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STORYTELLING

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George Pérez and more!

ALL-NEW
MATERIAL BY
GARY FRANK,
TERRY DODSON,
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AND MORE!

INTRODUCTION BY **MICHAEL TURNER**





HOW TO DRAW

THE BEST OF
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TRAINING**
STORYTELLING

WIZARD ENTERTAINMENT:

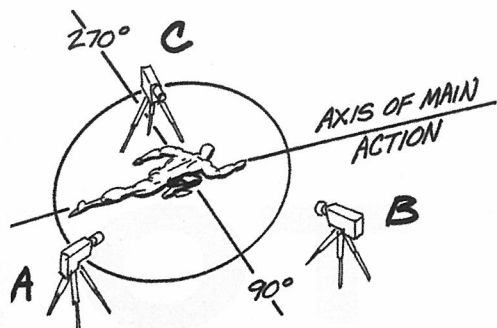
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MICHAEL TURNER

Imagine you are a director, with an unlimited budget, with any imaginable actor or actress responding to your every emotional directive, with any special effect you desire at your fingertips, with thousands of extras you can use anytime you want, with any set location of your choice on Earth—or possibly even a space station—or maybe another planet or dimension altogether. Imagine all these things within your grasp at any time.

There's only one small hiccup: You have to physically draw all these things...

This is why I love comics! Every artist sitting down to draw a single page of a comic book owns all these very assets. With all these tools at your disposal, at any given moment, the fundamental skill that

elements they incorporate in any given story. There are no clear-cut rules for good storytelling—another reason why I love the comic medium! But there are different aspects to consider when putting the pencil to the page. Effective camera angles, scenes framed by dark silhouettes of mysterious characters, static panels with one element changing...these are just a few of the many tools an artist can use to depict power, mood and timing of any given scene.

A great storyteller will also go beyond the shapes and figures within the panel, and use the panels themselves to deliver the required emotion of any given story. They can use panel layout and composition that is designed to subconsciously lead your eye

Storytelling turns the photographer into the director. It is the responsibility of the comic book artist to 'direct' the various elements in any given story.



separates the comic master from the apprentice is storytelling ability.

You may be able to draw all the aforementioned elements in many individual instances, but the key to great storytelling is to put them all together in a sequence that makes sense to the reader, and fully engulfs them in the tale you're attempting to deliver.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. But what if you have to turn a thousand words into a series of pictures that leads the reader on an adventure involving a heroine with wings; a young, highly flammable boy; a sarcastic arena gladiator being hunted by a megalomaniacal paraplegic sorcerer and a huge mechanized dragon with...well, you get the picture. In *Soulfire*, I incorporate magic, technology and dramatic elements together to create an imaginary universe. Imagination stems from imagery. Yet images with no direction or focus do not lead to good storytelling. No, excellent comic book stories come from the artist's proficiency in delivering a great narrative through their work.

Storytelling turns the photographer into the director. It is the responsibility of the comic book artist to "direct," so to speak, the various

through the page, while also using the size of the panels to make you go faster or slower through the story, depending on how they feel like pacing the sequence. A comic artist can use colors to make you notice a particular item or event, while hiding other key elements in shadow. They can toy with your emotions with long, isolated shots of a character utterly alone, or the heroic upshot of a protagonist who's just saved the day. They use all of these techniques deliberately to get the desired response from the reader.

At the end of the day, the various methods artists can use are limitless depending on their imagination, but how these skills are practiced on the actual page—using their own distinctive storytelling process—is what will ultimately separate that previously mentioned master from the apprentice.

Michael Turner
March 2006

If you've fallen in love with Aspen from Fathom or lost yourself in the world of Soulfire, you've experienced superstar artist Michael Turner's stunning storytelling firsthand.





CHAPTER ONE: PAGE DESIGN

- FUNDAMENTALS OF STORYTELLING
- PANEL SEQUENCE
- LAYING OUT A PAGE
 - PANEL LAYOUT
- ADVANCED LAYOUT
 - SPLASH PAGES
- EVOLUTION OF A PAGE

YOU THINK I'M BEAUTIFUL?

FUNDAMENTALS OF STORYTELLING

BY JOE KUBERT

Hi, I'm Joe Kubert (or a reasonably caricatured facsimile), and this is the first in a series of storytelling articles that I and other artists have been asked to do for you, the *Wizard* readers. Turning text into pictures may sound like an easy procedure, but in fact, it is a difficult task. Sometimes, even daunting. Nevertheless, it's the primary job of the professional cartoonist. Telling a

story in picture form with clarity, impact, drama, humor and with a smooth flow of continuity is really what cartooning is all about.

Pretty pictures are nice to look at. Eye candy. But if the pictures are complicated and difficult to discern, the story becomes elusive. And if the story is hard to read, the cartoonist is not doing his job.

SCRIPT

Panel One-

Description: Big panel. Long shot. A caveman enters a wild looking area filled with huge boulders and marshy depressions.

Man (thought): I HAVE NEVER SEEN THIS PLACE BEFORE.

Panel Two-

Description: He's suddenly aware of a noise—a scream. He turns to look in the direction of the sound.

Panel Three-

Description: From behind a big rock, a woman comes running towards him. She is wild with fear, screaming.

Woman: HELP... HELP ME P-PLEASE!

