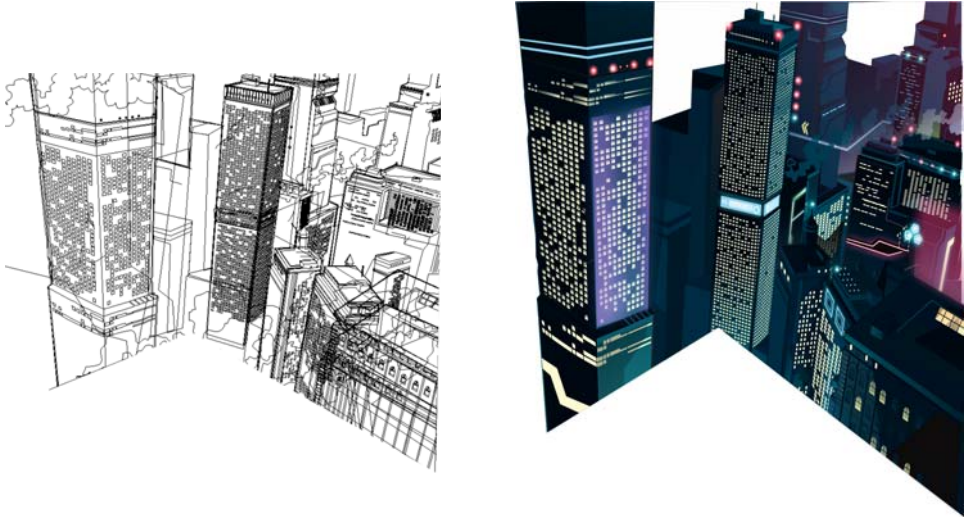

Figure 20 (left to right): Wireframe view and normal view of the background

To add the neon lights, I use the **Transparency** tool ▦ together with the **Drop Shadow** tool ▢. On the property bar, I change the opacity and feathering of the drop shadow to achieve the desired effect, and I also choose the neon color (Figure 21).
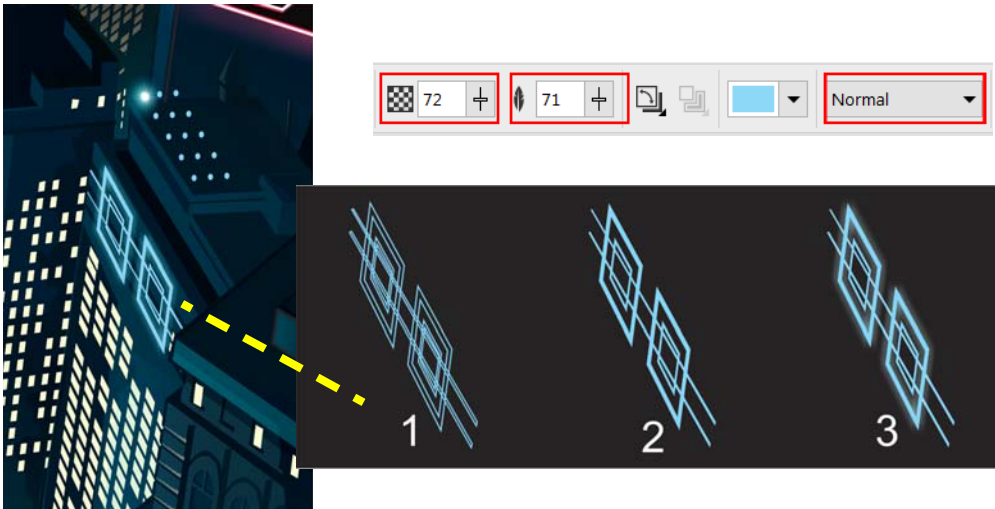

Figure 21: Zoomed view of the neon effect. Wireframe view of the object (1), normal view (2); object with drop shadow (3)

Drawing the windows and the buildings

I draw a window with the **Rectangle** tool ☐ (F6), copy the window, and apply a transparency. Next, I place the copy top of the original to add depth (Figure 22-A).Then, I draw small shapes with the **Freehand** tool ⁺₍ₙₙ (F5) to give each window a unique look (Figure 22-B).

