UNDERDOGS

DIGITAL COLORING FOR COMICS – GIMP EDITION

January 25, 2014 • Made by Patrick Yurick

I still remember feeling awe the first time I super-imposed text, with effects, over a picture downloaded from the Internet. My high school's art room had a brand new Gateway computer with Adobe Photoshop 3.0. Finally, I could make digital art and I was the only person I knew who could do that. My obsession with the program grew so that by age 18 I was co-teaching the digital arts class.

1999 was a lifetime ago. Nowadays, basic information on Photoshop is widely available. My mother can place text in an image and I routinely see 8-year-old kids who post their digital creations on the web.

During my time as a ninth-grade art teacher, I helped hundreds of students learn to color with computers. Technology has radically changed things. Most students are accustomed to picking up digital skills much faster than was possible when Photoshop was first introduced.

One thing that hasn't changed is the prohibitive cost of a program like Photoshop.We live in a world where the ability to manipulate imagery on a computer is expected of those pursuing a career in the arts. Why not make the industry standard (i.e. Photoshop) free for students? Why isn't it free for everyone? The truth of the matter is that the Adobe's sales infrastructure is based on a model from over 20 years ago. It would be unrealistic to expect the program to suddenly become free for all.

After I taught my students how to color in Photoshop and gave them assignments, something weird would happen. They would routinely return empty-handed because they had no access to the program. By the end of 2011, I was fed up. I made the switch to free open-source programs, specifically GIMP.

During 2012, I used GIMP almost exclusively to digitally color my comics. In fact, the first 16 pages of my comic, American BOOOM, perfectly illustrate the benefits of coloring with GIMP. The program is extremely versatile and easy to learn. It has many of the same capabilities as Photoshop, but it's free.

An example of digital coloring in GIMP from American BOOOM by Patrick Yurick and Alonso Nuñez

Why choose to color in GIMP over Photoshop?

Digital coloring has so standardized the look of comics that original or unusual styles of coloring stand out. From *Darwin Carmichael is Going to Hell*, to *Romantically Apocalyptic*, to the print stylings of Justin Ponsor, coloring has blossomed into a fascinating area of study.

But I digress. We all have to start somewhere, which is how GIMP fits in. While teaching high school three years ago with my colleague (now wife) Kay Flewelling, I gave my students an assignment called the Comic Book Project.

Art by Drew M. Lee 14 from the Comic Book Project (instructors: Patrick Yurick, Kay Flewelling)

The goal of the *Comic Book Project* was to teach new students how to become better storytellers. The development of digital coloring techniques was a critical component of this. The example above demonstrates how one of our students, Drew, learned to color her own comics during the course of the project. Although she colored this comic in Photoshop, everything she learned applies to GIMP as well. Except with GIMP, the entire world can access coloring tools for free.

Have you heard about One Laptop Per Child? When those computers are distributed to developing countries, they won't have Photoshop on them. They will have access to GIMP. Such free and open-source programs were developed to provide universal access to art-making tools.

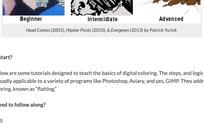
From a personal standpoint, I highly value the humanitarian nature of access to a program like GIMP. It aligns with my desire to help all students create their comics without worrying about cost.

If GIMP is so great, why would anyone use Photoshop?

For all of the many advantages of using GIMP, it lacks certain advanced features that Photoshop possesses. Most beginners won't miss these features, but as your abilities improve, you may contemplate making a change.

This is how I would advise your choice of program based on ability level:

- Beginner — The beginner has no experience using a computer to make art. They may have drawn on paper, but this has never extended to opening a graphics program. They would like to learn how to color their comics, but expect that knowledge to take time. This tutorial series is perfect for the beginner.
- Intermediate — The intermediate is fairly profile. They know how to color in programs like GIMP and Photoshop, but are by no means experts. Their coloring may lack depth, shading, or sometimes have weird visual artifacts like specks of white. The intermediate user probably understands most of this tutorial, but it is recommended that they review it anyway. Learning that last little bit is vital!
- Advanced — The advanced user would find everything in this tutorial series intuitive. They are capable of coloring a page with flats in 45 minutes or less, and require more than basic functionality. GIMP may have worked in the beginning, but they have hit a ceiling with regards to its capabilities. For all its remarkable accessibility, GIMP lacks a number of features that professional colorists need.



Beginner Intermidate Advanced

Head Comics (2001), Hipster Picnic (2010), & Evergreen (2013) by Patrick Yurick

Where do I start?

Attached below are some tutorials designed to teach the basics of digital coloring. The steps, and logic behind them, are broadly applicable to a variety of programs like Photoshop, Aviary, and yes, GIMP. They address the first phase of coloring, known as "flatting."

What do I need to follow along?

You will need:

- A computer that is running Windows XP (or above) or Mac OSX (or above).

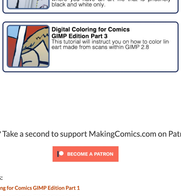
Or:

- A computer that is running Linux (I don't know this operating system as well, but since it is free and open-source I expect to make comic-related tutorials for it in the future).

And:

- GIMP 2.8. Other free, open-source alternatives to Photoshop exist, but this is the one I prefer. Many of my coloring tutorials will use GIMP — it's fun, and does almost everything that Photoshop does. I strongly believe that the future of art (particularly art education) lies with open-source software.

The Tutorials



Digital Coloring for Comics GIMP Edition Part 1
This tutorial will instruct you on how to scan and save your comic book illustrations in order to use them with the GIMP Digital Coloring tutorials.

Digital Coloring for Comics GIMP Edition Part 2
This tutorial is designed to help get your scanned art files, which should be full of greys and lots of "accessory" pixelated marks, to the point where you have an art file that is pristinely black and white only.

Digital Coloring for Comics GIMP Edition Part 3
This tutorial will instruct you on how to color lin eart made from scans within GIMP 2.8

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9 Responses to "Digital Coloring for Comics – GIMP Edition"

Arnie January 25th, 2014

This is great Patrick, I was wondering when you'd touch on this subject.
In case you didn't know about more Alternatives
http://mac.appstorm.net/roundups/graphics-roundups/the-best-alternative-apps-to-everything-in-adobe-creative-cloud/

Reply

Mark January 25th, 2014

Arnie, that list is epic! Thanks for sharing!

Reply

Michael Freely January 27th, 2014

Gimp is fantastic. With the cost of Photoshop being so high I would basically have to wait until tax returns time to even think about getting it. So many other things the money is needed for… My gimp "pen" never run out of ink, even if my printer does.

Thanks you so much for tackling this subject. Gimp or Photoshop, It is an intimidating part of the process for me.

Reply

Patrick January 28th, 2014

Thanks Michael. I know that comic book making in GIMP isn't mainstream, but it is vital in allowing the literacy of comic construction to spread to new makers. Thank you so much for commenting. Let me know if the tuturials work for you. -Patrick

Reply

Grace April 22nd, 2014

Thanks so much for this tutorial series! I am just getting into digital coloring, and I downloaded Gimp but wasn't sure how to begin using it, so this is great. 😊

Reply

Archsider April 1st, 2016

Yes , almost all software that are tools are free, and art should have also, I use Krita and Gimp in Linux , it is great.I can do anything and everything that I can do with PS. 😎

Reply

Mark Jolly October 15th, 2018

We are pitching a cartoon to some small county papers. Looking for a reasonable program to colorize for
newsprint. How much is your program?

Reply

Patrick Yurick October 16th, 2018

GIMP is free and opensource!

Reply

Becca July 22nd, 2019

Thank you so much for this!

I'm just starting digital art, and working on my drawing skills which are very rusty. This will be very useful! I appreciate having so much info out there to help me learn, especially with GIMP.

Reply

Leave a Reply

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Your E-Mail*

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XHTML: You can use these tags: <a href="" title="" > <abbr title="" > <acronym title="" > <b> <blockquote cite="" > <cite> <code> <del datetime="" > <i> <q cite="" > <s> <strike>

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Digitizing Coloring For Comics GIMP Edition Part 1

by Patrick Yurick - www.theheadcomic.com

Required materials:

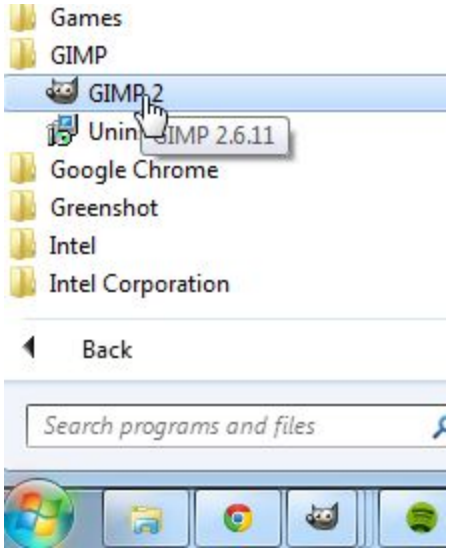
- GIMP 2.8
- A Scanner. I am using a Canoscan LIDE 200

The Tutorials

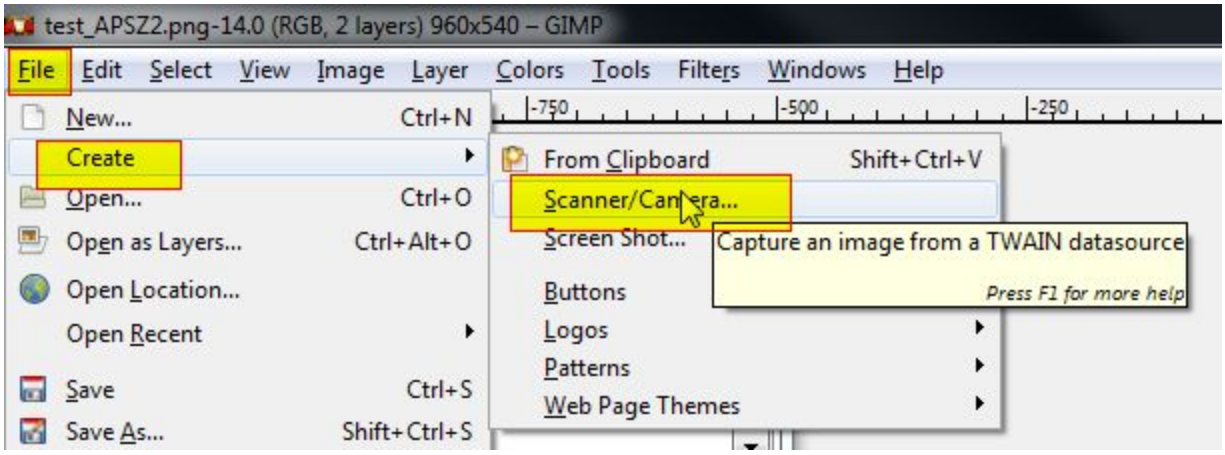
	Digital Coloring For Comics - GIMP Edition Part 2 This tutorial is designed to help get your scanned art files, which should be full of greys and multiple pencil/eraser marks, to the point where you have an art file that is pristinely black and white only (which is what you will color on)
	Digital Coloring For Comics - GIMP Edition Part 3 This tutorial will instruct you on how to color lineart made from scans within GIMP 2.8

Tutorial:

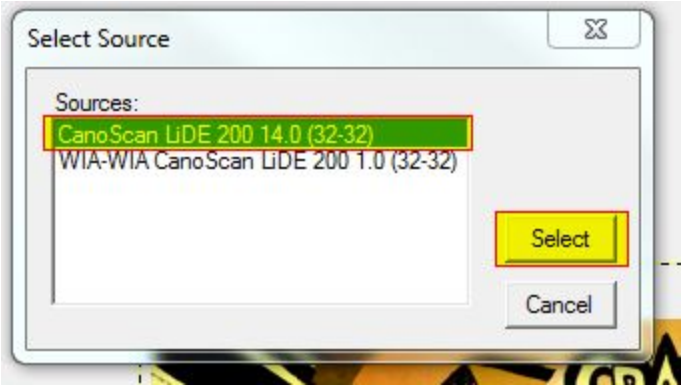
1. Make sure your inks are complete. I also recommend downloading Dropbox onto your computer, so that when you save your scans, they are saved on the Cloud and safe from hardware crashes. To ensure that your scans don't get mixed up (and to reduce the Dropbox clutter), I also recommend making numbered folders, with each number corresponding to the step of your comic process (One for scans, two for colors, three for layers, etc.).
2. Open GIMP on your computer (make sure your scanner is plugged in and installed to your computer!)



