

The Timun Mas Folktale as a Source of Inspiration for the Science Fiction Comic MOONA

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How to cite: Najib Z. F. & Fiyanto, A. (2025). The Timun Mas Folktale as a Source of Inspiration for the Science Fiction Comic MOONA. *Gorga : Jurnal Seni Rupa*, 14 (2), 478-486. <https://dx.doi.org/10.24114/gr.v14i2.68432>

Article History : Received: August 13, 2025. Revised: September 13, 2025. Accepted: December 31, 2025

ABSTRACT

Folklore is a cultural heritage that preserves moral, ethical, and social values that remain relevant for adaptation into modern media. Timun Mas, one of the popular legends from Central Java, conveys messages of affection, courage, and wisdom, which hold strong potential for creative reinterpretation. However, interest in folklore among younger generations tends to decline due to the dominance of global popular culture. This study aims to explore the adaptation of the Timun Mas story into a science fiction comic entitled MOONA. The research method employed is a literature study on sources related to the Timun Mas narrative, comic theory, and similar adaptation works, followed by a creative process consisting of pre-production, production, and post-production stages. The final product is a 26-page comic that merges traditional elements with the science fiction genre, reconstructing the original characters and conflicts into a futuristic setting without losing its cultural values. This adaptation serves as an effort to preserve cultural heritage through visual media aligned with modern readers' preferences, while also contributing to the growth of the local creative industry. The study demonstrates that folklore can be effectively developed through science fiction comics, providing a new form of cultural preservation and creative innovation.

KEYWORDS

Folklore
Timun Mas
Comic
Science Fiction
Creative Industry

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesian folklore is an integral part of the nation's cultural heritage, introduced from an early age. As an oral literary tradition, it represents the identity of each region and diverse cultural values, passed down through generations via verbal transmission (Trisnasasti, 2021:101). Folklore serves not only as entertainment but also as an educational medium that conveys moral, ethical, and social values, providing exemplary lessons for society (Sulastri & Alimin in Wiguna & Alimin, 2018)

One of the most popular folktales deeply rooted in the collective memory of Indonesian society is *Timun Mas*. Originating from Central Java, the legend tells the story of a woman's longing for a child, fulfilled through a pact with the giant Buto Ijo, and the child Timun Mas's eventual struggle to escape and defeat him (Waryanti et al., 2021). The tale introduces characters familiar to the Indonesian audience, such as Mbok Rondo, Buto Ijo, Timun Mas, and the Hermit (Rahimsyah in Rahmah, 2007:54), and conveys moral messages including parental love and protection, problem-solving through action and prayer, imaginative thinking via fantastical elements, social values in helping others, and fostering ethical and religious devotion (Tutul, 2022).

Folklore, whether consciously or unconsciously, often serves as a creative stimulus (Ernawati, 2020). Over time, these stories have been adapted into various popular media, including comics, which combine sequential images and symbols to convey information and evoke aesthetic responses. According to (Scott McCloud, 1993), a successful comic relies on a balanced combination of

narrative clarity and visual intensity, employing continuity, imagery, dialogue, and gesture in close juxtaposition to create a coherent narrative. The genre has evolved with technological advances, offering alternative forms of storytelling beyond traditional text-based books.

In this context, *Timun Mas* has significant potential for reimagining through the lens of science fiction (sci-fi), a genre that enables imaginative world-building incorporating futuristic technology, alien lifeforms, and space exploration (Aprieska in Sipayung et al., 2023:117). Several works have demonstrated the success of this approach, such as *Dragon Ball* by Akira Toriyama, inspired by *Journey to the West*, reconstructed within a sci-fi setting with original characters and shōnen-style adventures (Minguez-López, 2014), and *H2O: Reborn* by Sweta Kartika, which reinterprets *Ramayana* with sci-fi elements while retaining its core conflicts (Bajraghosa et al., 2018).

In Indonesia, comics have existed for a long time, beginning with Put On, a comic strip by Kho Wan Gie published in the Sin Po newspaper in 1931 (Seno Gumira in Bagas et al., 2013). The industry has continued to evolve, and by 2023, various local comic creator events have emerged. Examples include Pesta Komik and Comic Paradise, both of which contribute to the growth of local comic sales and raise public awareness of domestic comic production. Pesta Komik, held in Bandung, aims to serve as a platform for diverse events and programs in collaboration with various parties to advance the Indonesian comic industry (Pesta Komik, 2023). Similarly, Comic Paradise (COMIPARA), held twice a year in Yogyakarta, focuses on comics, webtoons, and their derivative products, with the mission of becoming a creative space for creators and enthusiasts of pop culture in Indonesia (Comipara, n.d.).

