

# Understanding Motion Comics

Design Research Project



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Guide - Prof. Phani Tetali

## Declaration

I hereby declare that the research done for my design research seminar project and submitted as a written report to the Industrial Design Centre, IIT Bombay is a record of the original work done by me under the guidance of Prof. Phani Tetali.

I affirm that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or falsified any idea/data/fact/source to the best of my knowledge. I understand that any violation of the above will cause for disciplinary action by the Institute .

Unless otherwise stated, the contents of this report in the form of text and images are entirely my own. The views expressed in the document as part of the written submission of the project are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of Industrial Design Centre, IIT Bombay.

Signature:



Date:

25<sup>th</sup> May 2016

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## Approval sheet

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Project Guide: 

Date: 04/08/2016

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## Abstract

Comics have fuelled imaginations of children and men all around the world for decades. They possess the power to take the audience along with them to a totally different world of fantasy. Like films or Animation, you don't need a big team to produce a good comic book. A single curious mind is enough to take you into a fictitious world, completed with characters and conflicts of their own. When we are reading comics, we escape reality. We are living in that world, living the life of those characters. With the advent of modern technology, the prospects have widened. There are more ways to tell story now. Stories have the ability to be interactive, to respond to the decisions of the audience. They can now come out of the page, they can move, they can be given voices, sounds, animation, adding more layers of magic to an already magical medium. The aim of this project is to look at the world of motion comics today as well as the means of creating them for modern platforms like Android, IOS and windows.

## Introduction

In theory, motion comics are narratives where we take a story, plan it out in panels (if preferable) and animate them, a portion of them or the layout itself with or without sound, music, Foley and effects so that it forms a unique audio-visual narrative of its own-combining elements of both animation and comics. As of now, motion comics have no single definition. This term is used for both limited animation videos as well as for highly interactive graphic storytelling apps. There are sources that say that motion comics typically have limited amount of animation, that generally static images, sometimes lifted directly from the source comic are animated, but then, there are motion comics like the animated graphic novel 'Bottom Of The Ninth' by Ryan Woodward which incorporates fully fledged and mature animation in parts. Motion comics can be anything from just a digital comic book page with animated elements to interactive animated videos laid out as panels playing sequentially.

The level of interactivity that we have today had never been possible before. With the rapid advancement in entertainment technologies like the arrival of smartphones and VR, new media are appearing which open doors to limitless possibilities in motion comics. The aim of this project was to understand how can we implement the concepts of motion comics in our own stories. At the end of this project, we were supposed to come up with a story, a layout and a write up about how our comic works

## A brief history

It goes back to the pre internet revolution days of 1966 when a TV show named 'Marvel super heroes' was aired. The first original motion comic, may have come from this show. It wasn't called motion comic at that time, but it had all the ingredients that are present in modern motion comics. It was a panel by panel adaptation of early marvel comics, played with very limited animation and completed with a soundtrack. The first full fledged thing that can be called a motion comic is 'Saw: Rebirth'. It played as a video. It had panels, word balloons, voice acting and a sound track. Images moved but the characters were static. Even then, the term 'motion comic' wasn't used until the release of Warner brothers and DC comics' 'Batman: mad love' and 'Watchmen' in 2008. After that, Marvel comics also jumped in the motion comics with the Help of a company owned by Neal Adams. Since then, many people have jumped in and experimented with this storytelling style.



A still from 1966's Marvel Superheroes. The visuals were taken directly from the earlier comics