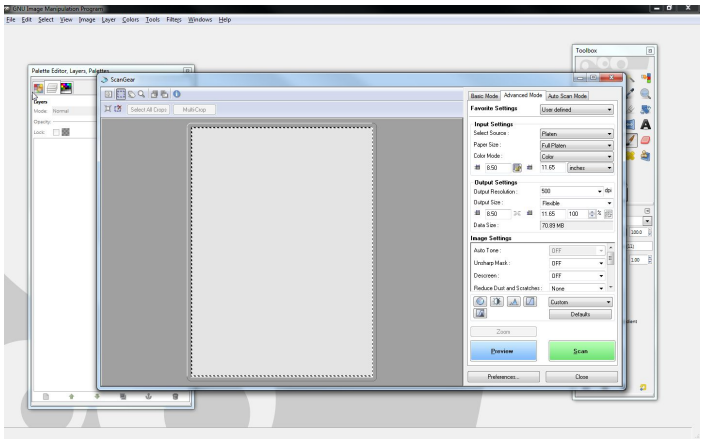
3. In GIMP, click File>Create>Scanner/Camera



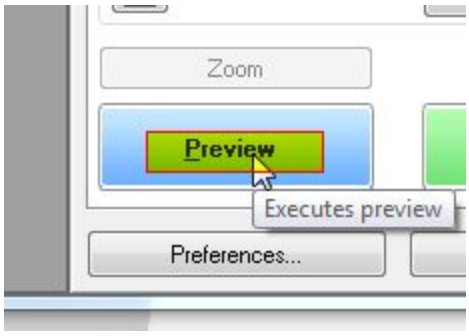
4. A Window should appear that asks you where to scan from, select your scanner and click select



5. Your scanner menu should appear

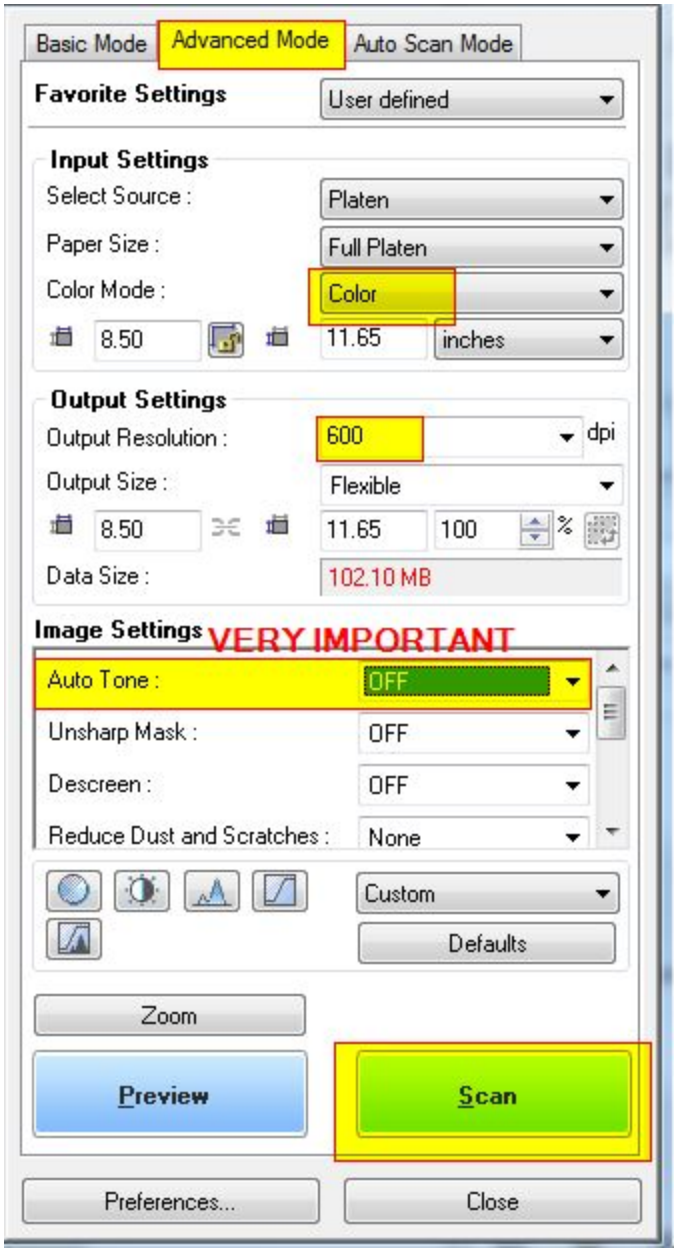


6. Click on the “preview” button



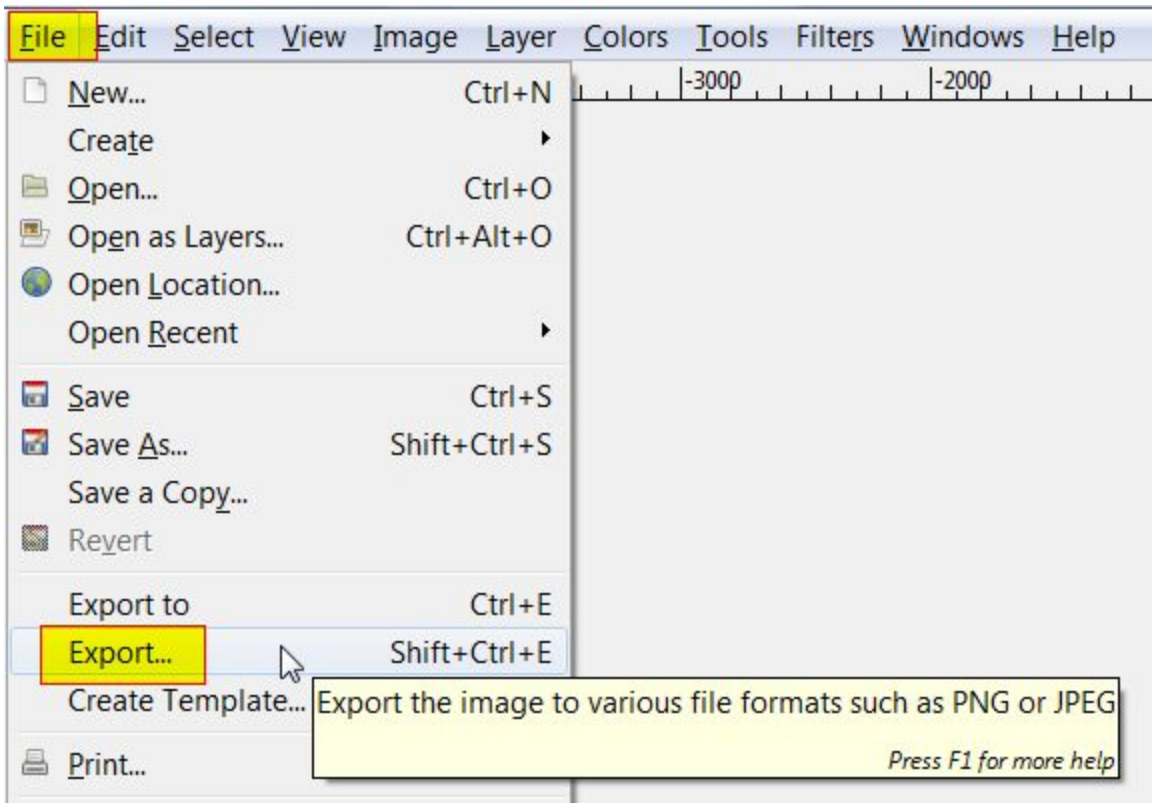
7. After your scanned page pops up in the preview window, make sure that it isn't cut off and that it is positioned precisely. If you have to reposition it, make sure you execute the "preview" step (step 6) again.

8. Now that your page is properly aligned for scanning, go to the menu, under Advanced Mode, and make sure that the settings are exactly as show below in the highlighted areas. Once you have all of the settings set, click "Scan"

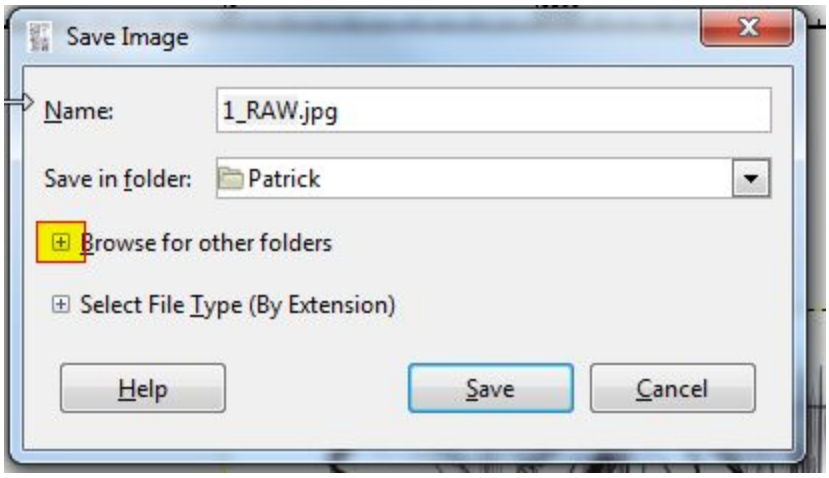


9. Your final file should now be open in GIMP!

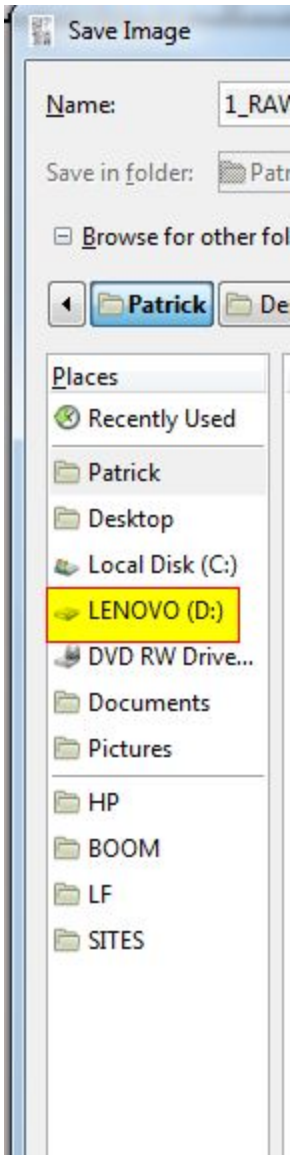
10. Click File>Export



11. In the “Save Image” dialog box that comes up, click on the + sign next to Browse for other folders

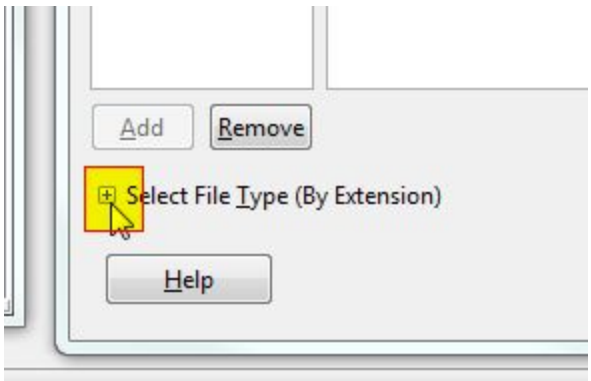


12. In the “Places” box, find the “Dropbox” folder (or, if you don’t want to use Dropbox, then whatever other folder you want to save your images to) on your hard drive

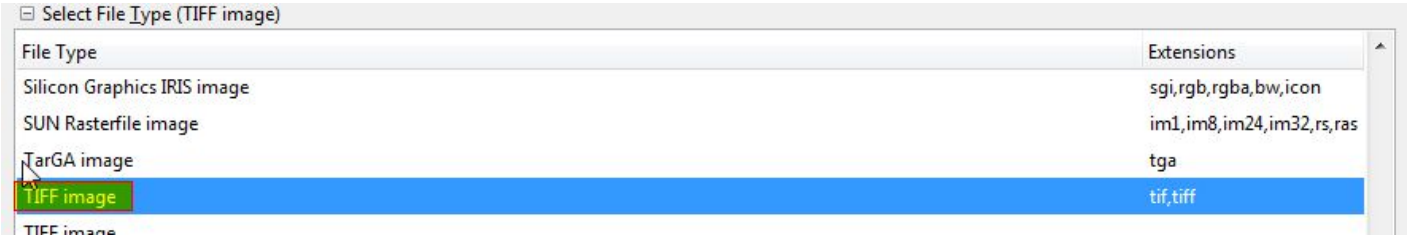


13. Select your numbered folder and go inside of it.

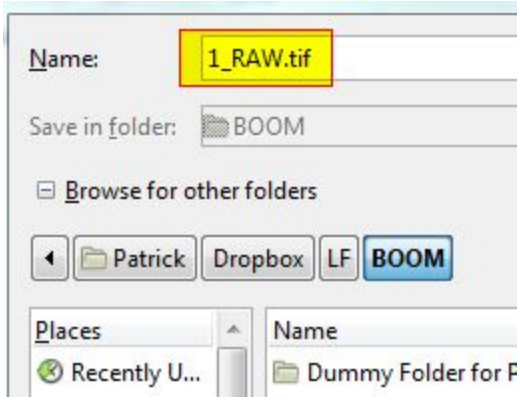
14. At the bottom of the dialog box click “Select File Type”



15. Scroll down and select the “TIFF image” filetype

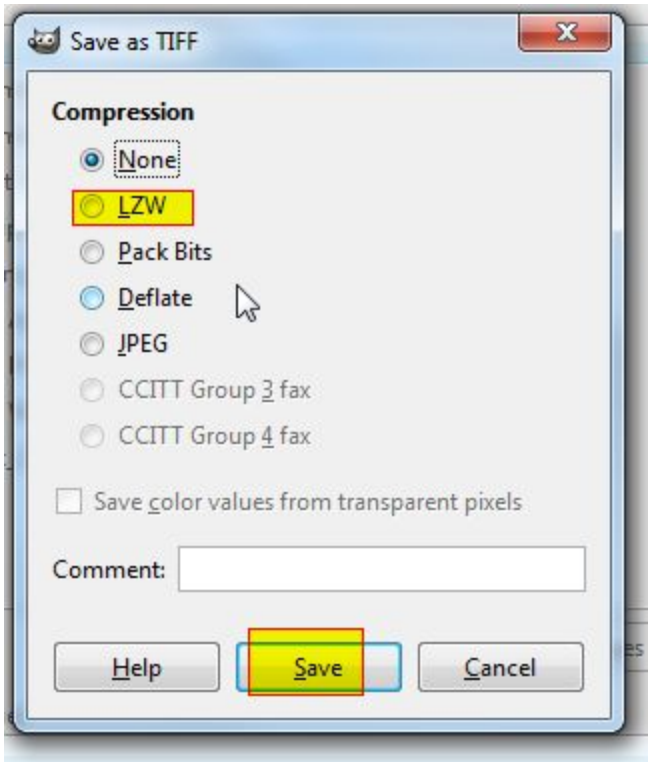


16. At the top of the dialog box, click on the box and change the name to the page number followed by an underscore and the word RAW (standing for RAW files)



17. Click Save

18. A Dialog box will appear. Select LZW compression and then click save



19. You are done! Make sure this uploads to Dropbox by ensuring you have enough Dropbox space and that your internet connection is on.

