

INTERVIEW WITH NATHAN HALE

Tell us about your new books.

My newest books are called Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales, from Abrams. They are graphic novel (comic book) versions of true stories from American History. They are narrated by the famous Revolutionary War spy, Nathan Hale. They are for middle grade readers and focus on the crazier aspects of American History. The first book is called One Dead Spy, and is about Nathan Hale's own spying exploits in 1776. The second is called Big Bad Ironclad! and is about the ironclad arms race during the Civil War.

What's your favorite thing to draw? Least favorite?

I like drawing people doing things. Fighting, jumping, interacting with their environments. I like drawing dinosaurs, castles, military uniforms, machinery, pretty much everything. I don't like drawing horses and dogs (they have such confusing legs!)

What has been the most fun you've had on a project? Least fun?

Most fun was probably *Frankenstein: A Monstrous Parody*, which was a Madeline parody I created with author Rick Walton. The illustrations had to match the scratchy, sketchy ink style of the original Ludwig Bemelmens artwork. It was MUCH simpler than the drawing style I was used to. It ended up being a lot of fast, funny fun. I completed the entire book in under a month. Least fun would be the *Rapunzel's Revenge* and *Calamity Jack* books, because they were so time consuming. Each of those books took nearly a year to complete. The coloring in particular was never ending.

What's your favorite book?

I don't have a go-to favorite book. For picture books, you really can't beat *Where the Wild Things Are* (you really can't), for comics, I love Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* books; I like genre fiction, tough guy stuff (Historical, War, Crime/True Crime, Horror). I don't like to read YA or Teen fiction--it feels too much like work. When I read for pleasure I like to be in grown-up territory. My favorite books I read this past year were *Matterhorn* by Carl Marlantes and *NOS4A2*--that's a Joe Hill horror novel I got an advance reader copy of. Super scary. Right now I'm reading some non-fiction, *The Guns of August* by Barbara W. Tuchman.

What books, authors and illustrators inspire you?

I grew up really enjoying sci-fi paperback cover artist Michael Whelan, I loved that guy as a kid. I'm a big fan of Edward Gorey and Hayao Miyazaki.

Where do you draw your inspiration for your work?

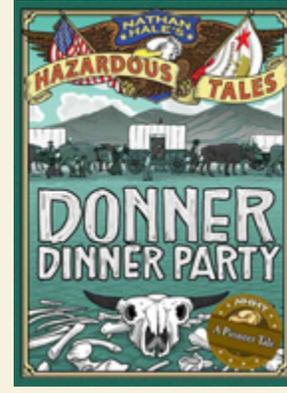
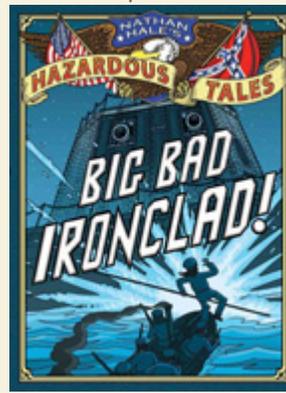
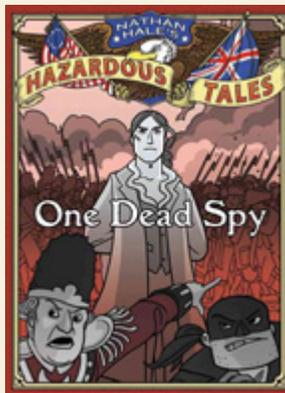
I follow whatever interests me most at the time. Recently it's been history. The Haz-

ardous Tales books have been so much fun to create because I'm learning so many new things as I write them. It's easy to get excited about drawing the pictures when the stories are so exciting.

What's your advice for kids and adults who want to illustrate books and comics?

Draw all the time. Every, every day. And most importantly, FINISH projects, don't just start them. Accept jobs people offer, even if it isn't your particular style. It takes a long time to establish both your style and your working habits, so don't pass up a chance to get paid to try something different. If people aren't giving you jobs, create projects of your own. Build a blog with daily/weekly drawing posts. Post your artwork online. Make deadlines for yourself. When I was in high school, I created a calendar for my friends and family. I would start every year around September, then photocopy my 12 drawings, fold, staple, and hand them out. I did a calendar every year for 10 years. People started expecting it. I had to meet that deadline every year.

If you could have dinner with any fictional character, who would you



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choose? Why?

I don't know. I have a horrible stomach flu right now. I haven't eaten anything but a handful of Frosted Mini Wheats for two days. The thought of eating makes me very queasy. But, since it's a queasy theme, I'll go seasick and say Jack and Stephen from the Patrick O'Brian navy books.

If you could take a vacation in any book ever written, which book would you choose? Why?

Same thing. I like the idea being on one of those 18 month sailing voyages. That'd be good.

How much time do you spend drawing/illustrating?

I once saw the illustrator Wendall Minor speak. He said his work week was 12 hours a day, seven days a week--on a slow week. Everyone in the auditorium laughed. They thought he was joking. He wasn't joking. It is a labor-intensive job. I have those same work hours, unless it's a deadline month, then the work hours ratchet up into the 14s and 15s. Comics in particular are very, very time consuming. You really have to love long, grinding hours and late nights.



Nathan Hale is an award winning children's book illustrator and author with a background in scientific and natural history illustration. Nathan has worked in natural history museum display, painting scientific murals for museums around the U.S. He studied illustration at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. He divides his time between picture books, natural history/educational illustration and graphic novels. Nathan collects LEGO sets and runs marathons (seven so far--marathons, not LEGO sets.) He creates an ongoing web-comic for children, with new posts every weekday (<http://spacestationnathan.blogspot.com/>).