Figure 22-A: Transparency is added to an object copy, which then is placed on top of the window to add depth.

Figure 22-B: Giving a unique look to a window

I make copies of the window variations created so far and arrange the copies in rows. I also change some windows to a darker tone to create the illusion that the light is not on.

Figure 22-C: The first row of windows is ready.

The buildings are created with the **Rectangle** tool ☐ and the **Freehand** tool. I usually use some reference images, but the basics are really simple. First, I create a rectangular shape (Figure 23-1), and then I click the top line of the building with the **Shape** tool (F10) to add a node (Figure 23-2). Next, I drag the node up and draw a line with the **Freehand** tool, dividing the shape in two to create a perspective view from below (Figure 23-3). Finally, I create a variation with three lines for a top view (Figure 23-4).
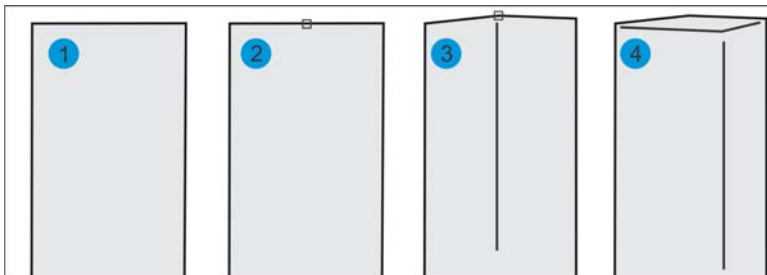

Figure 23: Drawing buildings with different views

The next step is to do all building planning and choose a base color. I choose green and add lighting with the **Transparency** tool ▓ using a lighter green tone. Because this is a night scene, I darken the top parts of the buildings. Next, I add lighting to the left side of the building once again using the **Transparency** tool, adding a 3D look and feel.
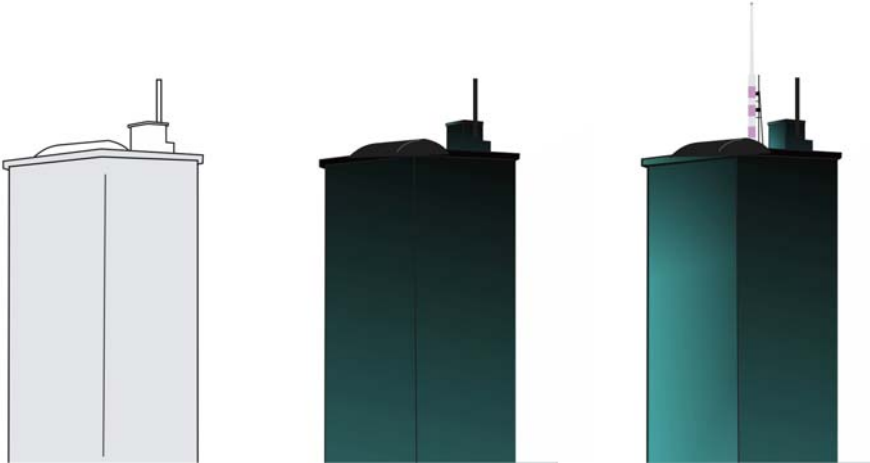

*Figure 24: Using only the **Transparency** tool, you can add lighting and a 3D look to the building.*

To complete the buildings, I copy the finished window rows, and multiply the copies by duplicating them (**Ctrl +D**). After the windows are aligned, I select them as a block and use the **Envelope** tool ⬚ (**Ctrl + F7**) to make the windows follow the perspective of the building (Figure 25). As a finishing touch, I draw a small antenna on top of the building.


Figure 25: Adding windows to the buildings

Now that the buildings are added to the background, I already have a good part of the comic ready.

Figure 26: Comic with buildings added to the background.