Panel Four-

Description: A giant robotic T. Rex monster charges into the scene.

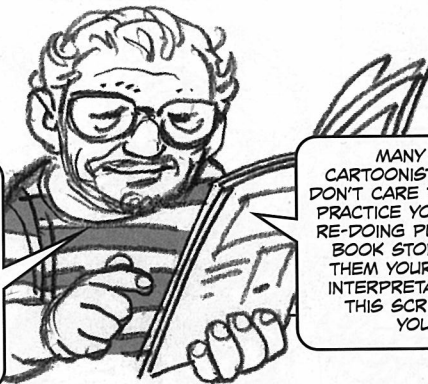
Panel Five-

Description: Close-up of T. Rex's head roaring/snarling.

EVERY COMIC BOOK STRIP **STARTS** WITH A **STORY** FIRST. THE **STORY** (OR **SCRIPT**) MAY BE SUPPLIED BY A WRITER, OR THE ARTIST MAY WRITE HIS OWN **STORY**. IN EITHER CASE, **FIRST** COMES THE **STORY**.

THIS IS WHAT A PROFESSIONAL **SCRIPT** LOOKS LIKE. THE **FIRST** STEP IN THE **PROCESS** OF **CONVERTING** WORDS INTO **PICTURES** IS TO **READ** THE **SCRIPT** **CAREFULLY**.

IF YOU DECIDE TO WRITE YOUR OWN **SCRIPT**, DO **NOT** ATTEMPT TO WRITE AND DRAW AT THE SAME TIME. CONCENTRATE ON YOUR **WRITING** FIRST. FINISH THE **WRITING** BEFORE YOU START TO **DRAW**.



MANY ASPIRING **CARTOONISTS** (AND **PROS**) DON'T CARE TO **WRITE**. IF **SO**, PRACTICE YOUR **DRAWING** BY **RE-DOING** PUBLISHED **COMIC** **BOOK** **STORIES** AND GIVE THEM YOUR OWN **GRAPHIC** **INTERPRETATION**. **SO**, USE THIS **SCRIPT** OR **WRITE** YOUR OWN.



FUNDAMENTALS OF STORYTELLING

THUMBNAILS

"Thumbnails" describes the size of the initial sketches done in preparation to doing the full-sized finished drawings. This is where you start to transform words into thoughts and ideas, resulting in story graphics.

NO, I DON'T MEAN THESE.



DOING SMALL DRAWINGS FIRST IS HELPFUL IN VISUALIZING A CONCEPT MORE EASILY.

DON'T ACCEPT THE FIRST THUMB-NAIL YOU DO. TRY SOME MORE.

YOU MAY ACTUALLY DECIDE TO GO WITH YOUR FIRST THUMB-NAIL, BUT YOU WILL HAVE HAD THE ADVANTAGE OF COMPARING IT WITH OTHER POSSIBILITIES AND SELECTING GOOD PARTS FROM SEVERAL THUMBNAILS.



ROUGHS

I SUGGEST A 3H LEAD FOR ROUGHS. THIS GRAPHITE IS ON THE HARD SIDE, AND SHOULD BE USED WITH A LIGHT HAND. OTHERWISE, THE LEAD WILL TEND TO DIG INTO YOUR PAPER AND BECOME DIFFICULT TO ERASE.

FINISHED PENCILS CAN BE DONE WITH A SLIGHTLY SOFTER LEAD; 2H. THIS WILL HELP DISTINGUISH BETWEEN YOUR ROUGHS AND YOUR FINISHING DETAILS.

Start by doing your first drawings roughly. Leave out details. I know you're anxious to do some real finished drawing, but it's too soon. You don't want to put a lot of effort into early drawings that you may want to change or even eliminate. So do your initial sketches roughly, but with enough clarity to recognize what you meant when you finish them later on.

INCLUDE BALLOONS

Text is an integral part of designing a comic book page. Balloons and captions *must* be incorporated in the initial layouts, not as an afterthought. It makes *little sense* to plan a panel composition and then *cover* half of the illustration with a word balloon or sound effect.

THE LETTERING NEED NOT BE DONE IN DETAIL, BUT MERELY INDICATED ROUGHLY, SO THAT YOU KNOW THE APPROXIMATE SPACE THE TEXT WILL COVER.

AGAIN, DON'T ATTEMPT TO FINISH THESE DRAWINGS WITH A GREAT DEAL OF DETAIL. JUST HAVE FUN.

MAKE SOME ROUGH SKETCHES OF THE CHARACTERS YOU INTEND TO USE IN YOUR STORY.