20. Close the document in GIMP

The Tutorials

	Digital Coloring For Comics - GIMP Edition Part 1 This tutorial will instruct you on how to scan and save your comic book illustrations in order to use them with the GIMP Digital Coloring tutorials.
	Digital Coloring For Comics - GIMP Edition Part 2 This tutorial is designed to help get your scanned art files, which should be full of greys and multiple pencil/eraser marks, to the point where you have an art file that is pristinely black and white only (which is what you will color on)
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Digital Coloring For Comics GIMP Edition Part 2

by Patrick Yurick - www.theheadcomic.com

Purpose: This tutorial is designed to help get your scanned art files, which should be full of greys and multiple pencil/eraser marks, to the point where you have an art file that is pristinely black and white only (which is what you will color on)

Required materials:

- GIMP 2.8
- Laptop or desktop computer with installation privileges

More tutorials:

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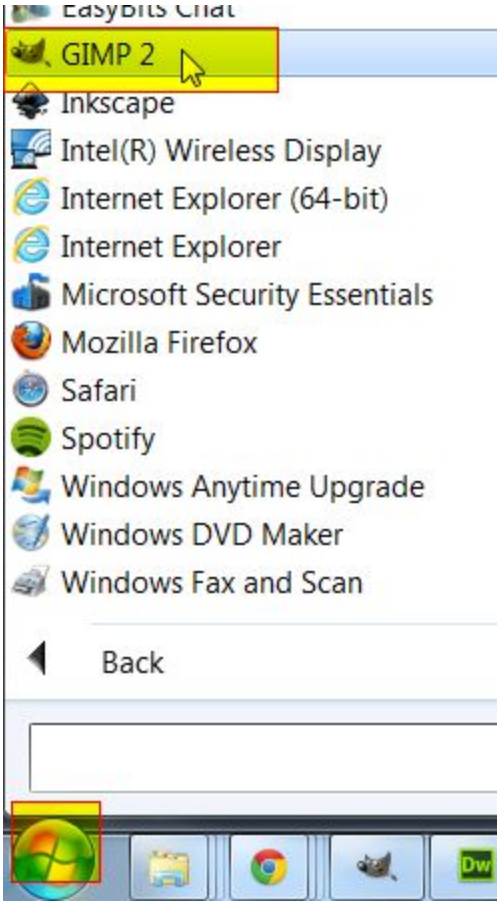
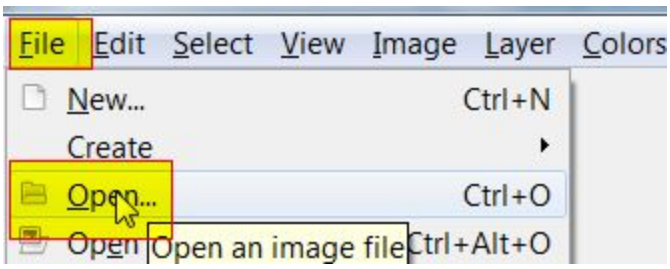
	Digital Coloring For Comics - GIMP Edition Part 3 This tutorial will instruct you on how to color lineart made from scans within GIMP 2.8

Tutorial:

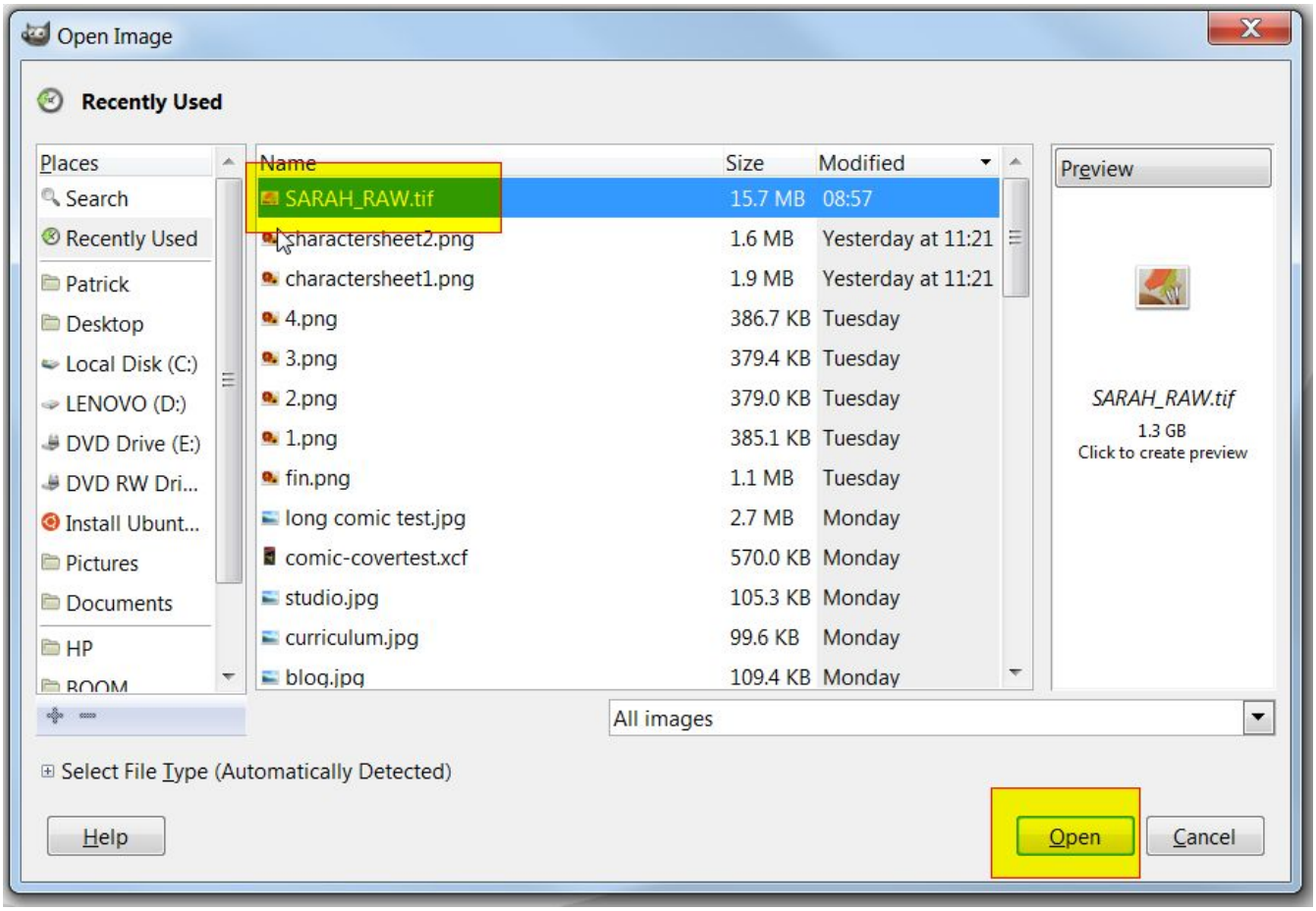
1. Open GIMP 2.8



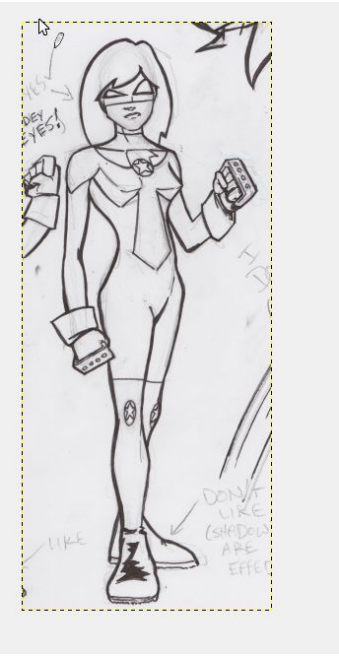
2. Click “File>Open”



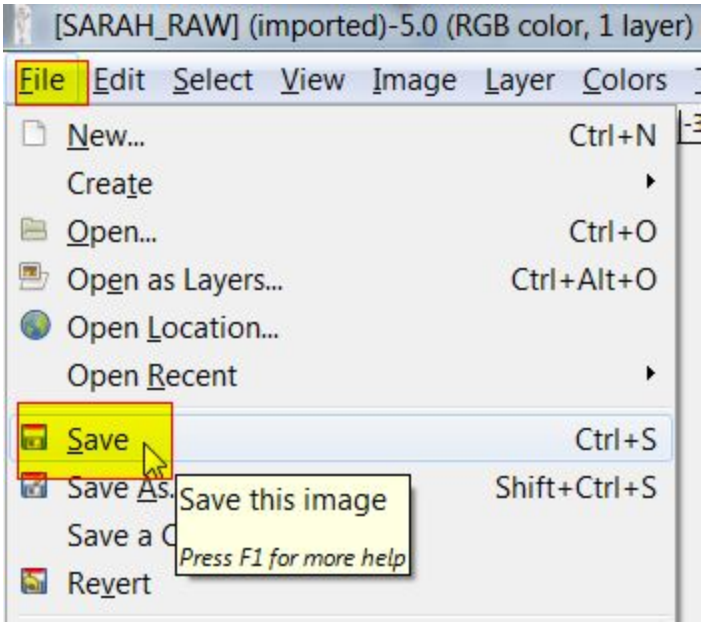
3. Find the RAW file you created in "Digitization Part 1" in whatever folder you saved it in



4. You should have a grey & balck scanned file that looks something like this open

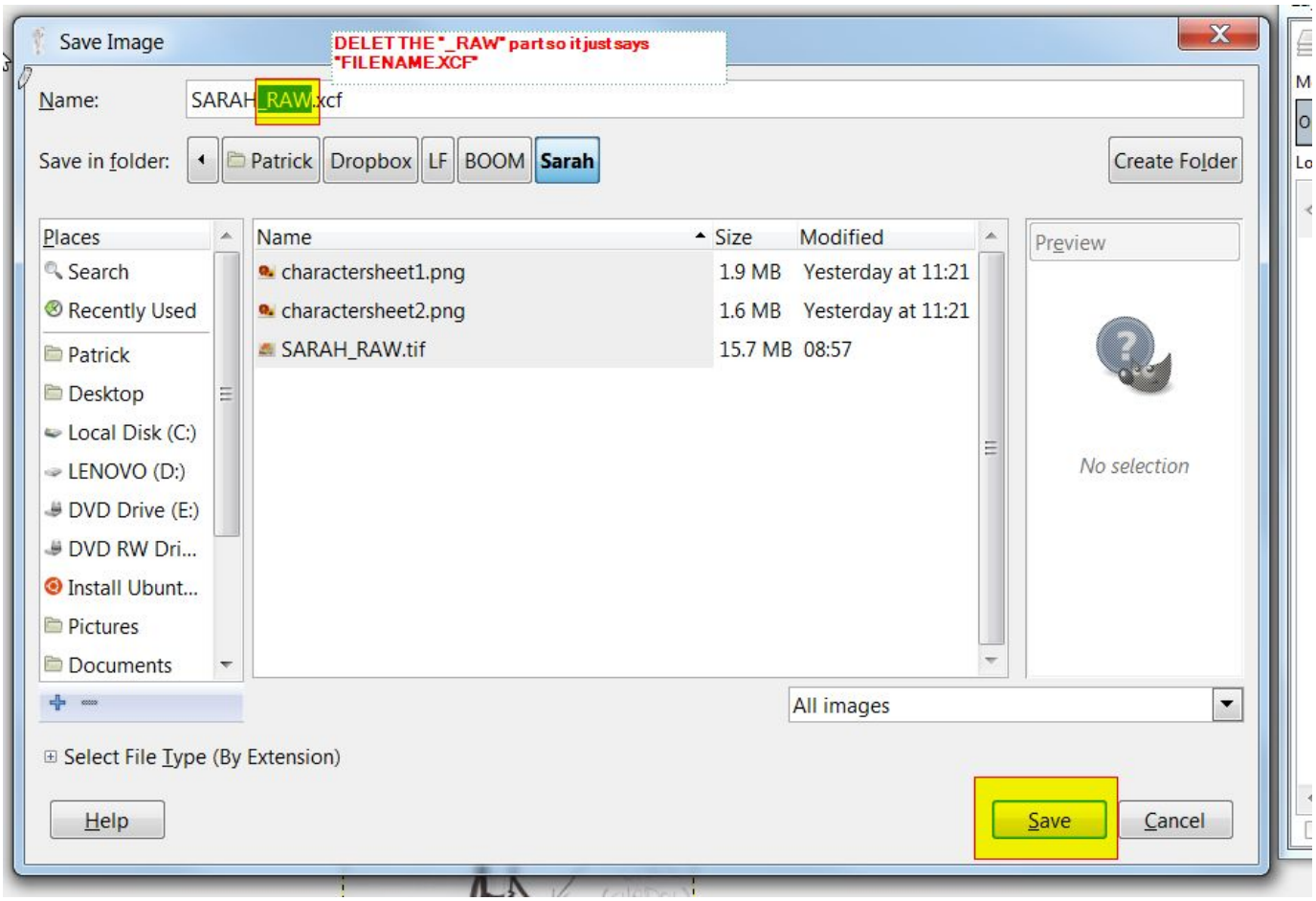


5. Click “File>Save”

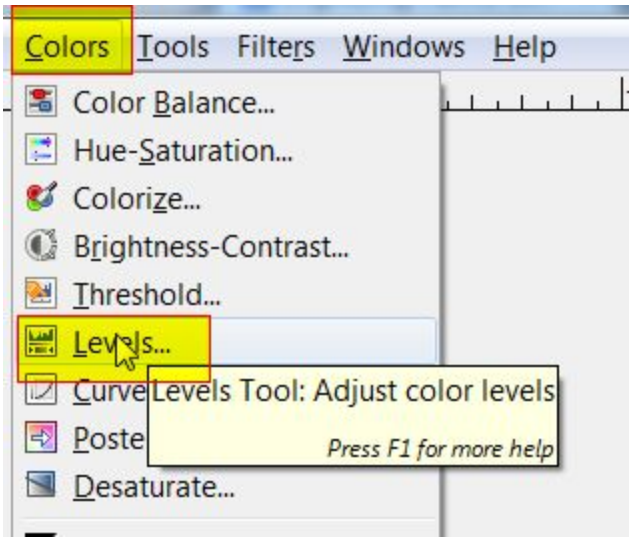


6. Because your file, previously saved, was a ".TIF" file, you currently do not have a complex file that can work with multiple layers. In photoshop these kind of files are call ".psd". In GIMP these files are called ".xcf" files. In this step we are going to save our first one from this file.

