

MICHEL MULIPOLA: SUPERHERO SECRETS

BY HANNAH SPERBER

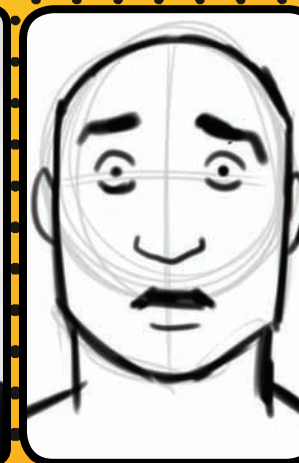


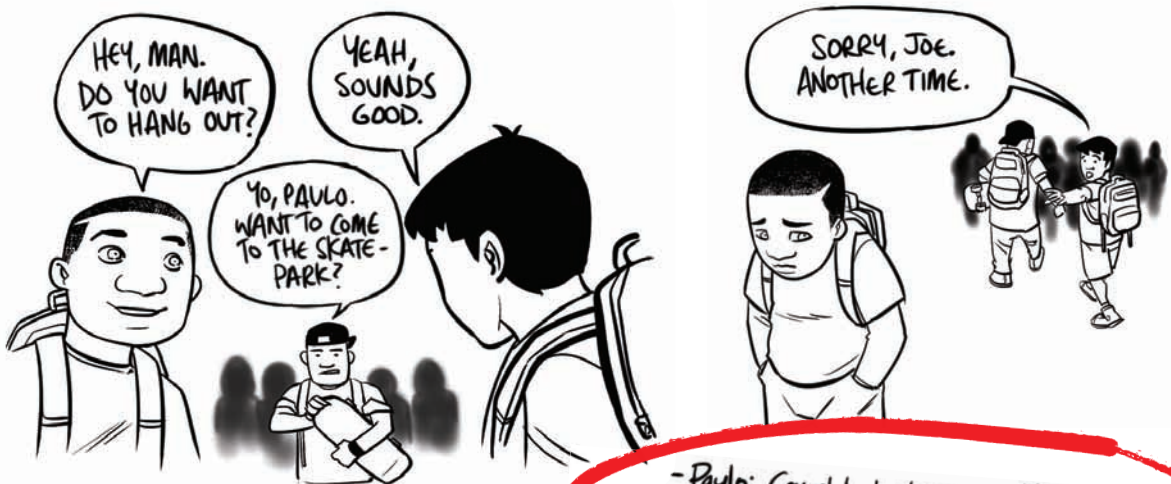
Michel Mulipola discovered comics when he was five years old: a pile of *2000 AD*. “I remember the exact moment I saw them,” Michel says. “The bright colours and bold characters really caught my attention.” Mesmerised, Michel fell in love with the art form. He’s made comics ever since. He’s just finished illustrating a graphic novel for American readers, a pro-wrestling drama called *Headlocked: The Last Territory*. Fans already want more. (He’s working on it.) Recently, Michel got to meet some of those fans at Comic-Con. Held in San Diego, it’s the biggest comic convention in the world. Or as Michel puts it: “It’s the international mecca of comic-book awesomeness.”

But most days you’ll find Michel in Onehunga, Auckland. This is where he works in a comic store. It’s the perfect job – reading and selling comics from round the world and spending time with other comic-book fans. Sometimes, Michel draws at work. “It brings something different to the store,” he says. “People can see comics being created.” Michel also encourages young cartoonists to come in and share their work. “We chat, and I give them tips.”

Michel’s dream is to be the first Samoan to draw for Marvel Comics or DC Comics. He doesn’t mind which. Between them, these two publishing companies are responsible for some of the world’s most iconic comic-book characters: Spider-Man, Wolverine, the Hulk, Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman. Michel grew up loving these comics and characters. “Being able to draw my favourite superheroes is a massive goal of mine. But Marvel and DC are giants. You have to be hugely talented for them to notice you.”

Perhaps you’d like to work for Marvel or DC? Maybe even beat Michel to it! He has some secrets for making good comics, and he’s willing to share ...