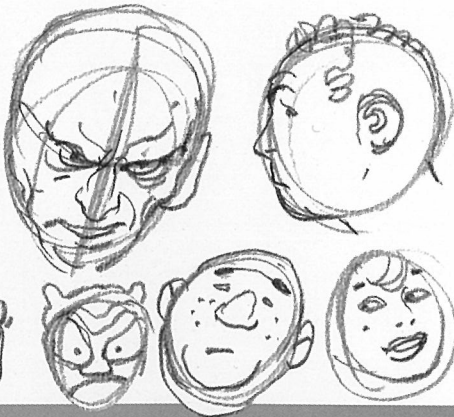


FIGURE A

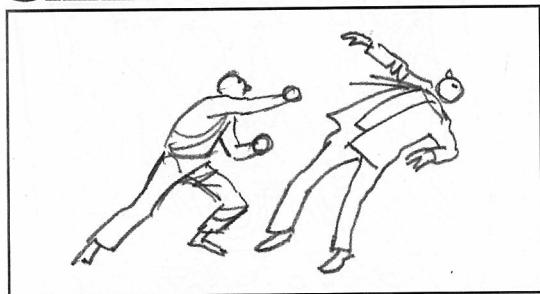


A comic book page must have a smooth transition from panel to panel. As cartoonists, we attempt to give the impression of movement despite the fact that we draw "still" pictures. To achieve the impression of movement, we must plan our panels with enough graphic information for the reader to connect the in-between panels in their mind's eye. Anything that disrupts the flow (like too great a jump between panels, or not enough graphic information) disrupts the story's flow for the reader (Figure A). A disruptive flow stops the movement.



Variations of sizes of objects and figures are extremely important in creating movement.

SIZE VARIATIONS



A series of panels containing figures of similar size will tend to stultify or deaden movement and action. It's like making a movie with a stationary camera. Little change in size means less movement and truncated action.

VARIED SIZES OF OBJECTS AND FIGURES CREATE INTERESTING COMPOSITIONS.

DEPTH AND SPACE ARE ENHANCED WITH VARIED SIZES. PANEL COMPOSITIONS SHOULD INVITE THE READER TO STEP INTO THE STORY, TO BECOME PART OF THE ACTION.

IT'S AN EFFECT GREAT FILM MAKERS HAVE ACHIEVED.

IT'S WHAT GOOD CARTOONISTS CONSTANTLY TRY TO DO.

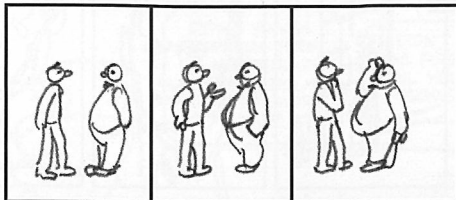


FUNDAMENTALS OF STORYTELLING

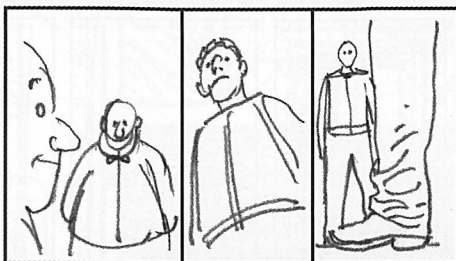
ANGLES

FOR ADDED INTEREST TO PANEL ILLUSTRATION, THE CARTOONIST MUST UTILIZE **ANGLES** AND **PERSPECTIVE** INTO COMPOSITIONS.

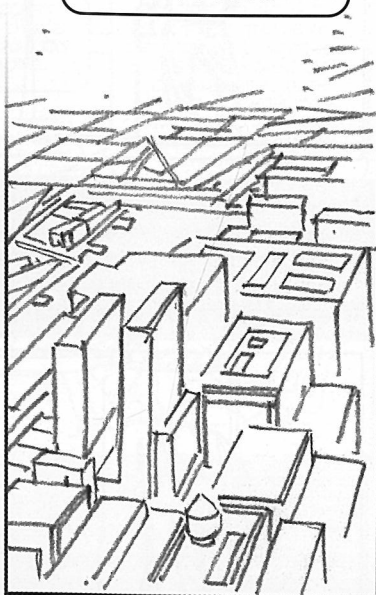
Straight-on drawings with little change of shapes or angles may be used at times, but will become boring if used too often.



Acute angles and extreme perspectives arouse the readers' imagination, placing him into otherwise unattainable positions and places. Especially when the drawing is done effectively.



"AN OVERHEAD LONGSHOT OF A CITYSCAPE CAN GENERATE A SENSE OF HEIGHT AND SPACE; MAKE THE READER FEEL HE IS ACTUALLY FLYING. IT PULLS THE READER INTO THE STORY."



PAGE DESIGN

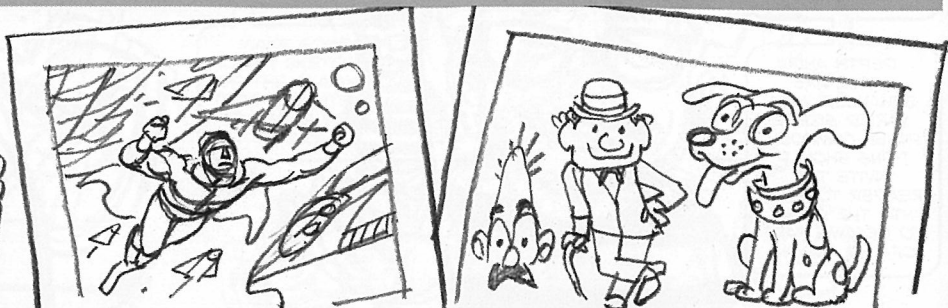
THE OVERALL DESIGN OF THE PAGE IS THE FIRST THING THAT CATCHES THE EYE AND INTEREST OF THE READER.



If the design aspect makes it difficult for the reader to focus on the story intent, the artist has failed in his effort to communicate, and **communication** is the **name** of the **game**.