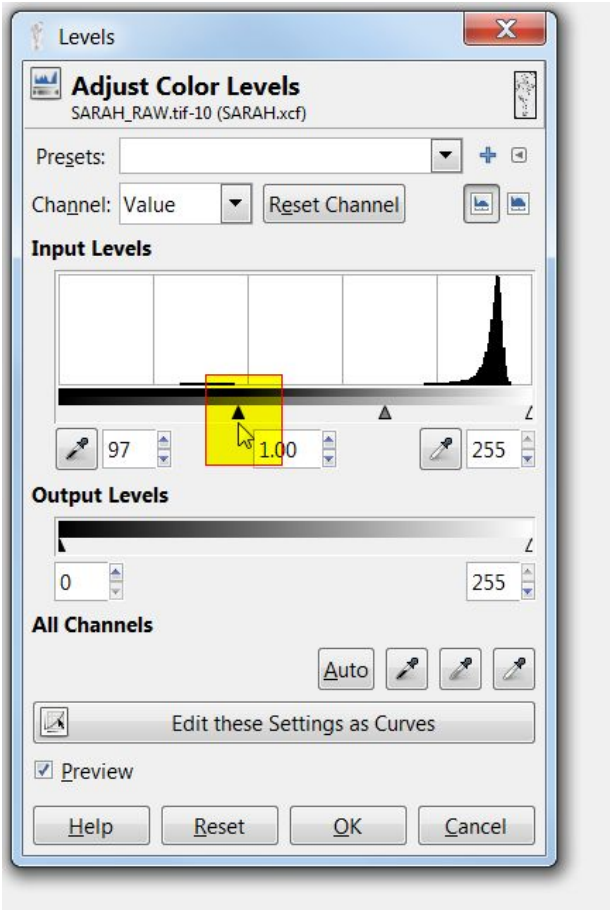
   When this window appears delete the "_RAW" part of the file name (that indicates that the file has not been worked with - which isn't what is happening with this file) and click Save. That's all.



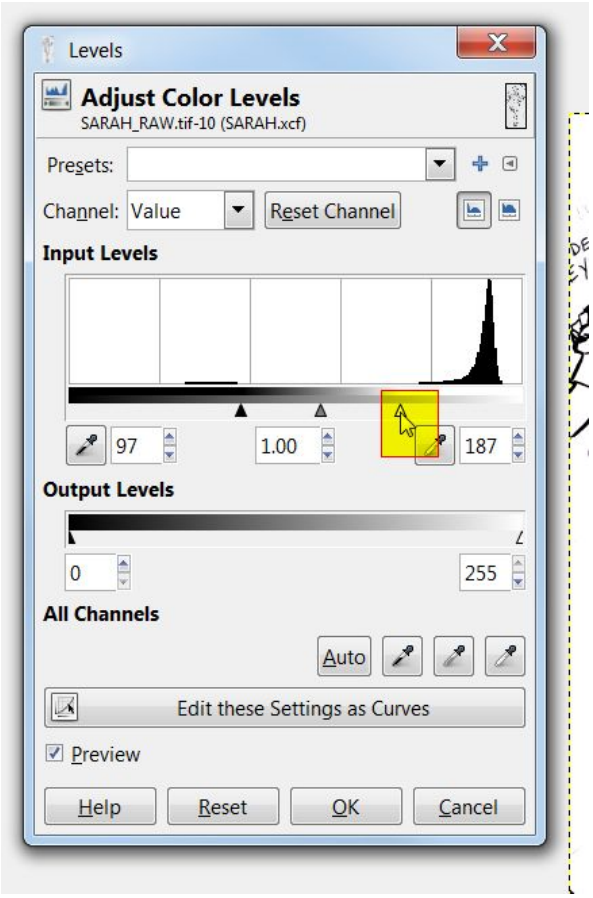
7. Now we are ready to make the pencil lines and greys magically disapear! Click "Colors>Levels"



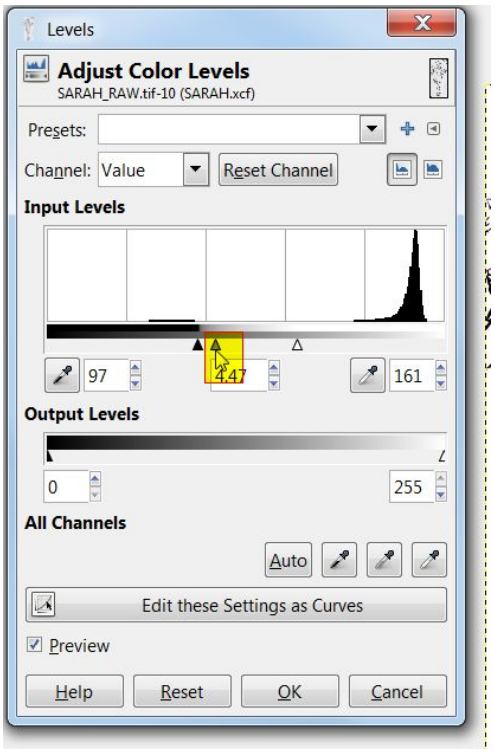
8. First click on the little black triangle in the “Input Levels Section” and slide it to the left. If you look at your image it should be being affected. When you do this with your back triangle you will see the black lines in the art get darker.



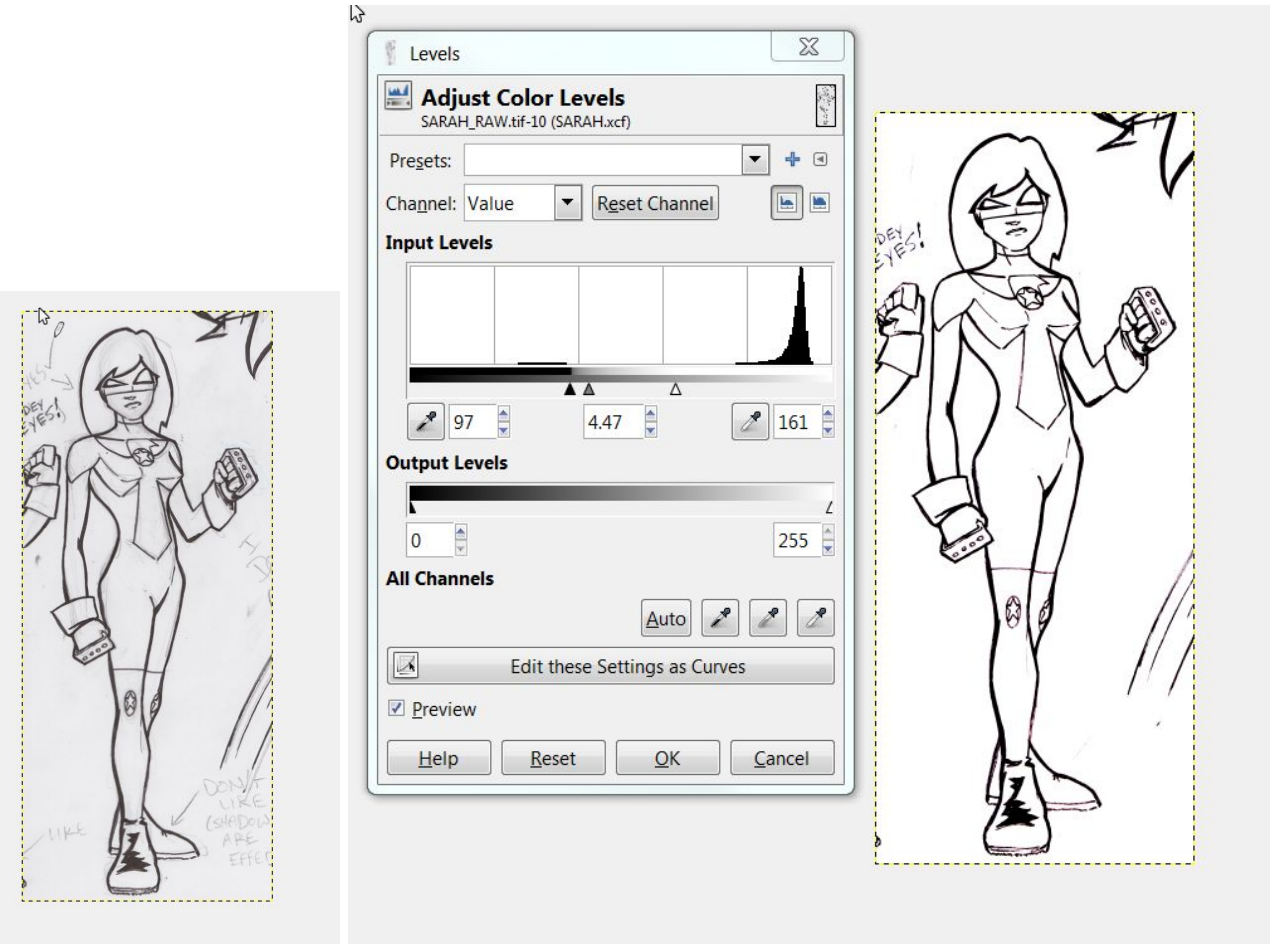
9. Now do the same with your white triangle. You will see the white parts of the art start to get lighter and the grey's in the image start to disapear.



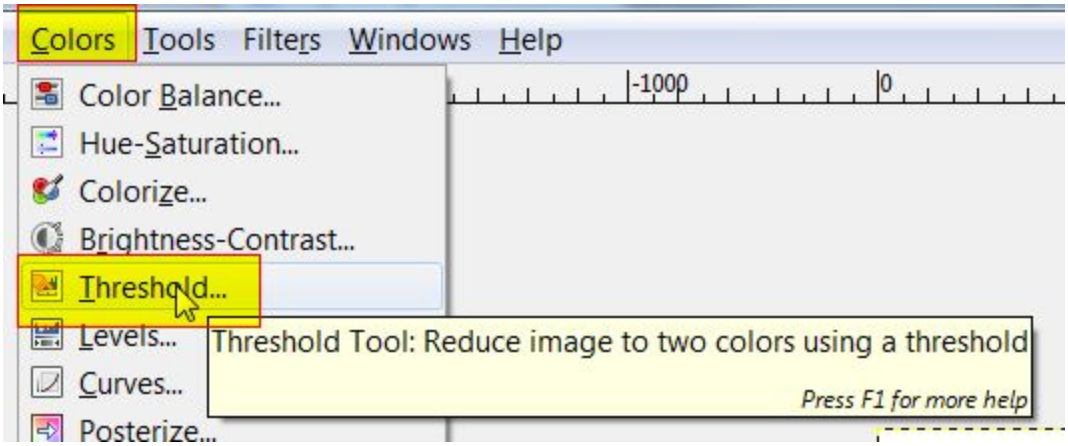
10. Now click on the grey triangle and move it closer to the black until you see all the pencil lines in your art disapear.



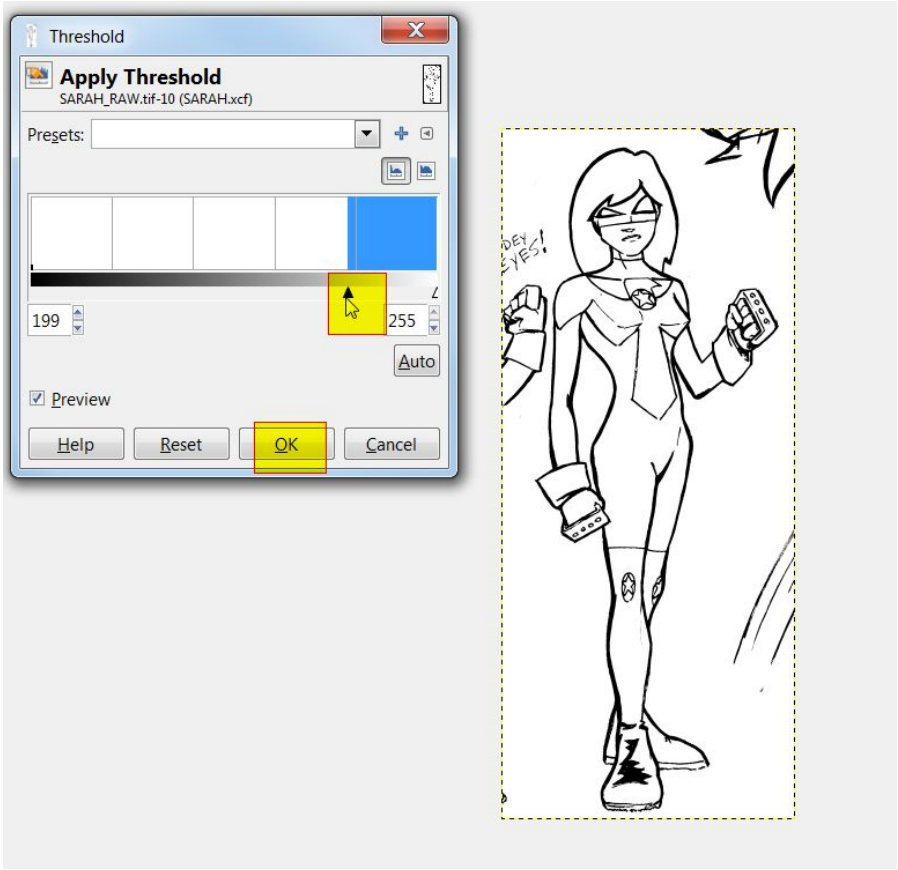
11. Before you click “ok” make sure your grey artwork looks like the image on the right. That means that all the grey is gone and you now have a more pristine black and white image.