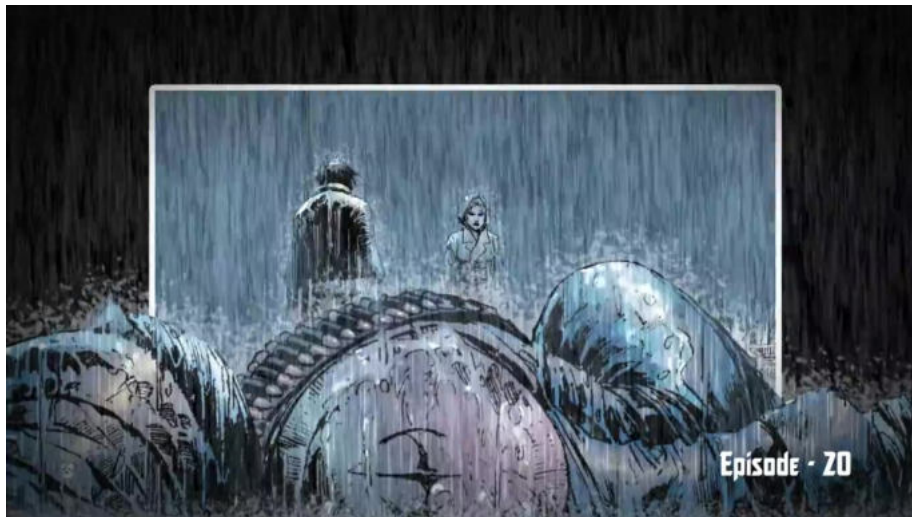


A still from Saw: Rebirth, one of the earliest motion comic



## Differences between Animation and Comics

Motion comic is an amalgamation of two different mediums- Comic books and animation. Now, the thing is that both media, despite being based on visual storytelling, are quite different. Comic is a graphic medium. Yet, it is called 'reading' and not 'Viewing' comics. When it comes to the experience of two media, it is entirely different. While animation is a viewing experience, Comics is a reading experience. Audience has total control of time in their hands while reading a comic. They can stop at any page, any panel. It is totally up to the audience to choose the speed with which to read. They can decide whether they want to relish the art in every page or just move with reading the narrative while in Animation, the experience has to be designed. Timing is not in control of the viewers. Also, in comic books, while the page has a fixed dimension, a single panel can be of any size, any shape and since viewers can take their time, there can be multiple images on a single page, which is not possible on a screen where multiple images will only be distracting.



A still from Graphic India's motion comic 'Devi', which is based upon the comic of the same name. Here, just the visuals of comics have been played along with voice acting and sound.

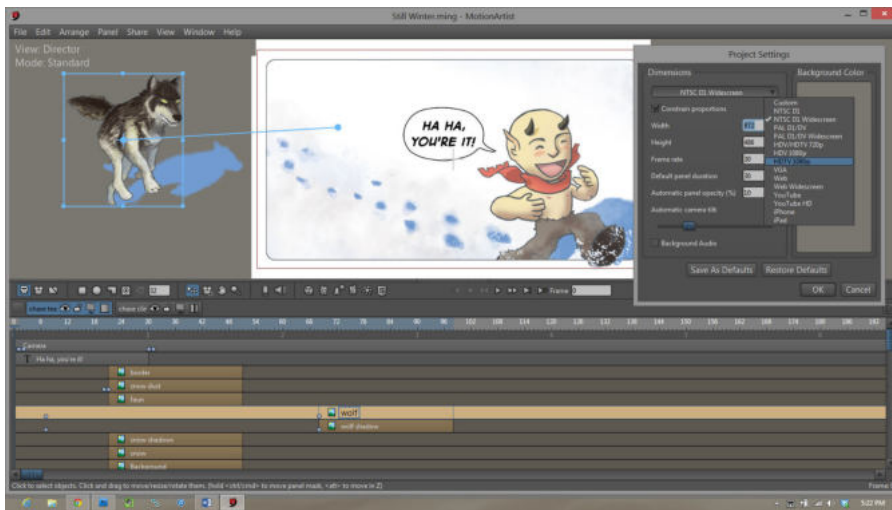
## Understanding motion comics

Various experimentations have been done in motion comics. A majority of them, are basically what can be called cheap animations- just soundtrack playing with limited animation. There is no advantage of element of time in the story here as the sequence plays for a certain time- with voice acting and all. So, most of the time, it is most of a viewing experience. We are not using time as our advantage at all.