All styles are subject to the aforementioned points. Acceptability of style is based on **quality**. The simplest cartoon style can qualify as a good form with which to tell a story. Good **simple** drawings are often more **difficult** to achieve than the more complex realistic illustrations. Yes, often **less** is **more**.

BUT, CARE MUST BE TAKEN THAT **DESIGN** DOES NOT DEDUCT FROM **LEGIBILITY**.



USE A RULER

Very often, the aspiring cartoonist will rush work in anticipation of seeing the finished drawing. You do *yourself a disservice* if you don't take time with your thumbnails, roughs, sketching and character development. If you rush it, your work may become sloppy or lack proper finish and details. It's a bad habit to fall into and can be costly in terms of personal gratification and ability to get jobs.

RULE YOUR BORDERS. *DON'T* DO THEM FREEHAND. MAKE SURE THE PANELS ARE SQUARE (IF THAT'S YOUR INTENT) AND THE BORDERS ARE FINISHED.

USE *DOUBLE LINES* FOR CLEAR SEPARATION. SLOPPY BORDERS WILL DEDUCT FROM YOUR DRAWING'S QUALITY.



A GOOD ERASER

A clean page signifies that the artist cares about his work. Smears and stains give the impression that he doesn't. If you don't press too hard with your pencil, your eraser will do a good job of cleaning.



BLUE PENCIL?

Years ago, non-reproducing blue pencils were used by many pros as a time-saving device. Since the blue lines did not photograph in the engraving process, it was unnecessary to erase the pencils (if only blue was used). Not having to erase after inking saved time, especially if the artist had 20 or 30 pages to erase.

Today, some artists use the blue pencil to do their preliminary rough layouts. They will then finish with black graphite. There are positives and negatives in this procedure. After inking, your drawings need to be erased. The ink tends to slide off the blue lines when the pencils are erased. Also, the originals don't look as sharp or as clean with the inclusion of the blue lines.



THIS *BASIC TRAINING* ARTICLE IS AN ACCUMULATION OF EXPERIENCE I'VE GATHERED OVER THE DECADES AS A PROFESSIONAL CARTOONIST. THEY WORK FOR *ME*... AND THEY'LL WORK FOR YOU.



Comics legend Joe Kubert is the founder of the Joe Kubert School of Cartooning and Graphic Art. For more information, head over to www.kubertworld.com. Also, check out his series *The Prophecy* from DC.



PANEL SEQUENCE

BY MIKE WIERINGO

When I was a kid, one of the things that attracted me to comic books—besides the incredible artwork and compelling, epic stories—was the way each artist had his own way of conveying the necessary information needed to

tell the story. Get it? Story-telling. An artist's storytelling style can be as unique as a fingerprint. An artist's choice of how to present the story is one of comics' most important aspects. Let's talk about some things to keep in mind when telling your stories...



IT'S ABOUT TIME...

One of the many storytelling tools a comic book artist has is the opportunity to pace a story any way he chooses. Stretching or compressing a moment or scene is something an artist can do for immediate impact, to manipulate the way a page flows for his reader. This is unique to the comic book. You don't need to rewind a tape or hit a reset button on a video game; all a reader has to do is flick his eyes back to the beginning of a scene to experience it all over again.

Here, I've taken a simple action: a fella has a ball fall on his head unexpectedly. It's a simple scene to execute, but how it's presented can make that simple scene a bit more complex. The panel where the ball actually hits this poor schnook is the crux of the scene. But adding a couple of "beats" (like "heartbeats") before and after panel three stretches out the moment, adding a bit of humor (**Figure A**). A much more abbreviated version (**Figure B**) gets the same info across, it just takes less time to tell.



FIGURE A



FIGURE B

SHOWWHAT?

Every artist has his own way of interpreting a scene. Suppose we have a plot where the writer instructs the following: "Artist, give us a visual of our hero, the Owl, grimly swinging out off a roof over the city. Do this however you like—just establish that he's in the city, it's night, and he's just swung off the roof."

Now, some artists would take this opportunity to use the page for a big, dramatic splash, as I've done here in the example to the left. It gets across everything the writer asked for, all in one big shot. But there are a lot of other ways to tell this story.