12. Click Colors>threshold

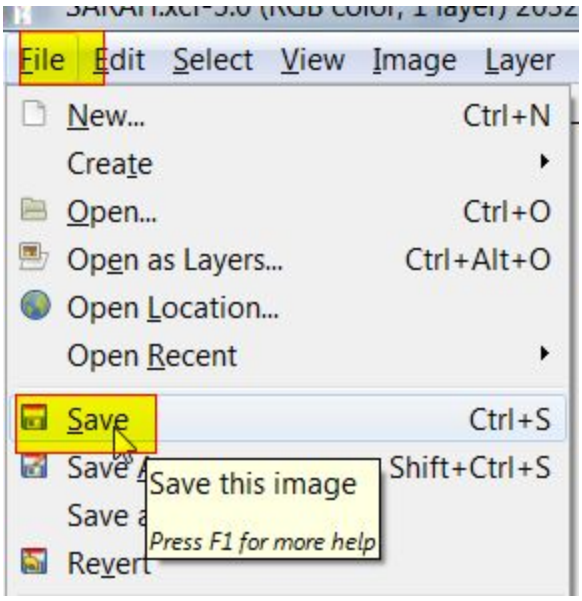


13. With the black triangle in the threshold window move the triangle to the right until you feel that the the black and whites are the way you want them. Then click “ok”

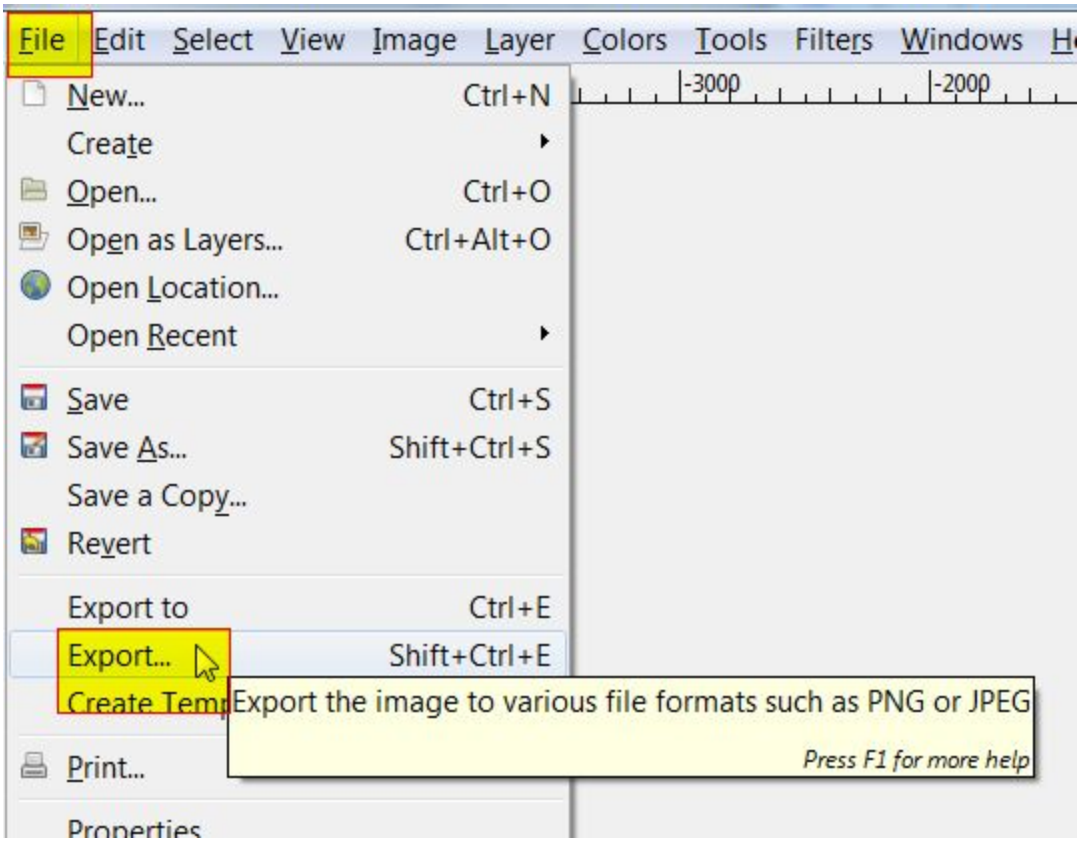


14. You should now have an image that looks something like this:

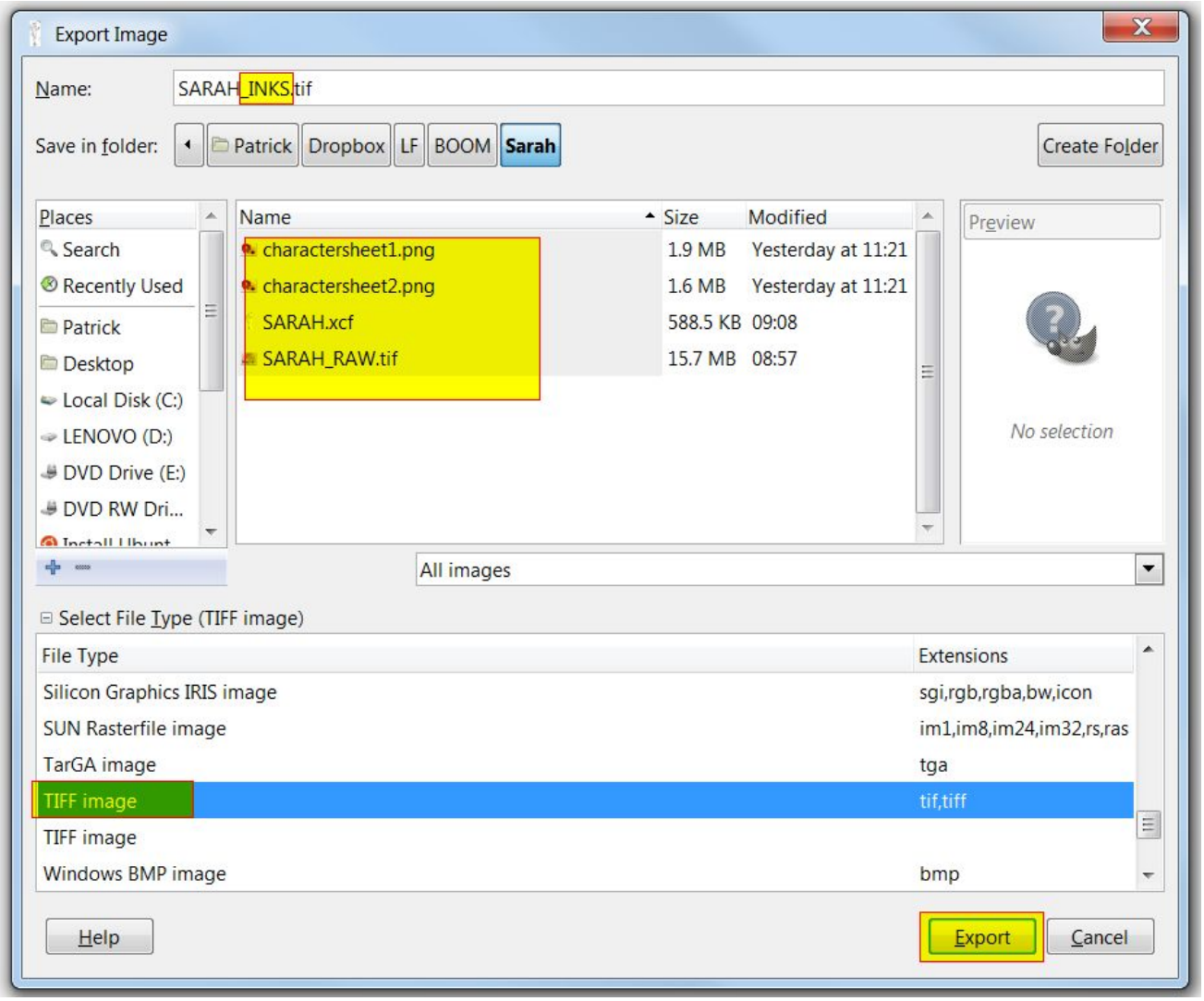
15. Click “File>save”



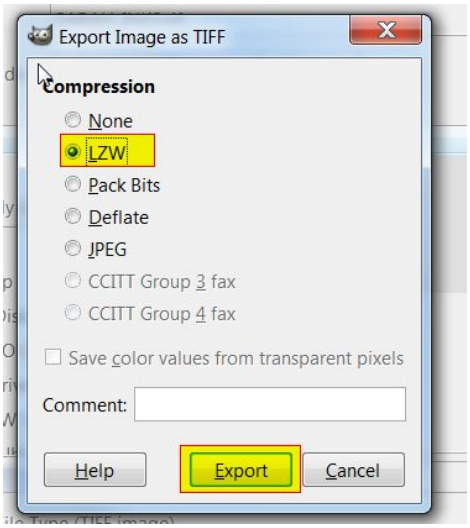
16. Now click “File>Export”



17. In the export window do the following steps before clicking export:
    - Find the correct folder and make sure you are saving your exported file there
    - Change the name of the file to “FILENAME_INKS”
    - Browse through the select file type “TIFF image”
    - Click “Export”



18. Select the “LZW” compression and click “Export”



19. You are done and ready to go to the next tutorial!

The Tutorials

	Digital Coloring For Comics - GIMP Edition Part 1 This tutorial will instruct you on how to scan and save your comic book illustrations in order to use them with the GIMP Digital Coloring tutorials.
	Digital Coloring For Comics - GIMP Edition Part 2 This tutorial is designed to help get your scanned art files, which should be full of greys and multiple pencil/eraser marks, to the point where you have an art file that is pristinely black and white only (which is what you will color on)
	Digital Coloring For Comics - GIMP Edition Part 3 This tutorial will instruct you on how to color lineart made from scans within GIMP 2.8

Digital Coloring For Comics GIMP Edition Part 3

by Patrick Yurick - www.theheadcomic.com

Purpose: This tutorial will instruct you on how to color lineart made from scans within GIMP 2.8

Required materials:
GIMP 2.8
Save for Web plugin installed to GIMP

The Tutorials

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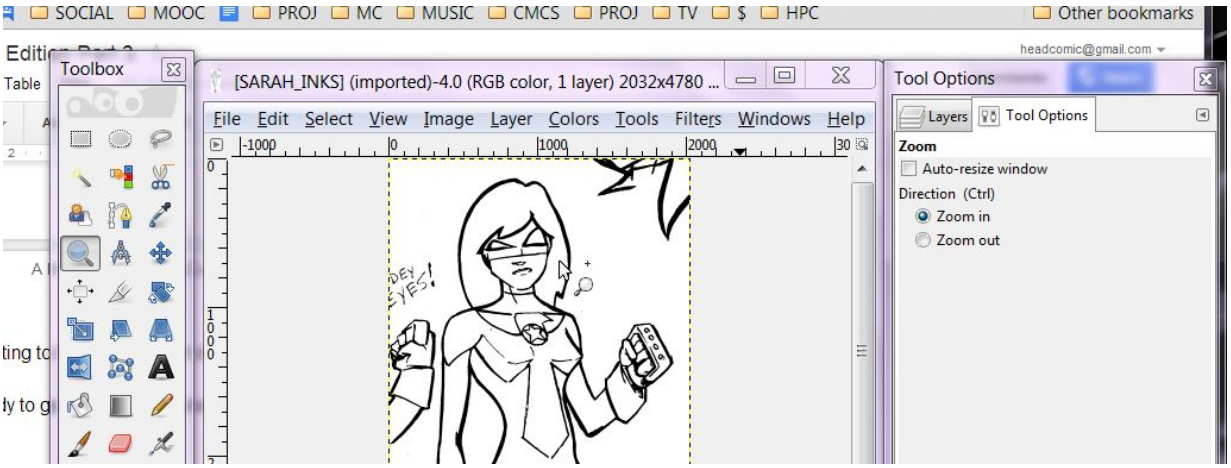
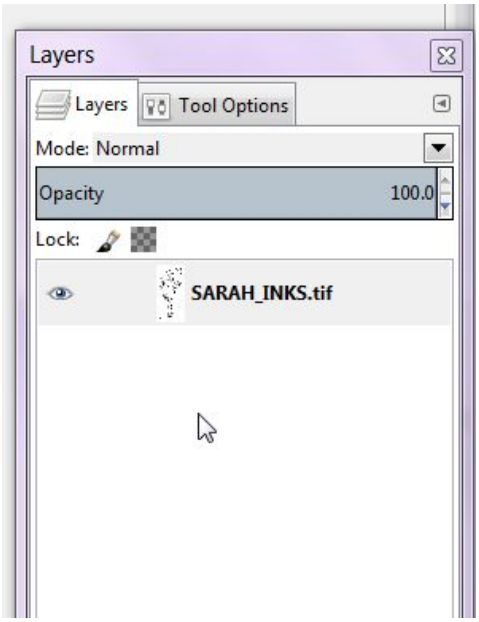
Tutorial:

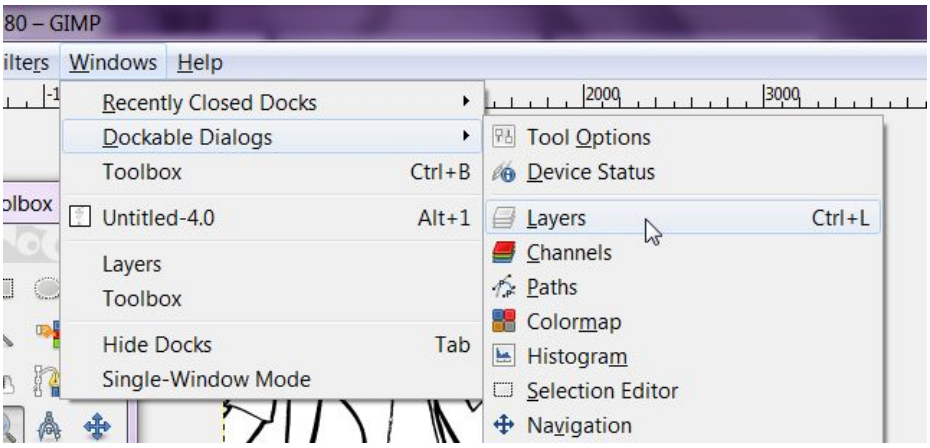
ONow, finally, we're getting to the coloring part of the series of tutorials! This is a pretty basic part. Open your inks file.



