

## A Trip to the Sausage Factory by Neil McAllister <https://neilmcallister.com/artwork/a-trip-to-the-sausage-factory/>

A friend asked me to design an invitation to the birthday party for her four-year-old, who is a huge Marvel Comics fan. As I worked on the project, took scans of the art in various stages of completion. I post them here for those of you who get a kick out of that kind of thing.

### STEP ONE

Every illustration begins somewhere. In this case, my friend sent me a few panels of comics as a mock-up, along with a sample script. She also told me which characters were her son's favorites. It was a long list for a 5×7" card, so we agreed to narrow it down to Captain America, the Hulk, Iron Man, and Wolverine.



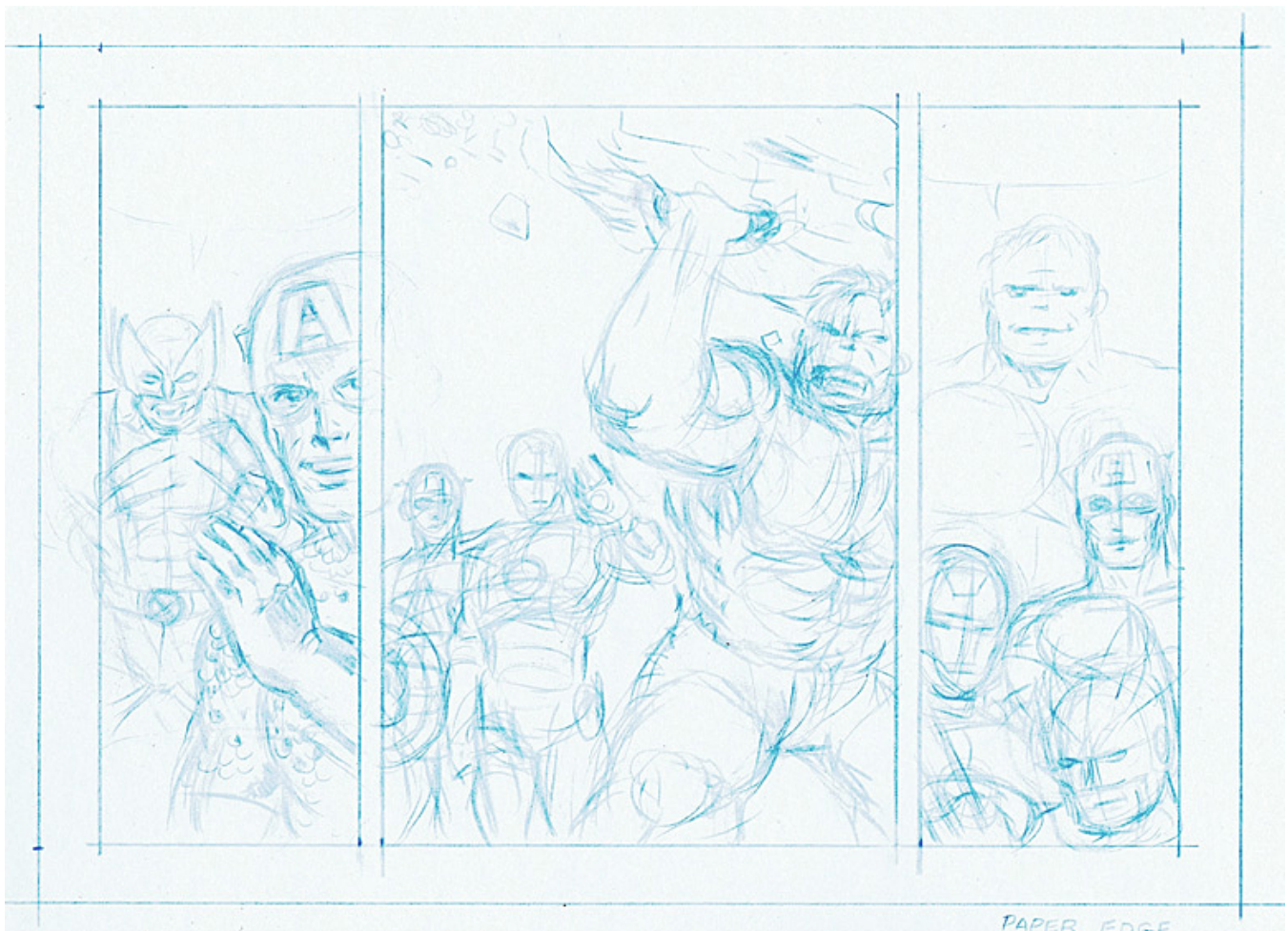
## STEP TWO

From there, I started sketching. My early thumbnail sketch, complete with the revised script, wasn't much more than a scribble, but all the essential elements were there. I scanned it in and emailed it back to my friend for approval. She gave it the thumbs-up, and we were officially in business.



### STEP THREE

Once the sketch was approved, it was time to go to the drawing board. I draw at 1.5x printed size (as do most comics artists), so I laid out an image area that was 10.5" wide by 7.5" high, divided into three panels. As you can see, these ruling lines and my initial under-drawing look blue in this image. That's because they are. I do these early stages of the drawing in non-repro blue colored pencil. It's an old artists' trick; this way, these messy lines will recede into the background, and the final, tighter drawing will appear clearer. There is also less need for erasure this way, which can damage both the paper and, potentially, the finished drawing.