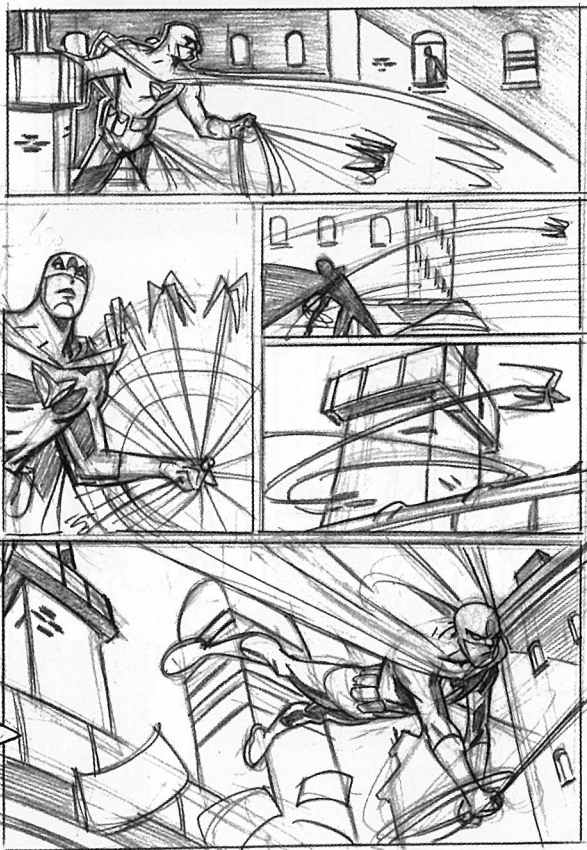
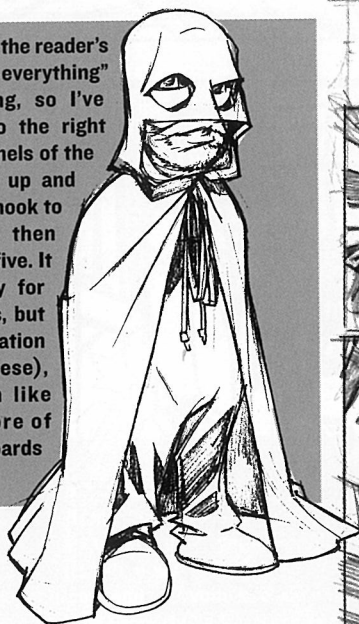


PRO TIPS

HIT THE BOOKS

"You should definitely take advantage of your local library. Whenever I'm stuck for a period or style, whether it's castles, English taverns or whatever, I just look up what I need and familiarize myself with different architectural whatnots." —Gerhard, *Cerebus*

I'm from the "let's hold the reader's hand and show 'em everything" school of storytelling, so I've added the verison to the right where we see four panels of the Owl actually winding up and tossing his grapple hook to another roof and then swinging off in panel five. It isn't really necessary for the reader to see this, but I'm a big fan of animation (Disney and Japanese), and a presentation like this reminds me more of animation or storyboards for a movie.



PANEL SEQUENCE

BLOW-BY-BLOW

Sometimes, however, what you don't show can be more effective, or have more impact, than actually showing an action. This allows readers to achieve "closure." In other words, it let's them fill in the information with their own minds. Sometimes leaving more to the imagination can be a good thing.

In the illustration to the right a hard-boiled detective-type gives some big thug a knuckle sandwich. You can see the thug recoil from the punch—you can even make out a little spit or blood. Looks like it hurts!



OUTOFSIGHT

But what if we don't show the impact? Here you can see our detective throwing his punch, but we don't really see its effect beyond seeing the thug's hand and some stars as he gets his clock cleaned. This lets us fill in the info. For all we know, his nose is spewin' blood, his eyeballs are poppin' outta their sockets, his head's comin' completely off...well, you get the idea.

In the example below, we even apply a little of the pacing exercise—stretching the moment, while at the same time leaving the violence largely unseen. The two lugs come at each other—POW!—and the thug's flat on his back! OI! "Mike Hammer" there's got quite a punch!



KEEPUP THE PACE

Well, unfortunately, it looks like I'm out of space. As far as storytelling goes, this is just a microscopic fraction of what you should keep in mind. There's a reason Will Eisner wrote two books on the subject! Remember, build your own "language" as you learn the basics. Now, hit those drawing boards! **W**

Mike Wieringo's timeless pencils have graced the pages of Marvel's Fantastic Four and his creator-owned project, Tellos.

LAYING OUT A PAGE

BY NORM BREYFOGLE



Many people may think of laying out a comic book page as the first step in doing comics. No sir! It's actually the exact midpoint of creating comics, where the story and the art first come together on the page. A good layout artist must be both visually artistic and literate.

So, let's assume you or your brother's friends have cobbled together a script. Let's also assume you've learned to draw. From life. From your imagination. You've

learned about light and shadow, anatomy, perspective and composition. You've studied art history. Been there, done that? Whew! You're impressive! Now you're ready to mix all of that together on the page in a layout.

All you'll need for tools is white bond paper, light and dark drawing pencils (I personally use a 6H for the lighter stuff and an HB for the darker) and a non-photo blue pencil. Oh, you need an eraser too, unless, of course, you're Jack Kirby.

PRIME/CAPTAIN AMERICA

Jones/Captain Strazewski

Submitted to Macchio December 7, 1995

PAGE ONE

1. Establish Washington DC at night (Washington Monument, etc), maybe with full moon.

SCROLL CAPTION: Washington, D.C.

CAPTION: The hub of American government on at least TWO worlds in the multiverse.

2. Medium shot: a silhouetted Captain America races toward the fence around the White House in deep shadow. A beam of moonlight illuminates the star on his shield. (He's outside the fence.)

CAPTION: On THIS world, on THIS night, a HERO moves stealthily toward the White House...

3. Cap starts to vault the fence. We see him clearly now.

CAPTION: ...the greatest PATRIOT in his reality.

CAPTION: Perhaps in ANY reality.

4. As Cap is still at the top of the fence, in the act of vaulting, there's an energy shimmer around him, wiping out the background.

CAP, THOT: What--?!

5. Cap drops down to the White House lawn, looking a little baffled. He shakes his head.

CAP, THOT: Felt disoriented for a second--a little dizzy!

CAP, THOT: Can't worry about that now. And I still have a...

6. Small close-up: Cap startled by voice behind him.

OP BURST: FREEZE!