So - how can motion comics have a unique experience of their own? The answer is- by taking the best of both worlds and eliminating their limitations. For example- if there is limitation of time in animation, we can remove that in comics by giving the control to the audience. That allows us to incorporate several panels in one layout. If there is limitation of movement in comics, we can incorporate animation. By animation, it does not only mean simple animation. Full animation, if used properly in motion comics, can enhance the experience of audience. These factors, combined with things that modern technology allows us to do- like Interactivity and Virtual reality, can enhance the experience greatly.

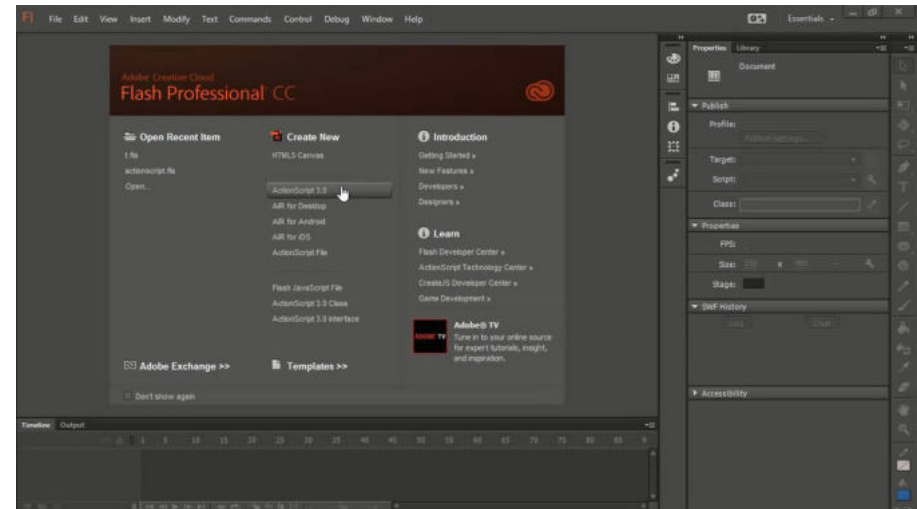
# Digital platforms for creating motion comics

## Smith Micro's Motion artist



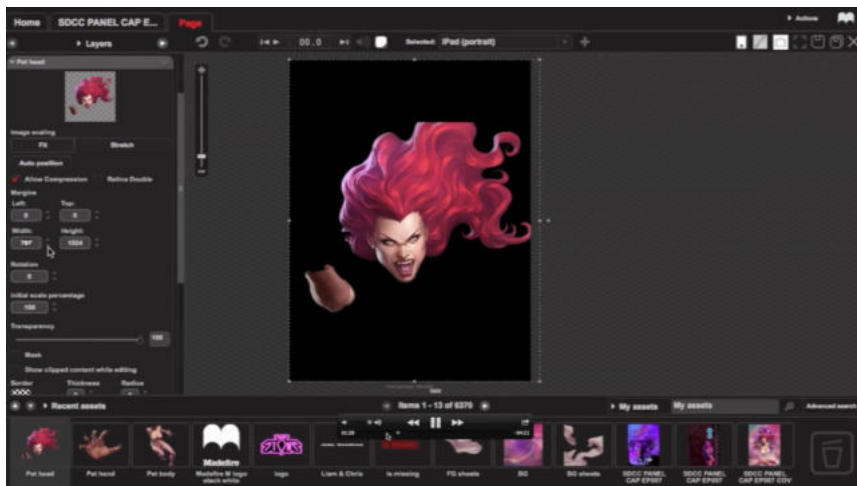
This is a tool created specifically for the purpose of creating motion comics. It does not have drawing features, However, MotionArtist is perfect for placing already drawn characters, backgrounds and other comic book graphics into comic book form. This comic book software has pre-made page templates, word balloons and many more features