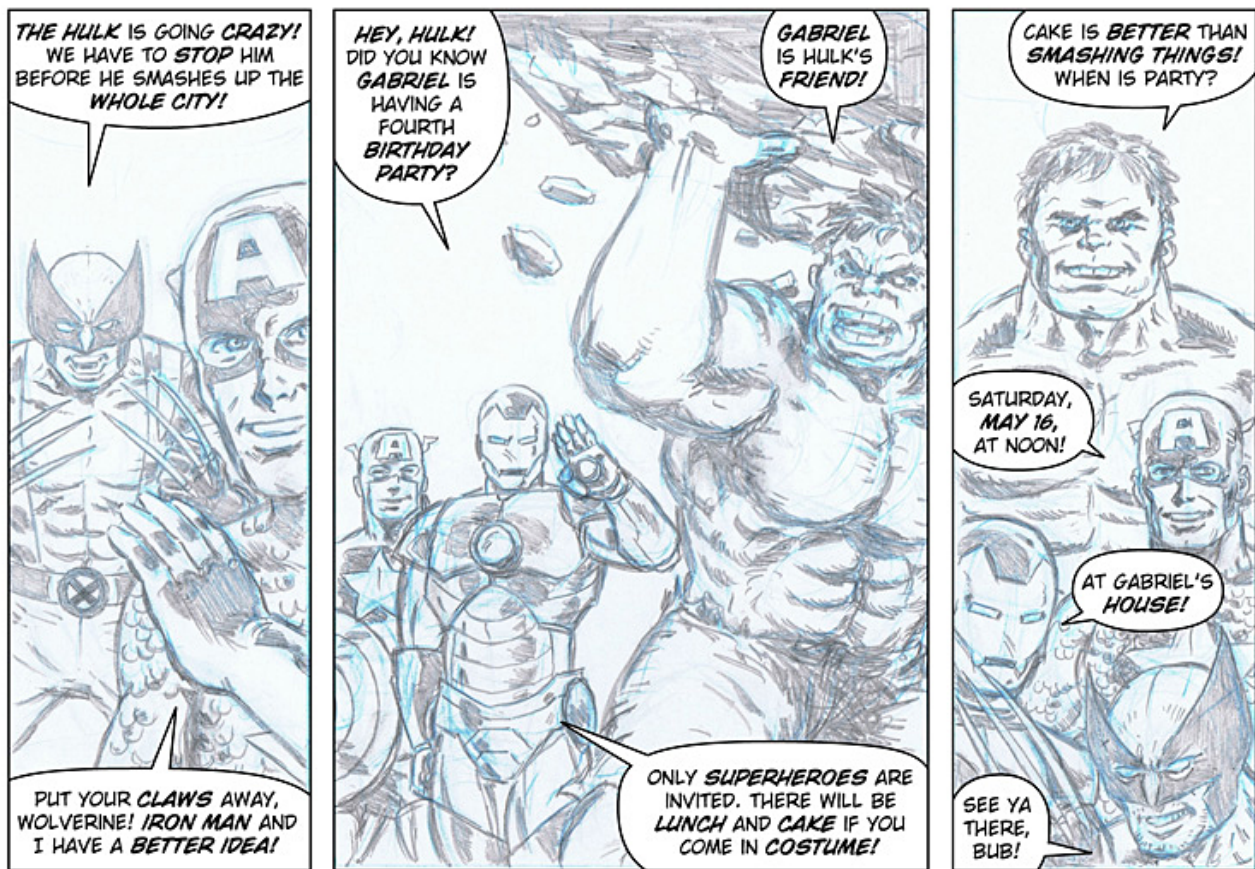
## STEP FOUR

With the groundwork laid, I can get to work with a regular pencil. I prefer artists' pencils, because the lead is smoother, but anything will do. You might notice that, compared to many modern professional illustrators, my pencil art is still relatively loose. I just don't have the patience to put every little detail into the drawing, as is the custom today. I think it needlessly adds to the labor involved.



## STEP FIVE

Now I add a modern touch. Before proceeding further, I scan the penciled artwork into the computer and apply the lettering in Adobe Illustrator. This saves considerable effort over lettering by hand, and it makes it trivial to correct the inevitable small errors. You'll notice that at this stage I also rule the panel borders and create a mask. This way I won't have to worry about measuring, white-out, and staying between the lines. When I'm finished with the piece I just drop the mask over the top and everything is neat and tidy.



## STEP SIX

With that taken care of, I get to work on the inking. You might think this part is easy; all I have to do is trace the pencil lines. But in fact I've always thought of inking as the most difficult part of the process. Pencil art often conceals a lot of ambiguities. It's here in the inking phase that you have to solve all the problems of the drawing and commit them to paper in black and white.



## STEP SEVEN

Because I was in a hurry, I chose to ink this drawing using a variety of markers, rather than using the traditional India ink, pens, and brushes. I'm not sure the inking job was entirely successful – I could still use a lot of practice. But on the whole, I think this drawing shaped up nicely. The scan of the inked artwork you see above has been digitally enhanced for improved contrast. I also took a snapshot of the work early in this stage, which you can see here.



## STEP EIGHT

After inking comes coloring. Once again, this stage is done entirely on the computer, in Photoshop. Because this card harks back to Marvel comics of the 1980s more than it does modern comics, I chose to stick to a simple color scheme that emphasizes the flat, primary colors of the superhero costumes. I did a little bit of modeling with the airbrush tool, but mostly I let the line art define the shapes. I colored the piece with the inked artwork on a separate layer with its Blending Mode set to “Multiply,” so I could color underneath the inked art, as if it were printed on a transparency.



## STEP NINE

And here's the finished piece! This step was easy – I just dropped the mask I created earlier on top of the color art, complete with all the lettering, and I was done. I rendered the final image as a PNG file so there wouldn't be any JPEG artifacts, and saved it at 300dpi. The final invitation cards were printed from these files. Pretty nifty, eh?