Recent studies have examined the adaptation of folklore into comics and other visual media as part of cultural preservation efforts. For example, Mughni & Martadi (2023) explored the deconstruction of the *Ramayana* in comic form to communicate the self-actualization of Javanese women, while Nugraha et al., (2023) developed a digital comic adaptation of *Timun Mas* through visual character interpretation, emphasizing fantasy elements rather than futuristic narratives. Similarly, Fitri (2025) demonstrated how Minangkabau cultural values can be transmitted through fictional characters in picture stories for the Alpha generation. These studies underline a growing interest in adapting folklore into modern comics; however, they remain focused on moral education, cultural identity, or visual reinterpretation. None explicitly integrate *Timun Mas* into a science fiction genre. Even recent explorations of science fiction in Indonesian literature, such as Sipayung et al (2023) on Tere Liye's novel "Hujan", do not intersect with folklore adaptation. Therefore, despite increasing scholarly and creative attention to folklore adaptation in the past five years, there is still a significant gap: Javanese folklore, particularly *Timun Mas*, has yet to be reimagined in the context of science fiction comics. This gap is especially relevant considering the success of Sweta Kartika's *H2O: Reborn*, which blended the *Ramayana* with science fiction elements and proved highly influential in shaping the landscape of local comics (Bajraghosa, 2018).

This study thus offers novelty by creating the science fiction comic *MOONA*, inspired by the *Timun Mas* folktale, reconstructing its characters, settings, and conflicts within a futuristic framework without losing its cultural values. The aim of this research is to preserve local cultural heritage through modern visual media, provide an alternative form of folklore adaptation that is relevant to contemporary readers, and contribute to the development of Indonesia's creative industry.

METHOD

The creation process was divided into three stages: pre-production, production, and post-production. Pre-production is the process of exploring ideas for the design concept to be created. This process includes the development of ideas, synopsis, storyline, and storyboard (Nurfitri et al., n.d.). Production stage focused on translating the script into visual comic panels. This process included the development of detailed storyboards, the creation of line art, coloring, and the finishing stage. This approach is consistent with the findings of Ayuningtyas & Sari, (2024) who documented a similar method in the creation of two-dimensional digital artworks, where the technical stages of production are an essential part of achieving a complete work. Post-production stage focused on refining the work until it was ready for publication. This stage is in line with Natonis et al., (2024) who emphasized the importance of performance management and the publication of artworks as an

effort to preserve cultural heritage. Similarly, **Ayuningtyas & Sari, (2024)** stressed that the presentation and dissemination of digital artworks play a crucial role in the creative process, enabling interaction and feedback from the audience. In this context, the digital publication of *MOONA* serves not only as a channel of distribution but also as a strategy to evaluate the effectiveness of delivering cultural messages through the medium of science fiction comics.

The comic was designed using *Clip Studio Paint Pro* and *Adobe Illustrator* installed on a Windows 10 computer with an AMD Ryzen 3 3200G processor, 16 GB RAM, and an NVIDIA GeForce GTX 1660 SUPER graphics card, supported by a Wacom CTL-672 pen tablet for drawing and a macropad to facilitate shortcut operations during the drawing process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Process of Creating a Work

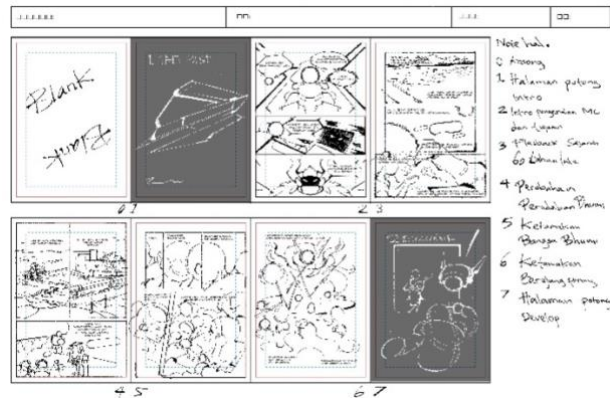


Figure 1. Storyboard Design Stage (Source: Author's Documentation, 2025)

In the **pre-production stage**, the process focused on idea exploration and a literature review related to the Timun Mas folktale. This stage produced a narrative framework that reemphasized the core values of the story, namely parental love and the struggle against threats. The pre-production stage resulted in a written script, a storyline draft, and initial character designs. In addition, the creation of a rough storyboard served to test the readability of the narrative and the coherence of the visual composition.