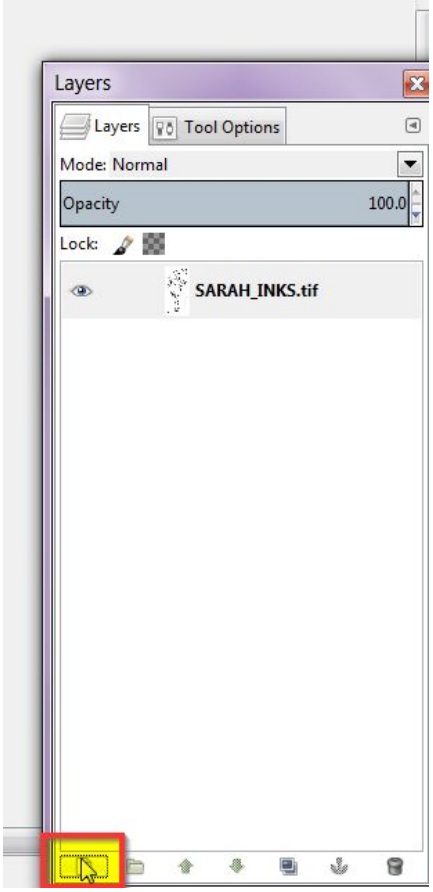
Select the layers panel (on the right side of your workspace)



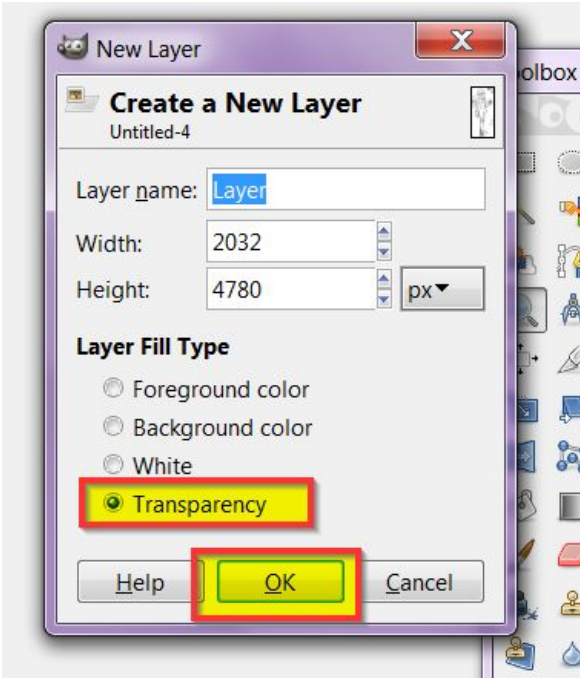
If it isn't open, because you accidentally closed it or something, click "Windows>Dockable Dialogs>Layers" or use the shortcut "Ctrl+L" for a PC, "Command+L" on a MAC.



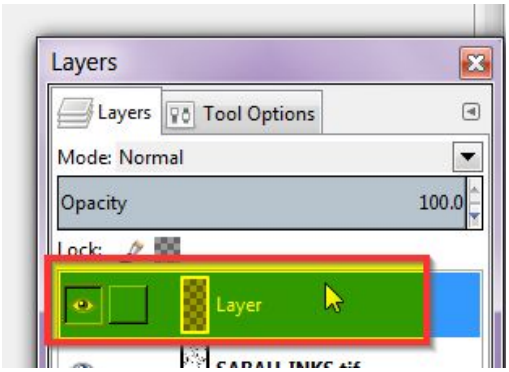
Within the layers palette, create a new layer by clicking on the blank page icon at the bottom of the layers palette.



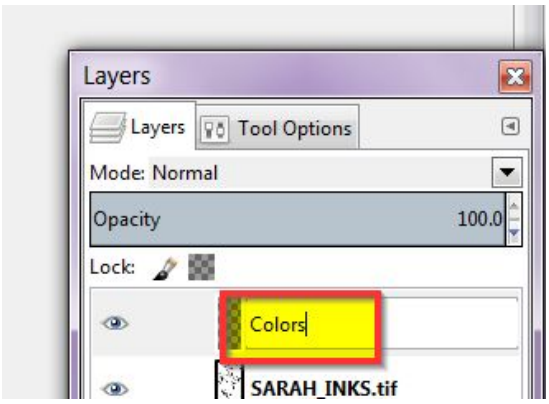
A new layer option box will come up. Make sure you set the layer to “transparency” before clicking “ok”



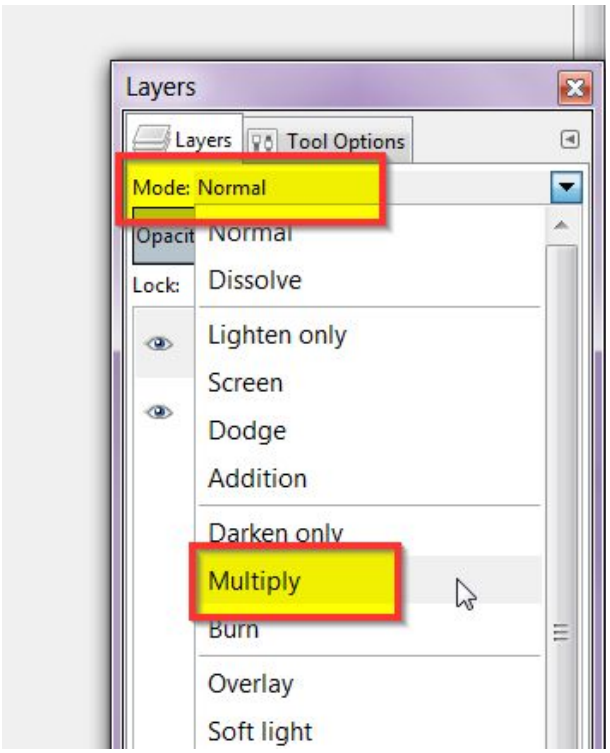
Now go back to the layers palette. Make sure that the new layer is above the line art layer by dragging it above. Select the blank layer.



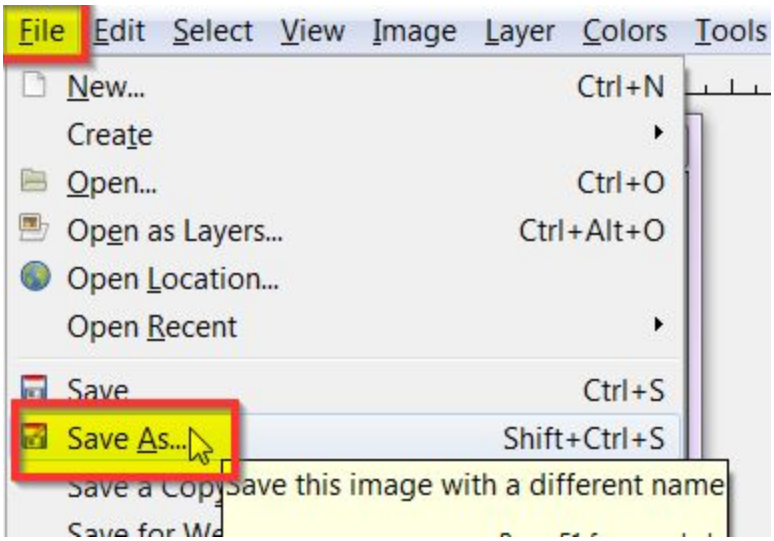
Double click it and rename it “colors”



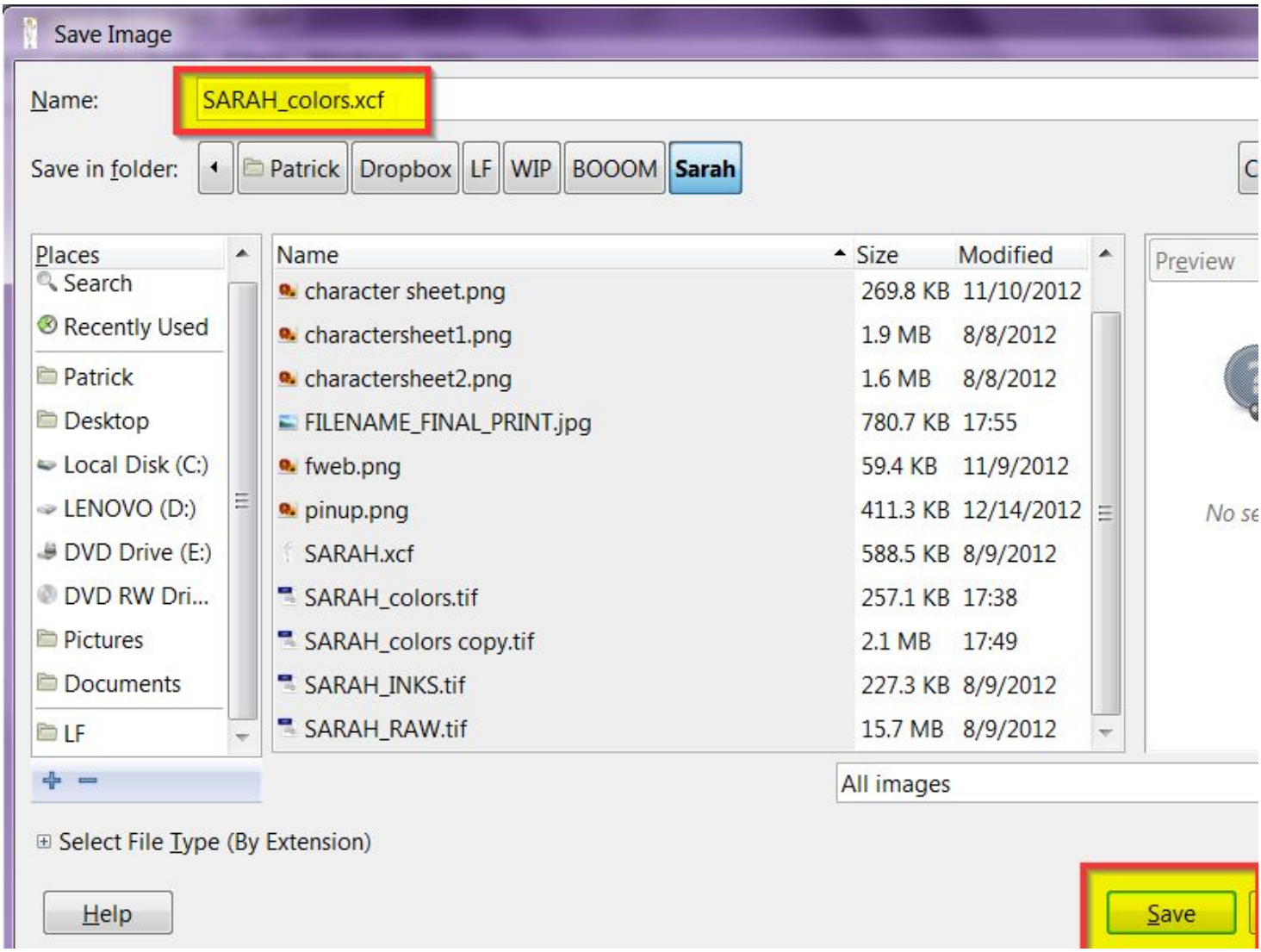
Now, under “Mode,” at the top of the layers palette, select “Multiply”



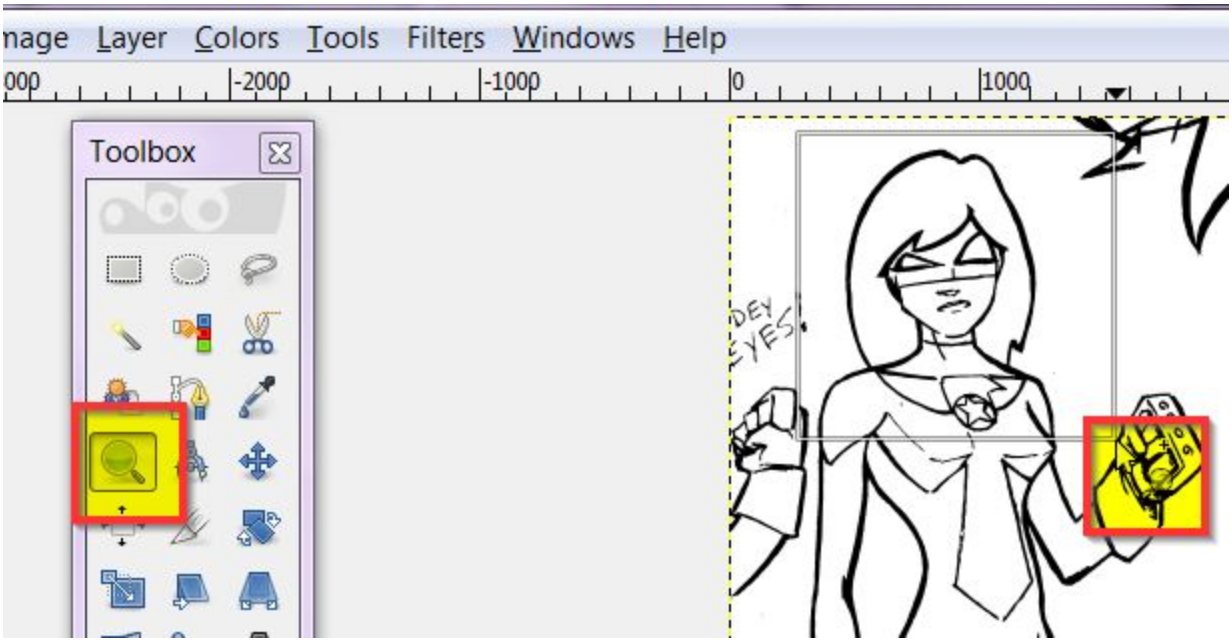
Click “File>Save as”



Making sure you are in the original folder you were working in, name the new save file “Filename_colors.xcf” (“.xcf” is the GIMP editable file, remember?). Then click “Save”.

