



Create illustrations with atmosphere

Design cel-shade style art with a little rainy ambience

Critical to any piece, colour can make or break an illustration. Some artists have a tough time really nailing the mood they want, and need a few tricks to help push a piece to the next level.

Maybe you have a demanding client who wants to take a nearly finished piece in a completely new direction. With a little bit of clever Photoshop layering and a few tricks, you can separate the content of the piece from the lighting and mood, therefore leaving yourself a little, or in this case, a lot of wiggle room in the final feel of the piece. And with each element of the piece separated into layers, it's a snap to go

back in and tweak until everything is just right. Use this approach to quickly work through colour and light variations of a piece before settling on a final design.

First, we'll take the original line work and quickly fill in a few conventional daytime colours. Once we have a base colour scheme set up, things take a detour as we plunge our sunny city into a rainy evening. To finish, we'll show you a few simple ways to work a little more depth into the image, with layering of rain and fog and specular bloom – a trick borrowed from 3D and motion design to give your otherwise hard-edged illustration a soft, muted feel.

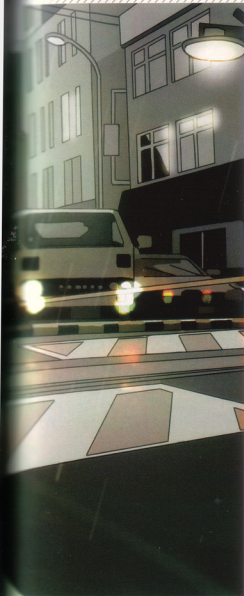


ON THE DISC

Open up this month's CD on the inside back cover, and you'll find the original 'linework.jpg', 'color' and 'headlight' images that you can use to follow along with David's tutorial.

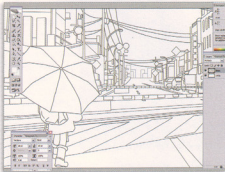
OUR EXPERT David Newton

David has been working in the graphic design, 3D and illustration circles for over eight years. He currently works as an art director in *cheery* (his words, not ours) Boston, Massachusetts. To view more of David's work, pay a visit to www.paperraincoat.com.



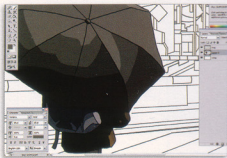
1 Line work

We'll start off with the line work. You can use pretty much anything to generate your lines – scanned drawings, photo reference, or just draw from your imagination. We've used a combination of drawing and photo source material and redrawn the image from scratch using a Wacom tablet. Set the Layer Mode to Multiply, and Opacity at around 80%.



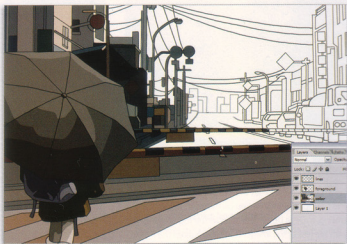
2 Colour

Create a new layer underneath your line work, and start painting in solid colours. Start with local colour, and then move towards white and black for highlights and shadow. If you're working from a photo, you can sample colours with the Eyedropper Tool. We're going to control colour with a separate layer later on, so don't be afraid to use some crazier colours. For now, keep the foreground (girl) as a separate layer so we can cut her out later on.



3 Midground colour

Continue to paint in all solid areas of colour. Areas that face towards a light source, such as the sky, should be given a lighter colour than areas that are obscured by objects, such as the sides of buildings. Don't be afraid to experiment. You can always paint over anything that isn't working. For now, leave the sky transparent. We'll fill it in in the next step.



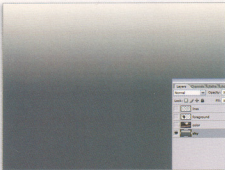
4 Background colour

As objects recede into the background, you should paint them both lighter (towards white) and less saturated. Essentially, push the colour toward the sky colour. This mimics natural haze and pollution, and creates depth. It'll also blend in nicely with the fog that we'll create in a moment.



5 Sky gradient

Create a new layer, and using the Gradient Tool, pick a desaturated orange and blue in the primary and secondary colour swatches. The gradient should fade to the darker colour near the horizon. Normally the sky would darken as you go up, but this'll eventually be a night time scene, so the reverse typically works better.