READING IS FUNDAMENTAL

Read as much as possible of the entire script or plot first. You never know when a later page or issue may contradict something you drew on an earlier page or issue. Call your writers or editors if you have any questions or if you find errors and contradictions. (For the plot and panel sequence, #1 is panel one, #2 is panel two, etc.) See the sample we'll be working on to the left.

Also, make sure to gather references. If you're drawing Washington, D.C., you'd better not try to entirely fake the White House! The children's section of your local library is a great place to find photos and drawings of all kinds from around the world. Magazines and movies are another good source.

PRO TIPS

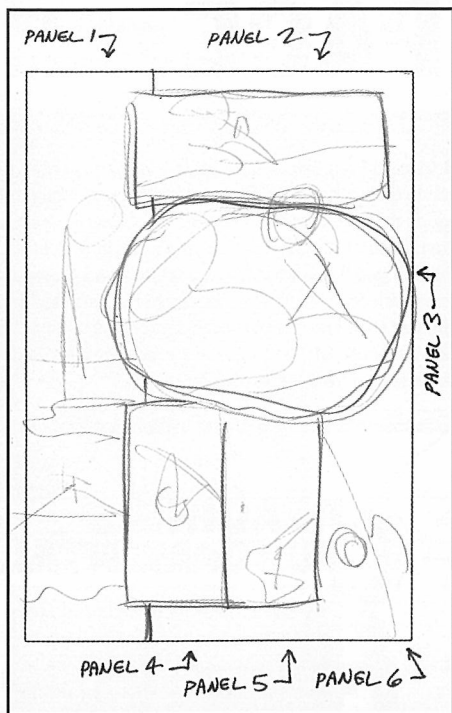
PHOTO FINISH

"Every character in *Ex Machina* is based on someone real, who I've shot with my camera. Mayor Hundred lives across the street, my wife plays Mitchell's mother in flashbacks, my son plays young Mitchell, and Kremlin lives four doors down from me. When we get together to do the shoots, I give the script out to each person, and everyone's reading their dialogue to get the facial expressions emoted properly." —Tony Harris, *Ex Machina*

THE SIZE OF IT

Decide what size you'll draw your layouts. Generally, a smaller size saves time by making it easier for corrections (rather than dirtying up the final art paper), and to see the entire page design at a glance. I draw my layouts at a size of 4" x 6" on regular white paper.

LAYING OUT A PAGE



I'M READY FOR MY CLOSE-UP, MR. SPIELBERG

Now you're ready to concentrate on an individual page. Visualize the scene or scenes in your mind's eye and choose which elements require the greatest "emphasis." Start roughing in panel borders with the 6H pencil by deciding how much of the page area you'll be devoting to each panel (see the thumbnail to the left). Generally, a larger panel indicates greater emphasis. How do you know which panels to emphasize? Well, you basically have artistic license to decide which panel should stand out the most. Panel 3, featuring Cap, was the most dramatic shot on the page, so I drew it big, making as much room as possible by shrinking the other panels (see layout below). Don't worry, you'll probably have to go back and erase a number of other panels until you're happy with the basic layout.



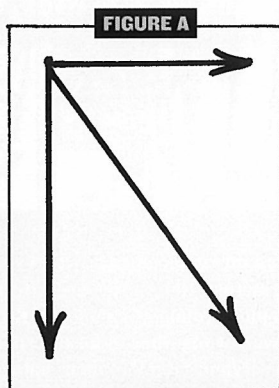
KEEP YOUR THUMBNAILS CLEAN

Here's where all those years of studying art start to come in handy. Still using the 6H pencil, begin drawing the general gestures of the objects and figures in your panels where your "visualization" of them is most clear.

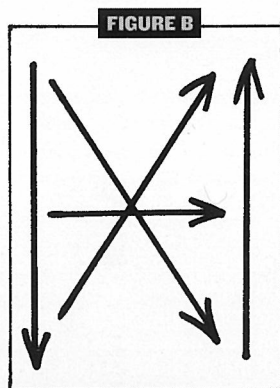
You also have to sketch in captions and word balloons in blue pencil—the blue pencil prevents them from being confused with the drawing lines. Copy (a.k.a. words) should be considered part of the page design, since it takes up space. This is why I prefer working from a full script, as opposed to the "Marvel method" of creating the plot first, then the art, then adding the dialogue last. That runs the risk of having a large word balloon—which you didn't plan for—cover up important art and destroy the overall page design.

EASYREADER

Strive for readability on a page and in individual panels. Readable storytelling is the mark of a good layout. **Figure A** shows the most readable paths for consecutive word balloons and captions. **Figure B** shows the most readable paths for movement in the art. Note that the art is more flexible in its range of readable paths than the copy (prose language is more formally structured than visual language), but a left-to-right movement is favored over right-to-left, because the story's inevitable end is always to the far "right" (i.e., the last page of the book). Plus your eye is trained to move from left to right.