Figure 2. Lineart and Finishing Stage (Source: Author's Documentation, 2025)

The production stage concentrated on translating the script into visual comic panels. It began with the development of a detailed storyboard, followed by the creation of line art that clarified the details of characters, settings, and visual elements. The finishing process involved coloring, applying visual effects according to the mood of the story, and placing dialogue within speech balloons. At this stage, the visual identity of the characters was reinforced, for example, Moona with her green hair and the Soma nation's combat uniform rich in cultural symbolism.

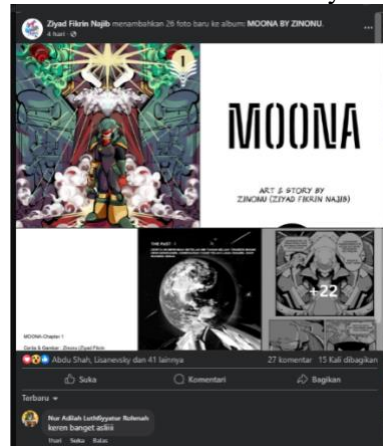


Figure 3. Publication Stage (Source: Author's Documentation, 2025)

The post-production stage focused on refining the work until it was ready for publication. Activities included layout adjustments, font sizing, color correction, and page-to-page consistency. The final outcome was a 26-page comic in A4 size, which was digitally published through the **author's Facebook account** as a means of audience testing. This publication served not only as a distribution channel but also as a way to gather audience responses regarding the effectiveness of conveying cultural messages through the medium of science fiction comics.

2. Form of the Work

1) Narrative Concept

The *MOONA* science fiction comic is inspired by the Timun Mas folktale, which has been reconstructed into a new story without removing its core essence the love between parent and child. In the narrative concept, four characters from the Timun Mas folktale are reimagined with new roles in the science fiction genre.

The main character, Moona (inspired by Timun Mas), is a special agent sent by Commander Buto Ijo, leader of the Soma nation, to retrieve a sacred artifact seized by the Bhumi nation 60 years ago. Two characters from the Bhumi nation are inspired by Mbok Rondo (depicted as a village doctor / *Ibu Mantri*) and the Hermit (depicted as Bhumi's military leader / *Senopati*).

This method of representation is influenced by Sweta Kartika's approach in *H2O Reborn*, which adapts characters from the Ramayana into a science fiction setting. The story is set against the backdrop of conflict between the Soma (Moon) and Bhumi (Earth) nations. Initially, Soma assisted Bhumi in overcoming a food crisis using their advanced technology. However, Bhumi grew greedy and seized the sacred artifact the source of Soma's power triggering a war that ended with Soma's exile into space.

Sixty years later, the Soma nation rises again under Commander Buto Ijo and forms a special forces unit. Moona is assigned to infiltrate Bhumi's military headquarters to reclaim the artifact, but her mission fails and she is injured. She is rescued by a doctor from Bhumi, an encounter that becomes the starting point for revealing her true purpose. Additional narrative inspirations beyond *H2O Reborn* include *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (futuristic mythology and human-alien conflict), *Maquia: When the Promised Flower Blooms* (themes of mother-child love across time), and *Dragon Ball* (diverse worldbuilding, technology, and the spirit of perseverance).

2) Visual Concept

In comic illustration, visual styles vary widely from realistic to semi-realistic and cartoony, often shaped by cultural context and audience preferences (Yonkie & Ujianto, 2017). Western comics generally adopt a realistic approach, as seen in *Batman* and *Superman*, with detailed anatomy and environments. European comics lean toward a cartoony style rooted in 19th-century satirical caricatures by Rodolphe Töpffer, exemplified by Hergé's *Tintin*, which combines realistic body proportions with simplified facial features. Meanwhile, Japanese manga, pioneered by Osamu Tezuka after World War II, is characterized by large expressive eyes that convey youthfulness and emotion, a style that has since become a defining hallmark of modern manga.