## Adobe Flash Professional



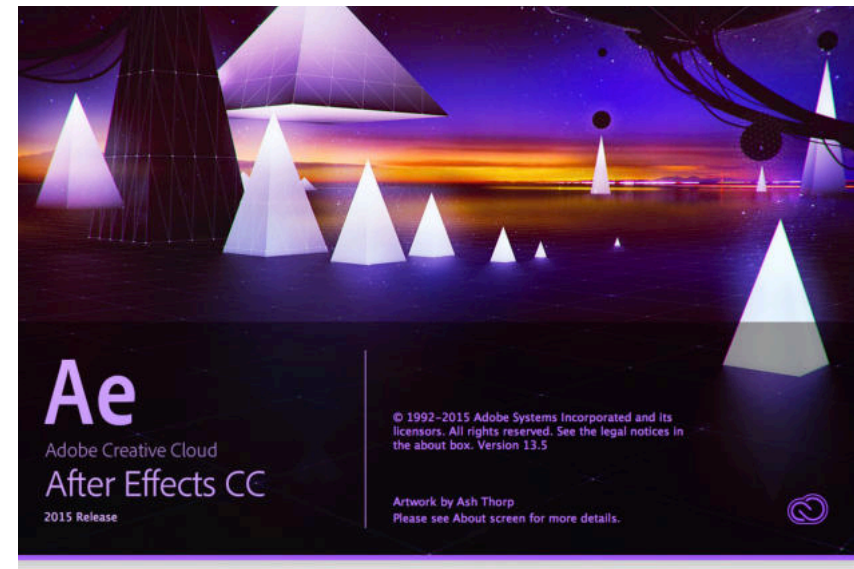
This powerful web animation program is also quite useful for the production of motion comics. Also, this allows user to draw. So, we can create the animations in the program itself. with the help of Action Script, it can also be made interactive.

## Madefire



Madefire is a popular digital comics app which brings comics from popular publishers to mobile. It also has a online tool at 'create.madefire.com' which allows user to create their own motion comics.

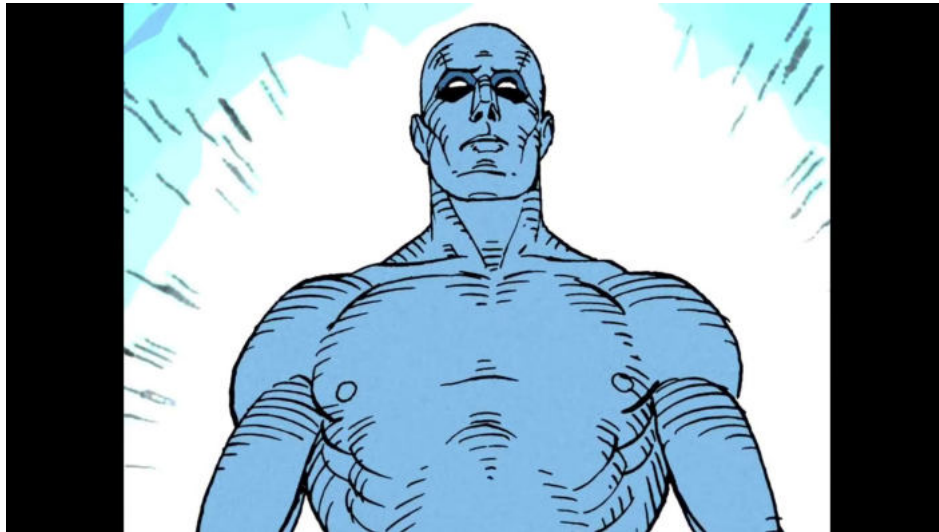
## Adobe After Effects



With the features this powerful program has, it proves a pretty powerful motion comic tool as well. It can be used to create video based motion comics. Most of the popular video based motion comics have been created in after effects itself.

## Existing motion comics

### Watchmen: The Motion Comic



Watchmen: The motion comic came out in 2008 for Web and Television. It is based on the DC comic book series *Watchmen*, written by Alan Moore and Illustrated by Dave Gibbons. The motion comic series consists of twelve 25-30 minute segments, each based on the twelve segments of the book. It was released in 2009 in DVD as well to coincide with the release of the movie *Watchmen*.