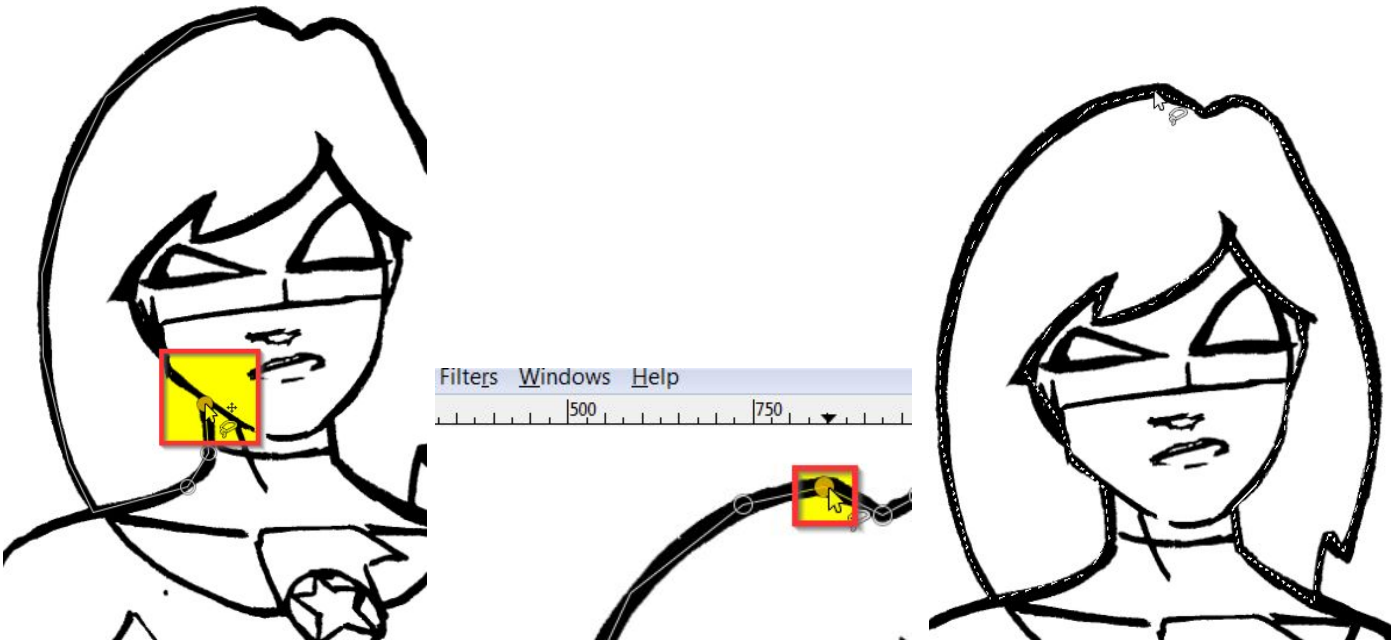


Select the “Zoom Tool” (magnifying glass) and select the first area you want to color. You can select a specific area of your art piece by clicking, holding down, and dragging over that area with the magnifying glass. In this case, I am selecting the girl’s hair to color first, so I have selected her head.



Now you can select the “free select” tool by clicking on it from within the toolbox, or by clicking quick key “F” on your keyboard.

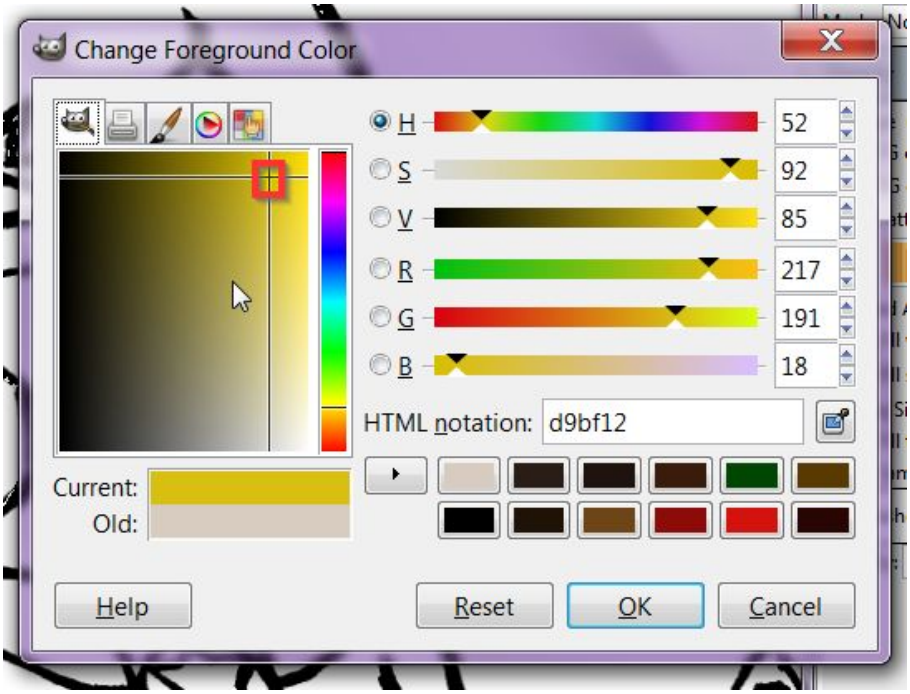
Now start selecting the area you want to color. I would suggest selecting from within the outlines so that the colors extend out beneath the edges of the art. This reduces the likelihood of missed space in the coloring. When you connect the original point where you started the selection with the end of your selection, your selection with generate.



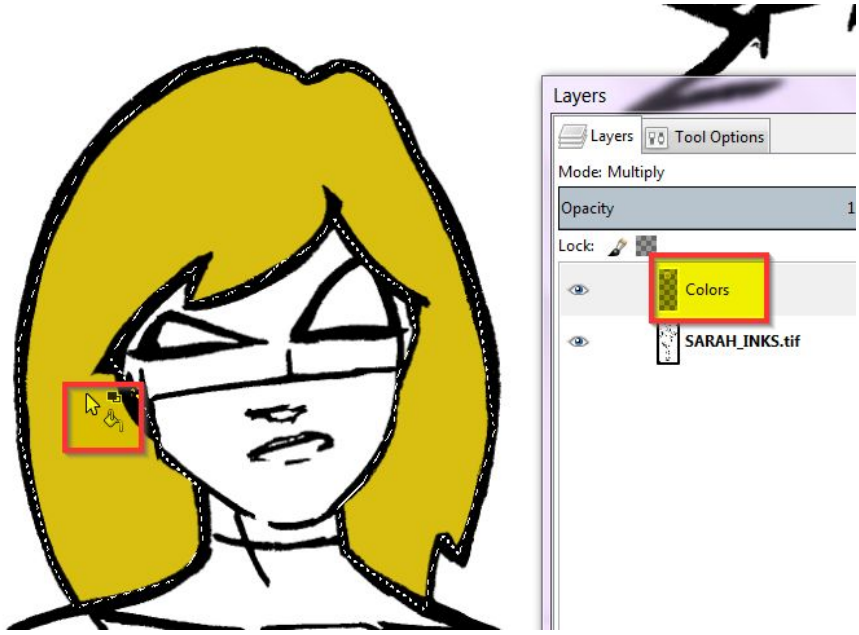
Within the toolbox, select the paint bucket tool.

At the bottom of the toolbox, double click on the foreground color to change the color you will be using.

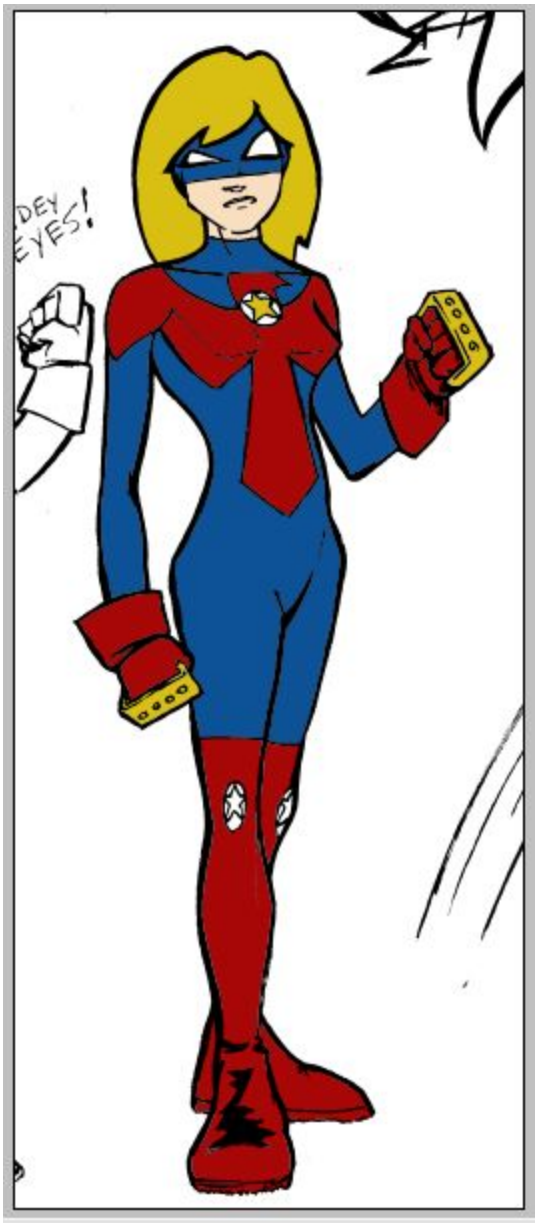
From within the color selector choose the color you would like to color the selection in with.



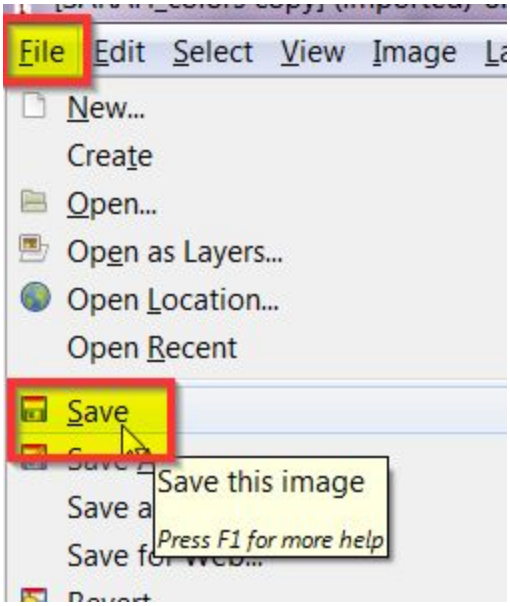
Within your selection, making sure you are within the “Colors” layer, click on the selection to drop the color in.



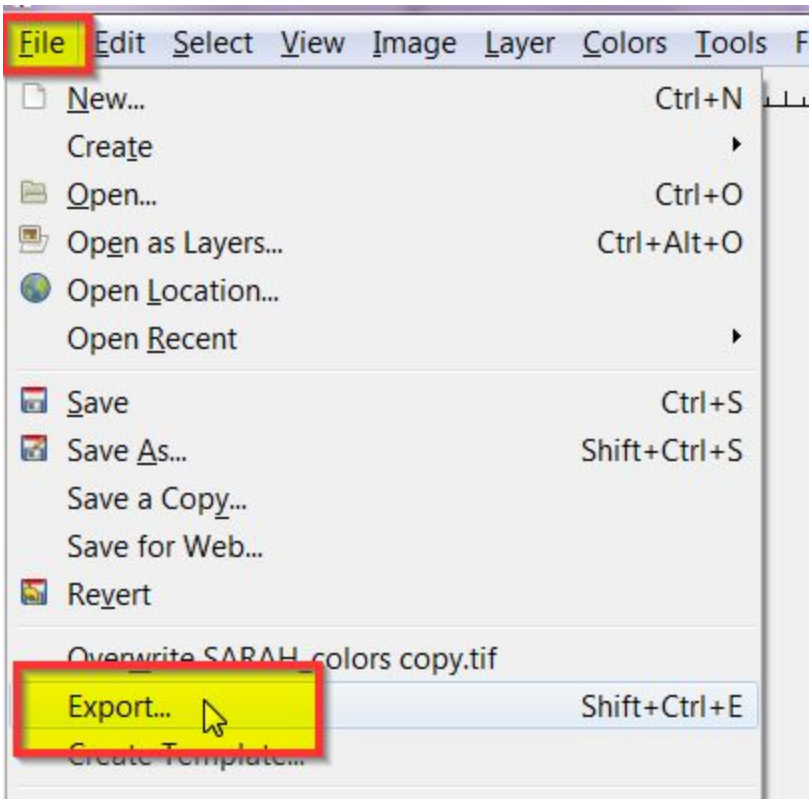
Now repeat steps 11-15 this for all of the selections you can possibly make in your drawing to color it in.