In developing the visual style for *MOONA*, the author refined a personal illustration style shaped by a long journey of experimentation and inspiration from several artists, including ChiaYeeeE, Posuka Demizu, Eiichiro Oda, and Yukinobu Tatsu. ChiaYeeeE and Posuka Demizu serve as references for dynamic perspective techniques and agile character forms, while Oda inspires the creation of cartoon-like characters with extreme and expressive shape variations. Yukinobu Tatsu influences the use of textures, line work, and simple yet effective character designs for action scenes. The combination of these influences results in a manga style with a personal touch, tailored to the science fiction theme and the worldbuilding specifically designed for this comic.



Figure 4. Character design of *MOONA* inspired by the Timun Mas folktale (Source: Author's documentation, 2025)

The image above presents the visualized character designs created by the author. The four characters depicted are key figures who play significant roles in the *MOONA* storyline. Moona, the main protagonist, is portrayed as a special agent who infiltrates the Bhumi military headquarters. While she resembles the Bhumi people, Moona has pointed ears and green hair. She wears a special combat suit inspired by galaxy-themed troops, bearing the signature star emblem of the Soma nation, and wields a weapon symbolizing her role as a soldier under Commander Buto Ijo.

Buto Ijo, in this story, is reimagined as the commander and leader of the Soma nation. His visual identity includes a horned helmet that conceals his true face, along with robes and attire signifying his high-ranking status in Soma, marked by the star emblem on his chest. His design draws heavily from gladiator aesthetics, symbolizing a heroic yet brutal persona.

From the Bhumi side, the military leader known as Senopati is inspired by the Hermit from the Timun Mas tale. His appearance blends the traditional attire of the Keraton Surakarta palace

guards with futuristic elements. A distinctive *batik jarik* cloth with a *parang* motif serves as his waistband, symbolizing status and bravery in traditional Javanese military culture.

The final key figure is *Ibu Mantri*, who becomes a mother figure to Moona. She is portrayed as a village doctor wearing a lab coat paired with a *jarik* featuring the *kawung* motif, which represents wisdom and justice. This method of characterization, with its representation of traditional figures, was inspired by Sweta Kartika's approach in *H2O Reborn*, where characters from the Ramayana are reimagined. For instance, Ravana is depicted as Rahwana, the ruler of Alengka; Rama Wijaya refers to Sri Rama; Sita represents Dewi Sinta; and even a directly named character, Hanoman, is transformed into Hanoman 2.0, a hybrid cyborg warrior (Bajraghosa, 2018).

As a result of this creative process, the *MOONA* science fiction comic was completed. The first volume consists of 26 pages, including the front and back covers, in A4 size at 350 dpi (267 mm × 364 mm), with a left-to-right reading orientation.



Figure 5. The *MOONA* science fiction comic inspired by the Timun Mas folktale (Source: Author's documentation, 2025)

3) Visual and Narrative Aspects

The story begins on Page 1, set aboard Moona's spacecraft, accompanied by narration stating that the events take place 60 years after the Bhumi tragedy, during Moona's mission to reclaim the truth long stolen from the Soma nation. On Page 2, Panel 1 shows Moona receiving direct orders from Commander Buto Ijo to complete her mission at all costs, affirming her readiness as part of special unit K-05. In Panel 2, she listens intently as the Commander stresses the importance of retrieving the artifact for the Soma nation. Panel 3 displays the Commander on a communication screen, commanding retribution for Bhumi's actions. Panel 4 depicts Moona's spacecraft breaking through the atmosphere toward Earth.

Page 3 transitions into a flashback. Panel 1 shows Bhumi farmers heading to the fields, narrated with an explanation of the ongoing food crisis. Panel 2 depicts a farmer lamenting his dried up fields, while narration mentions Commander Buto Ijo's attention to Bhumi's plight. Panel 3 features the Commander's space fleet observing Bhumi, and Panel 4 shows Bhumi representatives receiving food and technology aid from Soma.

On Page 4, Panel 1 presents a peaceful rural landscape, narrated as a once-simple civilization that quickly transforms (Panel 2) into an advanced society thanks to Soma's intervention. Panel 3 concludes with the Bhumi people warmly welcoming the Soma nation. However, Page 5 reveals the shift toward greed: Panel 1 depicts Bhumi citizens whispering their desire for Soma's technology; Panel 2 shows Bhumi officials planning to seize the sacred artifact; Panel 3 marks the outbreak of war.

Page 6 illustrates Bhumi's leader wielding the artifact as a weapon to drive Soma out, with narration confirming their full control over it. The story jumps to Page 7, where Moona successfully infiltrates the Bhumi military base, but the narration explains that she is soon detected and trapped in a corridor.

