TooningNews

Scanning

Fig. 1
In the Photoshop levels dialog box shown above, I've pulled the white (circled) arrow right toward the center to drop out some of the lightest grays and clean up stray smudges and pencil lines, and I've pulled the black (circled) arrow left toward the center to fill in the nearly black pixels and create perfectly black inked lines.

In this edition, I will assume that we have drawn and inked our cartoons and cleaned them up as reasonably as possible before scanning. What this means is that without scrubbing too hard with your eraser, which would lift away some of the ink and lighten the lines, you should eliminate what pencil work remains. The little bit of effort you spend now will save at least the same amount of time working toward the same end in Photoshop.

When we scan our cartoons, one of the first questions to ask is, what is the cartoon's final destination or use? The answer will determine the resolution of our scan. Normally, there's no reason to scan your cartoon at 400-600 dpi if it will go straight to web and never be printed on any traditional hardcopy medium. But if you suspect that it might someday end up being printed, then by all means scan at a high resolution. Because I never know what size my cartoons might eventually be reproduced or where they may end up being used: on t-shirts, in brochures, on signage and whatnot, they are all scanned at high resolution. Cartoons that are intended solely for viewing on screen don't require much resolution above 72 or 96 dpi since that's the resolution of most monitors. Keep in mind that a hi-res scan intended for screen viewing won't increase the quality of your image, but will increase the file size and download time.

I prefer to scan my inked work at minimum size of 100%, 600 dpi and grayscale. Although a black & white scan would yield a much smaller file size, the bitmap format makes jagged edges and I want to preserve the smooth edges that an anti-aliased grayscale image will give me. More detailed reasons will be explained in a later edition of this newsletter. After the scan preview appears on the screen, I'll adjust the tonal values to drop out a few of the low end grays to eliminate any leftover pencil lines and smudges, then adjust the higher end of the values to fill in the grays that should be perfectly black. Be careful not to drop out too much of the low end or you'll end up with a virtual bitmapped image and jagged edges anyway.

> *"…a hi-res scan intended for screen viewing won't increase the quality of your image, but will increase the file size and download time."*

Once the image is scanned, save the image as a TIF. It is a "lossless" format, cross-platform friendly, and very suitable for archiving. Now open the image in Photoshop and put the final touches on the cleanup by painting out any stray pixels and smudges still left, or by using Image>Adjust Levels feature. (Fig. 1) In the same menu, you can revisit the tonal values for the blacks and make any more needed adjustments. Remember to turn on the preview feature to see a live update as you move the sliders.