SECRET #1

WRITE YOUR STORY

- Paulo: Caught between old and new
- New skater friends fun but kind of mean
- Stops being a good time = regret
- Misses Joe
- How to make it up to him?

People sometimes forget that comics aren't just pictures – they're stories too. In fact Michel reckons the very best comics are the ones you can't put down because the story is so good. This is why planning is so important. "When you're starting a comic, write the story down – even if it's just a bit of dialogue or a few bullet points. This is called the script. The script is a bit like directions you can refer back to."

So what makes a great story? Michel can answer this. "Good stories need unforgettable characters who go on some kind of journey. And by 'journey', I don't mean a road trip. I mean facing a problem or making a mistake and dealing with it. It's an inner journey." Characters who make mistakes stop a story from becoming boring. But Michel says they have another purpose. "In real life, no one's perfect. Everyone messes up. If you want readers to care about your characters, you need to show them messing up, too."

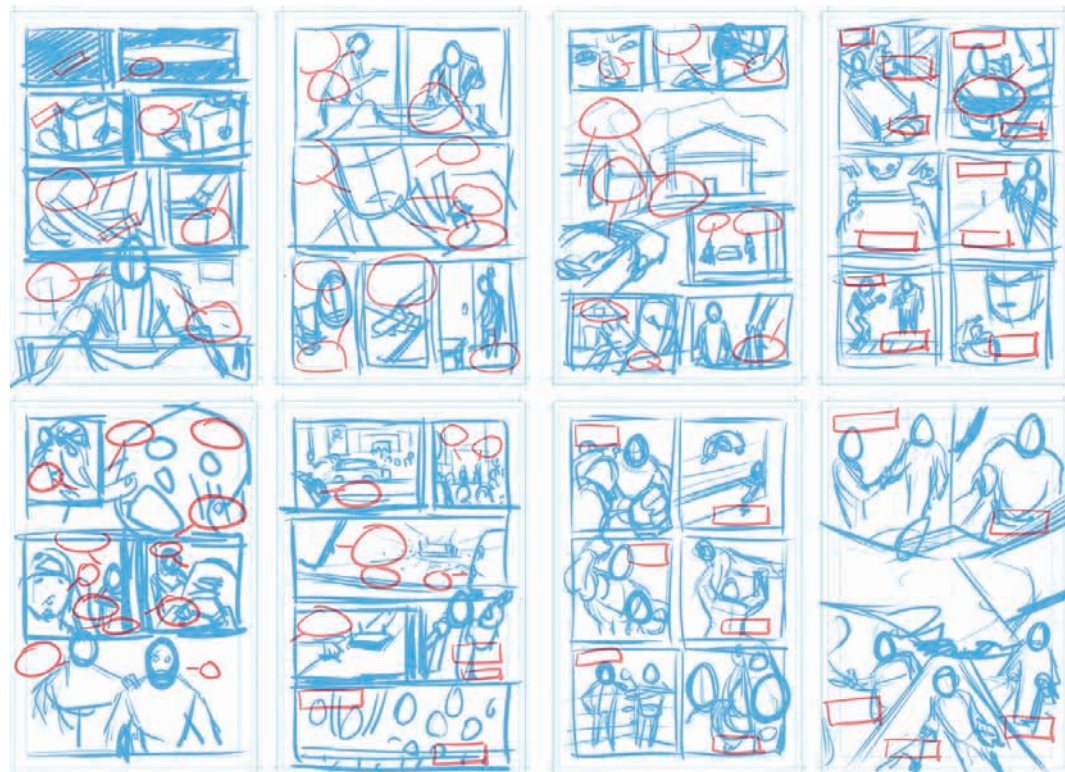
Sometimes, ideas take a long time to come. If you're struggling, there's another option. "Write about something familiar," Michel says. "I once did a humorous comic about the lighter side of life. You know the kind of thing: siblings fighting over the TV remote; Sunday lunch with the extended family turning into a food fight. For me it was an easy topic, but people really liked it."