Page 8 portrays a gunfight: Panel 1 shows Moona being ordered to surrender by Bhumi soldiers; Panel 2 has her hiding while reporting the mission failure; Panels 3–4 depict her counterattack, causing an explosion. Page 9 continues the siege, with Moona requesting mission delay (Panel 3) before a pistol is held to her head in Panel 4.

On Page 10, the assailant is revealed to be the Senopati, who claims to have encountered “her” five times before. Panels 3–4 suggest that Moona always carries the same mission but remains unaware of the true history. Page 11 shows Moona rejecting this claim (Panels 1–2), accusing Bhumi of betrayal, and attacking the Senopati (Panels 3–5) before escaping.

Page 12 depicts her escape: Panels 1–3 show Moona using a grappling hook to leap across rooftops, while Panels 4–6 show her activating her spacecraft to flee—realizing Bhumi's power exceeds her expectations. On Page 13, the Senopati orders anti-aircraft artillery (Panels 1–2), targeting Moona's ship (Panels 3–5) until it is finally hit (Panel 6–7). Page 14 captures the explosion (Panel 1), Moona's fall with the debris (Panel 2), and her submersion in water (Panel 3).

Page 15 opens with Moona lying gravely injured in bed, treated by an elderly woman from Bhumi—*Ibu Mantri*. Page 16 shows Moona waking (Panel 1), noticing Ibu Mantri carrying food (Panel 2), reacting with surprise (Panel 3), and standing unsteadily in suspicion (Panels 4–6). Page 17 depicts Moona threatening Ibu Mantri with a knife (Panel 1) before hearing a knock at the door (Panels 2–3). Ibu Mantri urges her to remain silent (Panel 4), but Moona insists she send the visitors away (Panels 5–6).

Page 18 reveals two Bhumi soldiers at the door (Panels 1–2), asking about Moona's whereabouts. Ibu Mantri denies knowing her (Panel 3), even when shown a wanted poster (Panels 4–6). Page 19 shows Ibu Mantri returning to the room (Panel 1), prompting Moona to ask why she offered help (Panels 2–3), but Ibu Mantri only tells her to rest (Panels 4–5).

On Page 20, the Senopati receives a soldier's report (Panels 1–2) suggesting Moona may be hiding at Ibu Mantri's home. He decides to monitor from afar (Panels 3–5). Finally, Page 21—set a few days later—shows Moona beginning to trust Ibu Mantri and wearing Bhumi clothes as a disguise (Panels 3–4). The page closes as Ibu Mantri invites her to join the village vegetable harvest (Panel 5), hinting at a new chapter in their relationship.

3. Audience Reception

The publication of the MOONA comic through social media opens a space for audience reception that can be analyzed using reception theory. According to Hall (Amelia et al., 2022.) audiences are not passive but actively decode the messages presented to them. Responses in the form of comments and digital interactions indicate that, despite the science fiction aesthetic, some readers are still able to grasp the core moral values of the Timun Mas tale, namely parental love and the courage to uphold truth. This aligns with Hutcheon (Kinney, 2013) in view that adaptation is a legitimate form of reinterpretation as long as the essence of the story remains intact. However, challenges arise when traditional values encounter futuristic aesthetics, which can lead to cultural dissonance. Within the framework of cultural hybridity Bhabha (Faisal et al., n.d.), the convergence of Javanese folklore and the science fiction genre can generate innovation while also posing the risk of commodification. Therefore, the success of adaptation is determined not only by its aesthetic qualities but also by the extent to which the new medium can preserve the substance of traditional values amidst the expectations of a global audience.

CONCLUSION

The creation of the MOONA science fiction comic shows that the Timun Mas folktale can be successfully adapted into modern creative works without losing its cultural values. Through literature study, visual design, and narrative development, the story was reconstructed into a futuristic setting that blends traditional elements with science fiction. This adaptation not only preserves cultural

heritage but also aligns with the growth of today's creative industries, offering readers moral messages, technological imagination, and reflections on universal human values.

The work also highlights that folklore can be revitalized through innovative media, bridging tradition with modern audiences and contributing to the local creative industry. Its main limitation lies in being confined to a single 26-page volume, which restricts deeper worldbuilding and character development. Future research could expand the scope by exploring longer narratives, adapting other folklore traditions, and experimenting with multimedia platforms such as animation or interactive webtoons. In this way, folklore adaptation can continue to grow as a sustainable method of cultural preservation and innovation.

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