Unifying colour

Sometimes when collaging photographs taken under different lighting conditions, the pieces sit in their own space and refuse to blend. One way to combat this is to use a unifying layer of colour. Create a new layer and fill it with a colour of your choice, set the Blending Mode to Color and the Opacity to around 5-10%. This'll bring cohesion to your scene. Films often use this trick to create an overall mood, such as *The Matrix*, which used different tints for the separate worlds.

6 Arrange the layers

Move this layer into the background, underneath your line work and colour. No special Blending Mode is necessary. With the sky in its own layer, it's much easier to make changes to it later on.

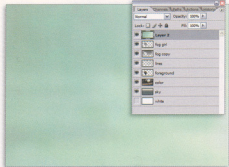


8 Fog blending

When you've finished erasing parts of the fog from the foreground, set the Blending Mode to Screen, and the Opacity to 30%. You can also set this before erasing, to get a better feel for how the fog is interacting with the rest of the image. This'll also lighten the image considerably, which we can fix later on.

9 Colour

Now we set the overall mood with a layer of colour to unify the piece. You could use a layer of solid colour using the Paint Bucket, or an image that you've adjusted using Hue/Saturation. In this case, we've used a small photo of clouds that's been Gaussian Blurred and colour adjusted towards a light green.



11 Adding rain

Create a new layer. It may help to hide all layers except the sky so that you can see what you're drawing. Using the Line Tool and a white colour swatch, simply draw a few diagonal lines at the same angle. You can copy and paste groups of them around the sky until you have enough. The Line Tool and a little blur is all you need to create a quick convincing rain effect.



7 Fog

Create a new layer for fog. Start with a medium grey value, fading to light grey at the bottom. Use the Magic Wand to select the outside of the Foreground layer. Select Invert and Delete to cut out the shape of the girl from the fog. Use a large (200-300 px), soft-edged Eraser with a fill of around 10% to erase parts of the foreground on the right, left and bottom. The idea is to end up with more fog in the background, and less in the foreground to increase the sense of depth.



10 Colour blending

Set this layer to the Color Blending Mode, with an Opacity of around 70%. This allows some of the original colour that we painted earlier on to show through. You could use more or less opacity depending on how much of the original colour you want to keep in the illustration, it's up to you.



"THE LINE TOOL AND A LITTLE BLUR IS ALL YOU NEED TO CREATE A QUICK CONVINCING RAIN EFFECT"

"TO MAKE CHANGES, THERE'S NO NEED TO GO BACK AND START OVER - SIMPLY TWEAK AWAY TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT USING THE OPACITY SLIDERS"

12 Rain blending

In this case, either the Normal or Screen Blending Modes will work. Set the Opacity to around 15-20%. After you're finished, add a little Gaussian Blur or Motion Blur to soften things up. If you use Motion Blur, make sure that you blur in the same direction that you've drawn the lines.



13 Adding contrast

For the next step, create a new layer. Select the Gradient Tool again, but this time make sure you set the Gradient Tool to Radial. Now click on the default white and black colour swatches. Next, drag from the edge of your image to the centre of the girl. Hopefully you should end up with a Radial Gradient similar to this image.



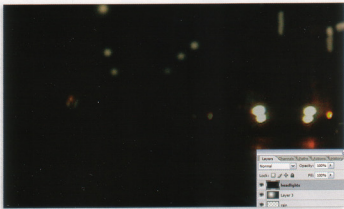
14 Gradient blending

Set the Blending Mode to Color Burn with an Opacity of 10%. This'll increase the contrast of the image, darkening the edges and lightening the girl. It also helps even-out the soft pastel effect that the fog added.



15 Adding headlights

Here we've added a photograph of two cars that are similar in placement to the ones we've drawn. Using the Adjust Curves command, drag down the centre of the Curve slider until only the bright parts of the image remain. This is the only part of the image we need.



Specular Bloom

Specular Bloom is the photographic tendency of the brightest parts of the image to 'bloom' or spread outwards. This can be caused by the emulsion of the film spreading, or by bounced light in the lens or camera. In some cases, these bright points of light can form into circles or hexagons called 'bokeh' or 'lens flare'.