### Peanuts



Peanuts Motion Comic is a series of animated cartoon shorts based on the famous comic strip of 1964 by Mark Schulz, *Peanuts*. It was released on iTunes in 2008 and on DVD in 2010. It is more closer to an animated film than to motion comics.



## Lost Girl



Lost Girl is a Canadian motion comic series that came out in 2010. It is a typical video based motion comic with limited animation.

## Bottom of the Ninth



Bottom of the Ninth is a full fledged animated graphic novel by Ryan Woodward with interactive elements and full 2D and 3D animation integrated into a unique comic book experience. It is currently available only for iPad and iPhone.

## Indian Motion Comics

Graphic India, formerly known as Virgin comics is a Bangalore based Digital entertainment company. It started out as a comic book company. They have released motion comics based on some of their titles as web series on you tube. Raj Comics and Vimanika comics are also about to launch Motion comics based on their characters and stories.



A still from Graphic India's Devi



A still from Graphic India's 18 Days



## Inspiration and Ideas

For our own stories which we had to develop, I looked and researched on many motion comics. But motion comics are not the only source of my inspiration. I have been an avid gamer since my childhood and one thing that comes to my mind on mention of motion comics are the cut scenes of video games, especially of those of the 16-bit video game consoles. They lacked proper soundtrack, but apart from that, they were perfectly eligible to be called a motion comics. Especially the games that were based on Comic books themselves. Like - Spiderman and Venom: Maximum Carnage. They had proper comic book-ish word balloons and enough motion to convey the story.





## Maxpayne 2

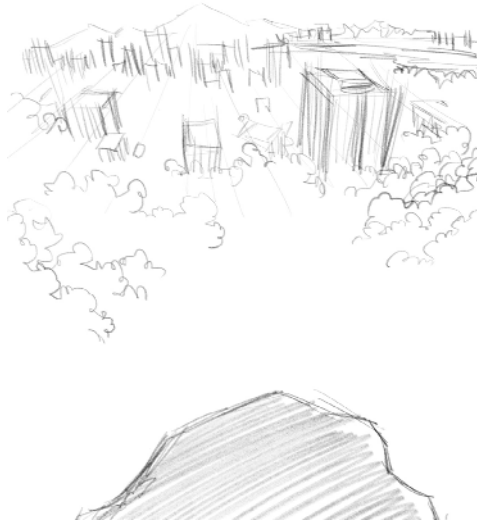
The cutscenes of the game *Maxpayne 2* were also a big influence. Especially the way story is told in them. They have proper visuals- like a comic book completed with dialogue, but they don't appear on screen just like that. Initially the screen is all black. Soundtracks and effects are present. As the dialogue voiceover come and story progresses, frames start appearing one by one. By the time all dialogues are finished, we have a complete comic style narrative on our screen. I think as a motion comic, it is pretty much complete in itself. All we need to do is to add animated visuals, appropriate transitions and interactive elements.

## Rough Layouts

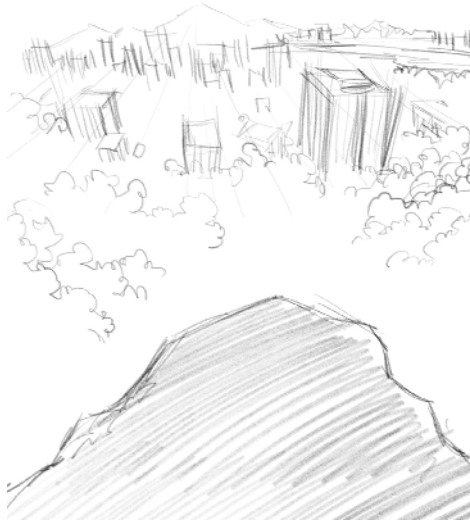


For the story I took an old existing story of mine on which I had made a short film and made a sequel out of it. It is about a wannabe detective who fails in everything he tries to do. In the end of the original story, he gets beaten up by people. This time, in the two pages, he rises again, vows to avenge his insult only to fall again from the top of rock he is standing on. Next- he is in a hospital, all bandaged, surrounded by his friends. These layouts are for an app based interactive motion comic for the platforms of android and IOS.