SECRET #2

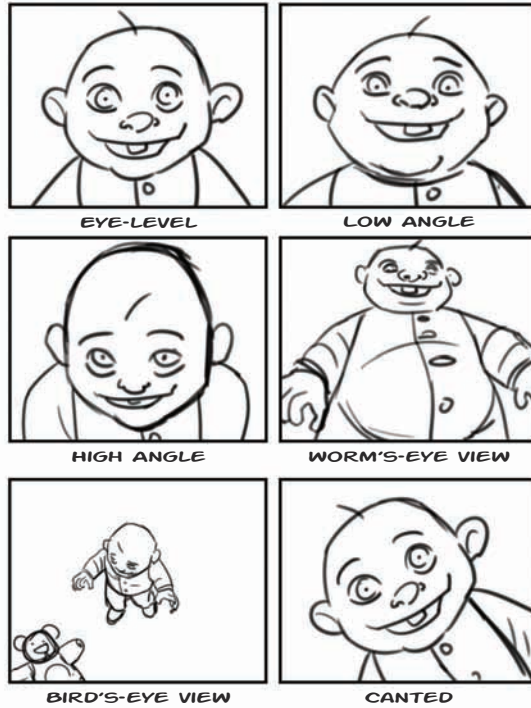
PLAN YOUR LAYOUT

Michel says that making a comic is similar to making a film. "Think of a comic as a movie on paper, with yourself as the director." He warns that you'll have to fill other roles too: the casting director, the props person, the sound director, the special-effects maker. "You're a one-person movie-making machine!" Michel says.

Most directors don't begin filming until every shot is planned. Michel agrees that this is a good way to work. For a comic, he recommends doing some quick sketches of your layout. These sketches don't have to be perfect – but they are important. They'll help you to decide what you'll show and how you'll show it.



KINDS OF ANGLES



“Your initial sketches are also important because they encourage you to think about each frame,” Michel says. Will you use high angles to make your characters look small or low angles to make them intimidating? Will you use an extreme close-up shot, to exaggerate a character’s expression, or an extreme long shot, to show us where your characters are and who else is around? Will your frames be square or different shapes? How many will there be?”

“Planning your layout is the best time to work these things out,” Michel says. “Otherwise you’ll make mistakes, and they’ll be hard to fix.”

KINDS OF SHOTS



SECRET #3

KEEP THE LAYOUT SIMPLE

Make sure that readers can follow your story easily. “Try using a layout called the Z formation,” says Michel. “This means your story travels from left to right, much like reading a book. It’s very straightforward, which is good. You don’t want readers working too hard.”