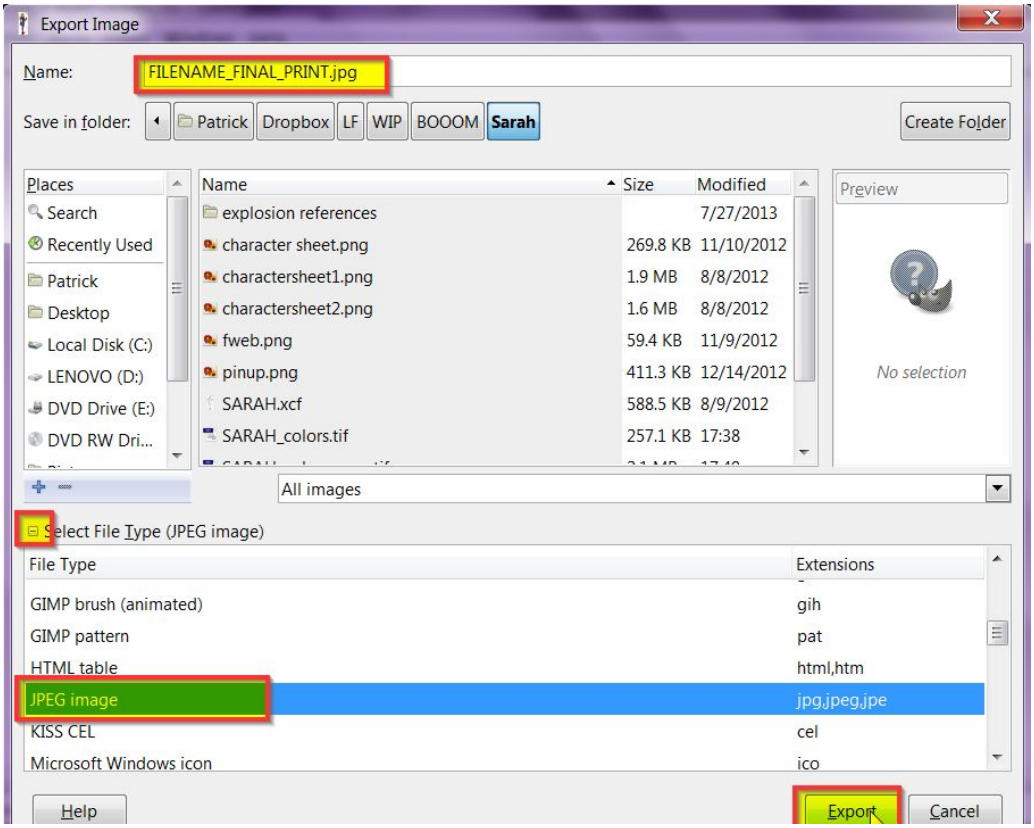
Before you finish, make sure that you click “File>save”



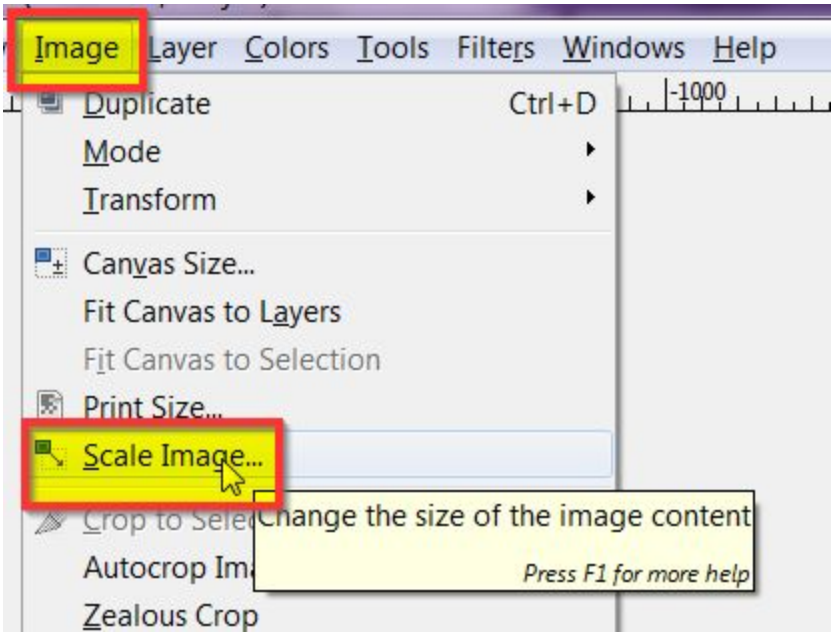
Now, to finalize the image for print settings, click “File>export”



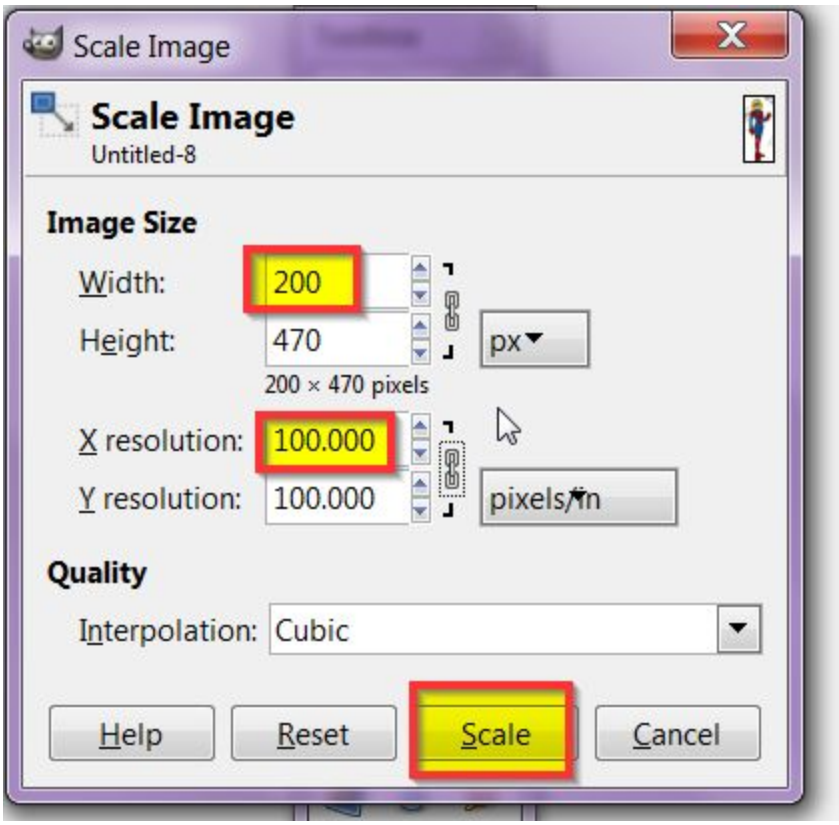
In the options box that pops up, name the file “YourFilename_FINAL_PRINT” (This is to indicate that this file is optimized for printing. It is a large file at this point, so I wouldn’t try and use it for anything else.) Click “Select File Type” and choose “.jpeg” and then click export.



Click “Image>Scale Image”

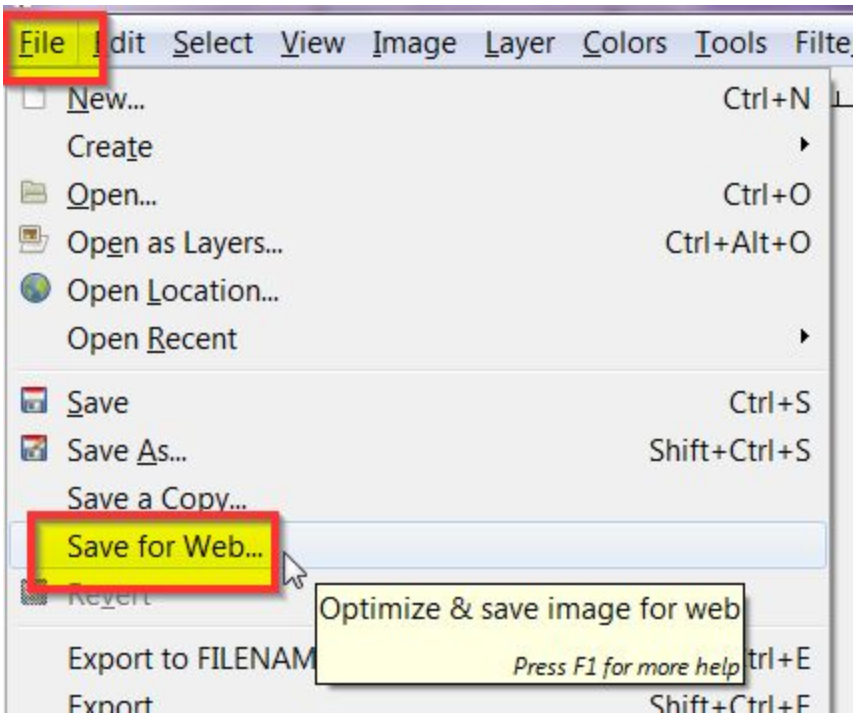


In the scale image options box, within the width field, choose a number under 1000 (which represents pixels) and then hit tab on your keyboard and the height should change as well. Now go to the “X Resolution” and change the number from “600” to “100” and click tab again, the Y resolution should change. Then click scale.

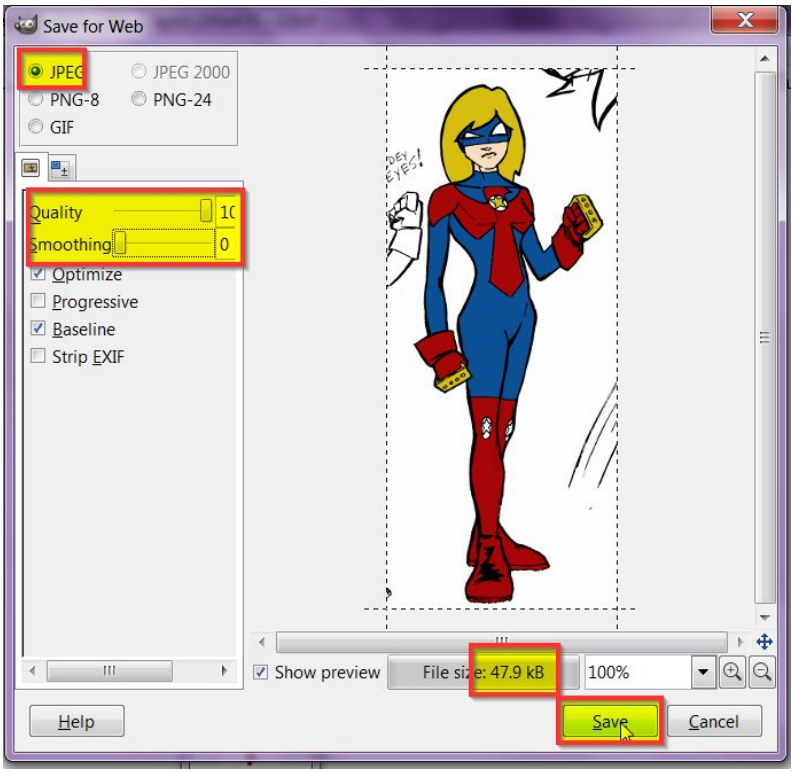


Using the handy dandy, "Save for Web" plugin for GIMP, I am going to now save my file so that it works for web sharing faster and easier. (You will need this plugin for that step, so if you don't have it installed, take a minute to do so now)

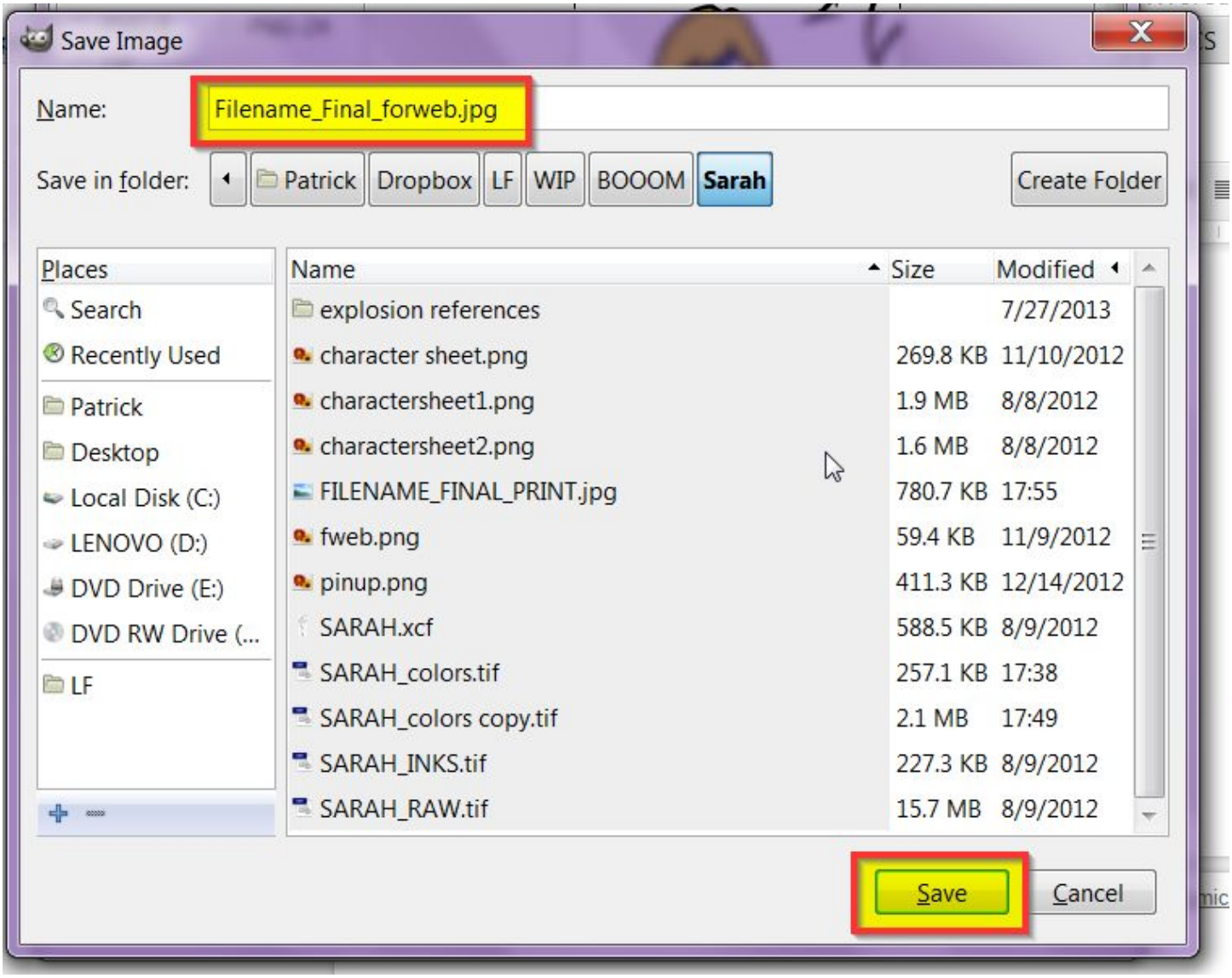
Click "File>Save for Web"



In the "Save for Web" options box make sure the "jpeg" setting is selected. Adjust the "Quality" and "Smoothing" options keeping an eye on the "File Size" indicator. (It should be under 100kb for web use) then click "Save"



Within the “Save image” options box, name the file something like “filename_final_forweb.jpg” to indicate it is for web usage. Then click save.



Now you can click out of GIMP. Don’t save anything at this point because the scaled image might accidentally override the settings on your large print file.

You are done!

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