Creating the sword and sky

Using the **Freehand** tool ✛ (F5), I draw the sword, and then I create shadows and highlights, using the same technique that was employed for the characters.
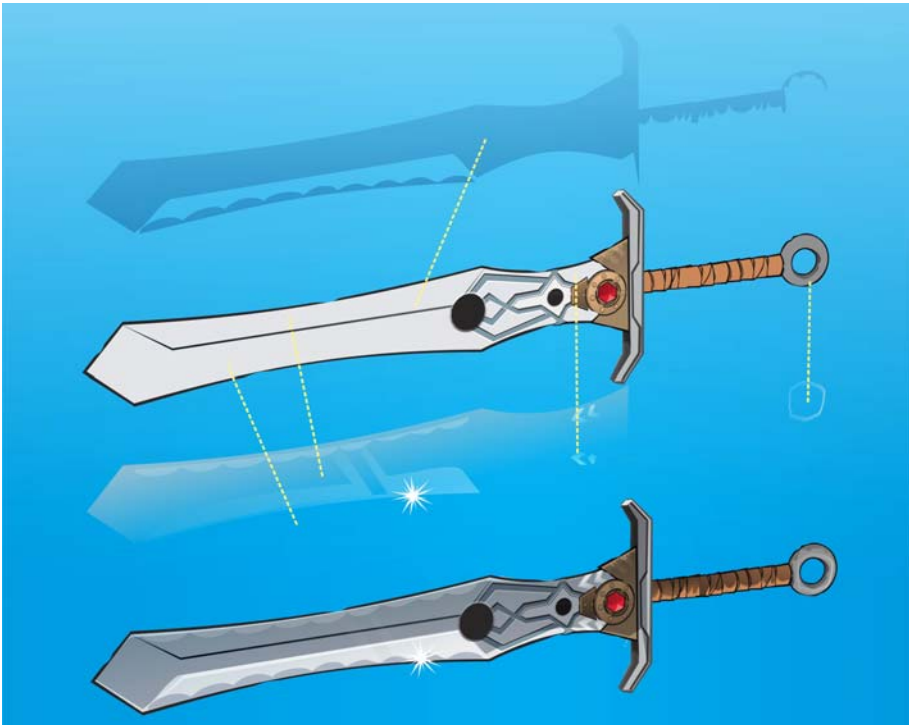

Figure 27: Sword before and after adding highlights and shadows

Figure 28: The sword is added to the scene, bringing this panel close to completion.

I draw the sky in Corel PHOTO-PAINT by using special brushes that help me create the clouds and the beautiful moon in the background.

Figure 29: The sky is created in Corel PHOTO-PAINT.

Figure 30: The sky complements the scene.

Adding the finishing touches

I add shine effects to the top of the buildings and the sword by using the **Polygon** tool ⬡ (Y). I increase the number of points in the polygon to 25 and then pull nodes to transform the polygon into a multi-pointed star (Figure 31).
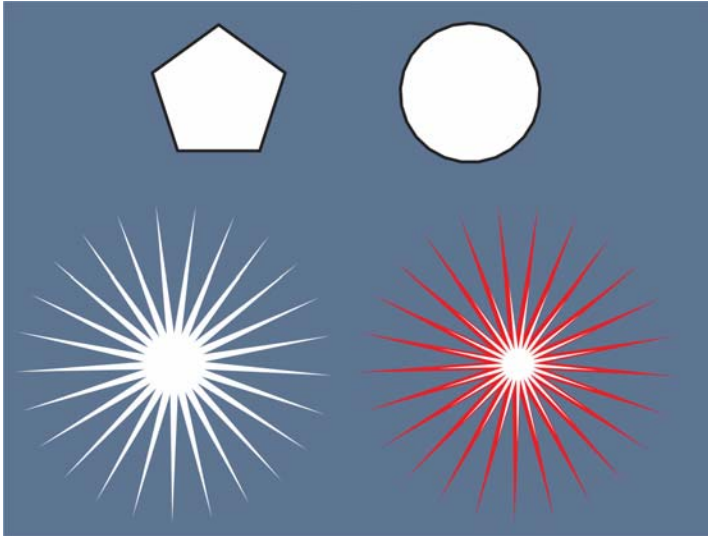

Figure 31: Creating stars from a polygon and overlapping stars for shine effects.

I overlay two stars of different color to create the shining light on top of the buildings, and I add a white star to create the shine effect on the sword.

Figure 32: Shine effects are added to the sword and the top of the buildings.

With all details added to the scene, the second panel of the comic is now complete.