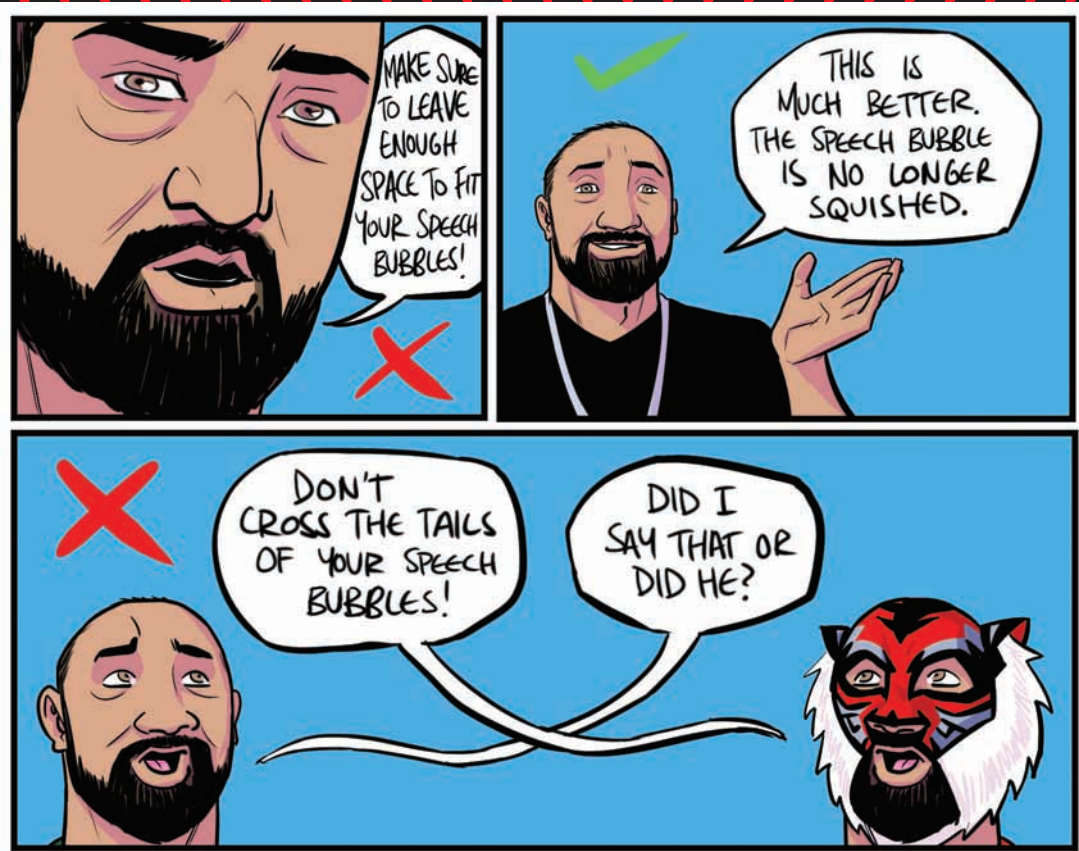


Michel does occasionally break out of the Z formation – just to mix things up. “Sometimes in a story something big happens. Then the layout needs a little shaking up. But you’ve got to know the rules before you can break them. I can tweak a comic so that it breaks the rules but still flows. You can do this when you have experience and are confident with the basics.”

SECRET #4

REMEMBER THE LETTERING

Comics use pictures *and* words to tell a story. So make sure you leave plenty of room for both. Otherwise, Michel says, you'll have trouble! "Squeezing in heaps of material can make a whole page look bad. I've seen comics with the words really squashed up to make everything fit. This makes it hard to read. I've seen speech bubbles with their tails crossing. This means you can't tell who's saying what." A bit of planning will ensure that both the pictures and text look great.



SECRET #5

PRACTICE MAKES (ALMOST) PERFECT

Michel calls it the artist's conundrum. "You're always searching for perfection, but deep down, you know you'll never find it. Don't let that stop you from trying. The more you draw, the easier it gets."

Some artists always carry a notebook. This is something Michel recommends. It means you're always ready when inspiration hits. "Draw the things you see around you. Draw the things you know – and keep at it. Don't give up. This is the first step to making your dream a reality. And don't be afraid to make mistakes. I make mistakes all the time. I love making them because that's how I learn. They teach me what *not* to do next time."



SECRET #6

HAVE FUN!

THIS IS EASY BECAUSE ACCORDING TO MICHEL, "MAKING COMICS IS THE BEST THING EVER! WORK HARD AND GOOD LUCK!"

Michel Mulipola: Superhero Secrets

by Hannah Sperber

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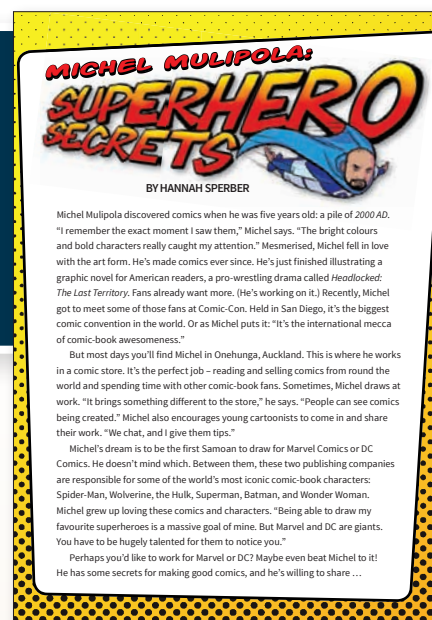
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