In illustration and 3D, you can add a little extra realism by faking this effect. Select the brightest parts of the image, copy them to a new layer and then blur using a Gaussian Blur filter.



16 Blending headlights

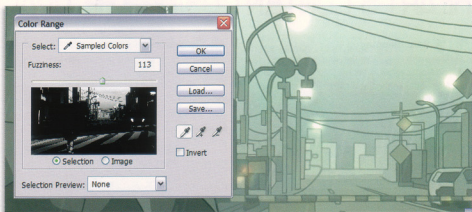
Set this layer to the Colour Dodge Blending Mode with an Opacity of 90% or 100%. Using the Move Tool, line up the headlights so that they're over the ones that we've drawn.



"YOU CAN USE ANYTHING TO GENERATE YOUR LINES: SCANNED DRAWINGS, PHOTO REFERENCE, OR JUST DRAW FROM YOUR IMAGINATION"

17 Specular Bloom

Now we'll create a quick 2D Specular Bloom effect. Create a new layer for the effect. Using the Eyedropper, select the lightest part of the image. From the top drop-down menu, go to Select>Color Range. Move the Fuzziness slider to the middle. This'll select all of the light parts of the image.



18 White fill

Fill this selection with pure white. We've shown this layer over a temporary black layer underneath so you can see the effect. Add a Gaussian blur filter of around ten pixels to bloom out the white highlight.



19 Specular Bloom blending

After blurring, set this layer to the Screen Blending Mode and the Opacity to 60%. You may want a higher or lower opacity depending on how much bloom you want. Be careful with this, however – add too much, and the image can have a tendency to look too soft and washed out.



20 Finishing – soft light

Now we just have to do the final touches. All of the fog and bloom have washed out the image a little too much, so we'll need to increase the contrast. Select the entire image canvas (Select All, or Ctrl+A), then Edit>Copy Merged (Shift+Ctrl+C) and Paste (Ctrl+V) to paste the entire scene into a new layer. Set this layer to the Soft Light Blending Mode with an Opacity of 60%. The Soft Light Blending Mode is an excellent way to increase the contrast and saturation in a washed-out image.



21 Finishing - post production

Repeat the Copy Merged process. Select the entire image canvas (Select All, or Ctrl+A) and Edit>Copy Merged (Shifts+Ctrl+C) and Paste (Ctrl+V) to paste the entire scene into a new layer. This time, add a slight Gaussian blur with a Radius of around four pixels.



22 Softer and lighter

Set this layer to the Screen Blending Mode with an Opacity of 40%. Like the Specular Bloom effect, this'll further soften and lighten the image and blend edge colours together.



23 Finishing - Levels

Again, the lightening/softening effects have lightened the image a bit more than we would like. As it's a night time scene we would still like to have darker areas and shadows. To balance out the previous layers, create a new Adjustment Layer and select Levels. You can drag the sliders around to see how they affect your image. We've dragged the Black Input Level to 53, and the Output Level to 16. This'll further darken the dark areas of the image without affecting our soften and bloom effects.



Post production

Post production is a broad term used in audio, video, film and effects work, that happens after the creation of the source material. It typically involves 'finishing' work. In the case of computer graphics this usually entails level adjustment, colour correction, matching footage to a background plate and other special effects.

For this tutorial, adding a copy of the image on top with a slight blur in Screen Mode, helps to soften the image out and remove some of the hard-edged, computer-generated look. This is typically unnecessary for photos but works well with illustration, 3D renders and occasionally graphic design when a soft effect is desired.



24 The completed image

And here's the finished image! Take note of the stack of layers. In each layer, using the Opacity sliders, we can separately tweak and adjust the background and foreground colours, rain, the overall green colour, headlights, Specular Bloom and post production softening, as well as a final contrast adjustment. So the next time you're faced with a difficult client, or just fancy a change, there's no need to go back and start over - simply tweak away to your heart's content using the Opacity sliders. ■



"THE SOFT LIGHT BLENDING MODE IS AN EXCELLENT WAY TO INCREASE THE CONTRAST AND SATURATION"