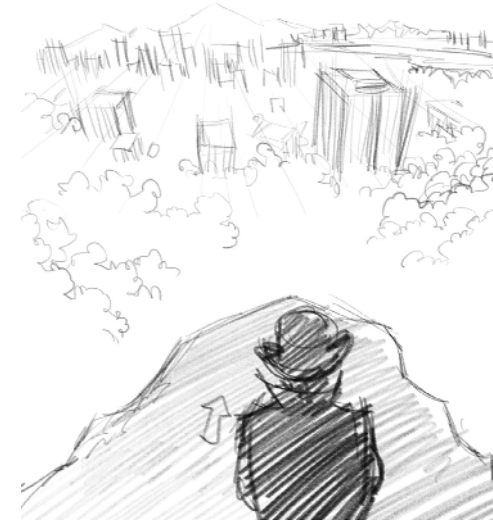
## Layout Explanation



So, this is the layout of one of the motion comic pages. The page opens with the shot of buildings far away. it is raining and thunders strike in the sky. it is night time. a piece of land emerges from below and horizon lowers as if camera is being brought down. The building part and the land part will be on different layers



Camera movement stops.



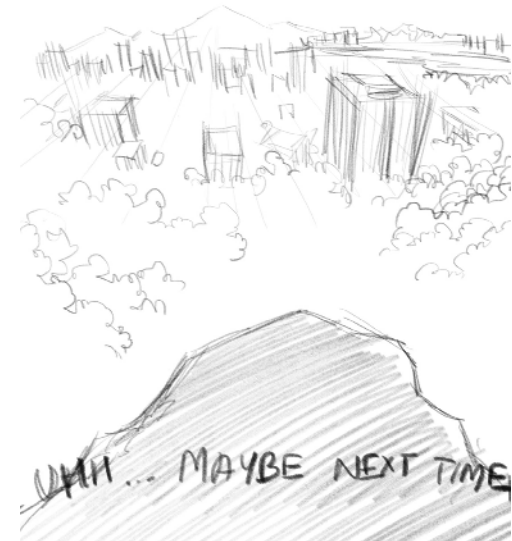
A figure in a hat and coat emerges from the bottom of the screen. The figure is walking towards the end of rock. The figure would be fully animated



Figure stops at the end of the land. Standing in a superhero pose, he looks towards the city, while the wind blows, billowing his cape. A thunder strikes and the Title of comic emerges - 'The return of Jaali Jaasoo'. The scene will remain like this. Title keeps moving in its place a little, rain keeps on pouring, the figure's coat keeps on billowing. After 5 seconds, a notification to swipe up will appear near the head of figure.



With the swiping up motion of the user, a strong wind will blow in the comic, the Title will blow away with it and it will result in the figure's hat being flown away from his head. The figure will try to catch the hat and in process will fall down. The piece of land is at height, so even after his fall, users will hear sounds like - Ouchh! oof!! ahh! 2-3 times.



Sounds will stop. New text will appear at the bottom of the screen, saying - 'Uhhh..... maybe later'.



## Final Layouts



The final layouts. The last page was removed and another was added before the title page in which Jaali Jaasoos gets up from hospital bed, prepares himself, gets dressed and starts walking, building up to the title scene. The final page wasn't needed and hence, was removed

## Conclusion

Comics are my first love. They are the reason I developed an interest in art. That interest and love resulted in me taking up comic books as a profession. It is always good to learn new things, broaden one's horizon and try stuff beyond one's comfortable zone. Motion comics for me, were something like this. I would rather make a comic or an animation than trying to do something which is in-between both.

This project made me realize that motion comics aren't just cheap derivatives of Comics and animation, but they have full potential to be a powerful medium themselves. With the research i did, I have a new respect for the medium. With the new technologies, the possibilities of this medium are limitless.

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