PATH OF TEXT

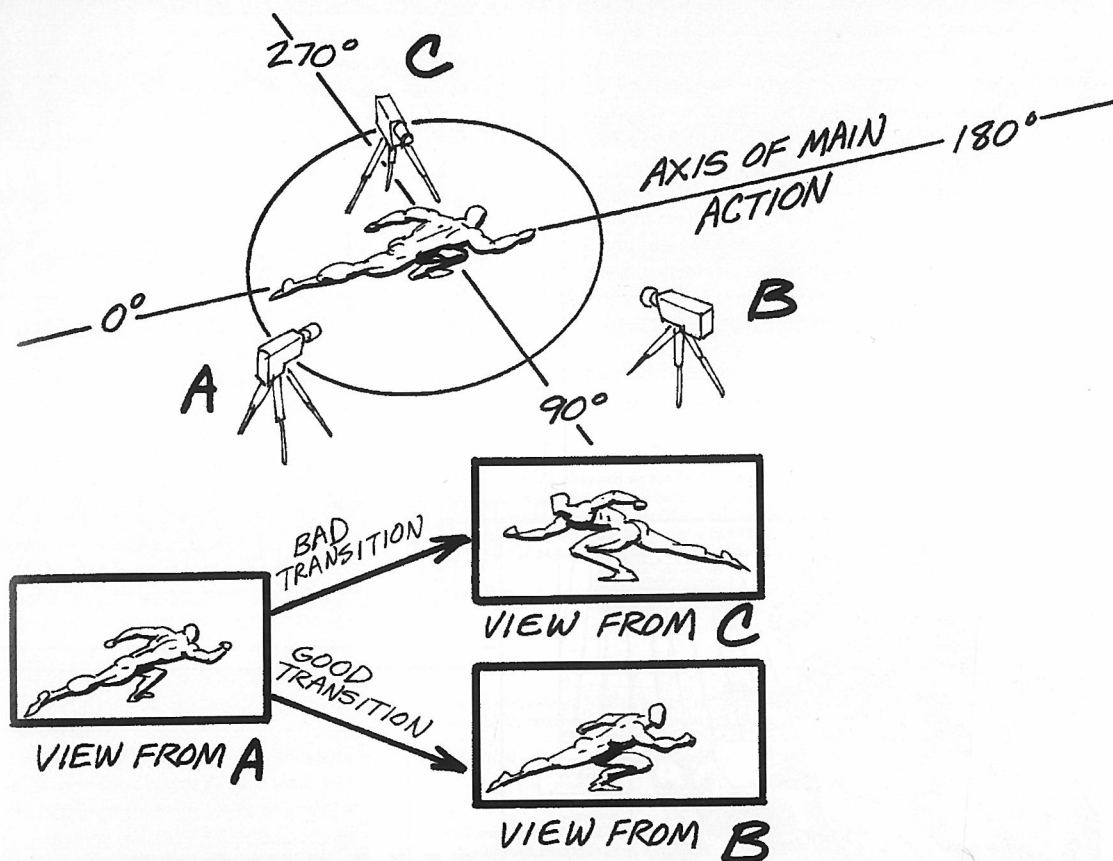


PATH OF ART

TURNAROUND, REAL CAREFUL-LIKE

Make sure you always observe the 180-degree rule, as depicted below. In transition between panels, don't cross the "axis of action" or you'll get a confusing "flip-flop" effect. It will look like all the action has suddenly reversed its direction!

For example, if you start your panel angle with Camera A (seen below), and swing counterclockwise to Camera B, you don't want to continue over to Camera C. If you cross over from Camera B to Camera C, you reverse the direction of action, halting any sort of flow in your panel layout.



STORYTELLING RULES

The trickiest part of laying out a page is actually deciding where to put everything. So, I racked my brain and came up with a number of storytelling rules (besides the readability and 180-degree ones) that I seem to follow both consciously and subconsciously.

- Establish the scene first, or at least early in the sequence, so readers have a sense of an environment and know where the action is taking place.
- Copy (lettering) is part of design and must adhere to all storytelling rules.
- With superheroes/action-adventure: Draw as "big" and as "in your face" as possible (large figures, exaggerated gestures, foreshortening, etc.). It's more eye-catching and dynamic!
- Make sure characters look and act "in character." Pay close attention to body language. A layout artist must be an actor too! (Not to mention set director, clothing designer, etc....)
- Alter the script if it improves readability. Just be sure to get approval from your editor or the writer first!
- Use the right amount of panels per scene. Don't overuse splashes or quick cuts (jumping from one scene to another, then another)—they lose their emotional effectiveness if used too often. You'll discover your own rhythm or style as you gain experience on this point.
- Use weird panel shapes only if the script specifically calls for it (or you think the story does), and it doesn't decrease readability. I took this liberty in the fourth panel because the script mentioned an energy shimmer that wiped out the background.
- Be aware of—and use appropriately—similar and different "camera angle" sequences for different psychological effects. Check out the last panel on the page, where the close-up "camera angle" focuses the attention on Cap's state of surprise. Again, you'll develop your own rhythm in time.
- Overlapping panels can create an illusion of more space on the page. In panel three, Cap's body overlaps other panels on the page, helping to "open up" the entire page.

DETAILS, DETAILS, DETAILS

Since you've just gotten the main elements roughed in, this is the best time to make any changes to your layout design, to better make it fit your knowledge (reference, experience, storytelling rules, etc.). It'll be a lot harder to change anything (and it'll cost you more time) after you've gone to the final art paper. At this stage, I usually put a lot of detail in with the darker HB pencil. Since I enlarge my thumbnails with an art projector right onto the final art paper, this saves me time and effort that'd otherwise be required after I've enlarged the picture. Most artists, however, use thumbnails merely as a guide and then actually draw their page on the final paper. Whatever you choose, tighten up your pencils and don't forget those details.



ALL Laid OUT

And there you have it. Your finished piece on 11" x 17" Bristol board paper, inked and everything. Now, there are many other ways to produce a layout that vary from my personal method. Arguably, however, most of the storytelling rules, although flexible, are pretty much universal. If you're an artist that cares about storytelling, the layout is the most important stage in drawing good comics, riding as it does on the razor's edge between writer and artist. A good layout artist is a good visualizer, a good translator of prose language into visual language, and a good bridge between the sometimes conflicting expressions of literature and art. Oh, and feel free to break most of these "rules" once you've truly understood them!

Dream big!



Norm Breyfogle has penciled everything from DC's Batman to Dark Horse's The Escapist.

PANEL LAYOUT

BY TERRY DODSON



Hello, Terry Dodson here, artist on such projects as *Wonder Woman*, *Spider-Man/Black Cat: The Evil that Men Do* and *Marvel Knights Spider-Man*. Wizard's asked me to give you a lesson on panel and page layout, so I decided to go with a character everyone's familiar with—good

ol' Spider-Man. Laying out the panels of a comic page is an art form, but as with all the topics in this book, with practice you'll get better and better.

So, here we go. These are some of the steps I take while laying out an actual comic page panel by panel, and the reasons behind the choices I ultimately have to make.

THE SCRIPT

Here's Mark Millar's full script to *Marvel Knights Spider-Man* #1, page 5. Mark does a great job of showing everything that needs to be shown. Plus, all the dialogue is there, so you can leave plenty of space for word balloons and use the balloons as design elements in the panels.

TEMPLATES

Here's the page template I've used for the *Marvel Knights Spider-Man* series (**Figure A**). It's a widescreen, cinematic type of layout I first noticed being used by Rob Haynes on *Daredevil: Ninja* and see now in Bryan Hitch's *Ultimates 2*. Mark really wanted to tell a more mature, darker type of story, and I felt this style of layout would work perfectly.

When you want to do an establishing shot, I like to use **Figure B**, where the first panel bleeds off the page. I think this makes the reader immediately notice something different is up. **Figure C** is a variation where there are two small actions that don't require a full panel, or you have a big action or a hero shot, or a combination of both. After reading through the script, I see that it's clear that four panels of action will work for this page, and so I switch to a page template something like **Figure D**.

Page Five

1
Cut back to the alley as the Goblin zips across the ground towards us here, squatting down like a quarterback on his glider and ready to take down the woozy, barely conscious Spider-Man he seems to be wiping the floor with. Spidey really looks an absolute mess by this point.

CAPTION For a fraction of a second, I wonder what NORMAL people do on Sunday mornings.

GREEN GOBLIN BIG, DEEP BREATH, PARKER...

2
Cut to outside the alley and we see the Goblin running into Spider-Man at seventy miles an hour and charging him back through the street as they both ride the Goblin Glider from the left to the right of the panel. Reaction from early-morning pedestrians and jolts from cars that suddenly stop to let them both zip past, struggling in this mid-air battle that's taking place just a couple of feet from the ground.

CAPTION Are they blinking at their radio-alarms? Are they nuzzling into their wives? Are they having their ribs broken by some old friend of the family dressed-up in a rubber costume?

3
Impact shot as they both hit a passing car and Spider-Man is yidden into the windshield, smashing it into a thousand tiny pieces.

CAPTION Or is that just ME?

4
Cut to car interior and the driver covers his face as a million little fragments of the windshield shatter in towards him. Really go for realism here. All the little details are what matter. Make this as close to the real world and a real world environment as you possibly can. Colours should be muted throughout the whole issue. Likewise, people should be dressed and look as people dress and look in real life. Keep the bystanders young and trendy. Make everyone look like students.

NO DIALOGUE

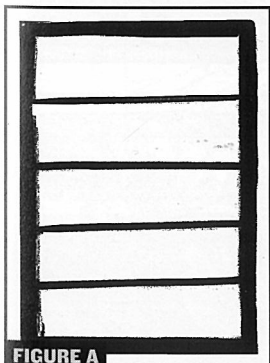


FIGURE A

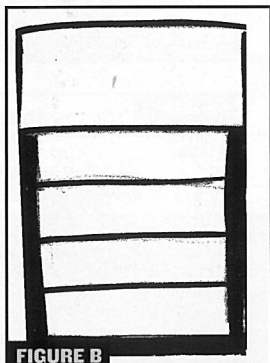


FIGURE B

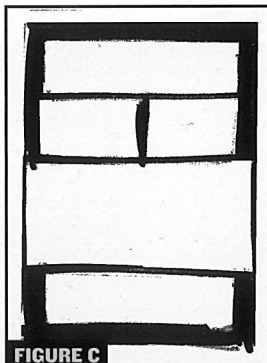


FIGURE C

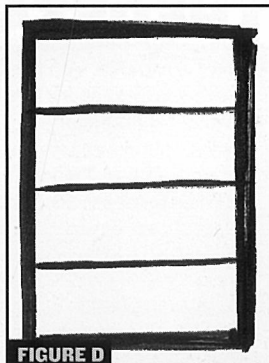
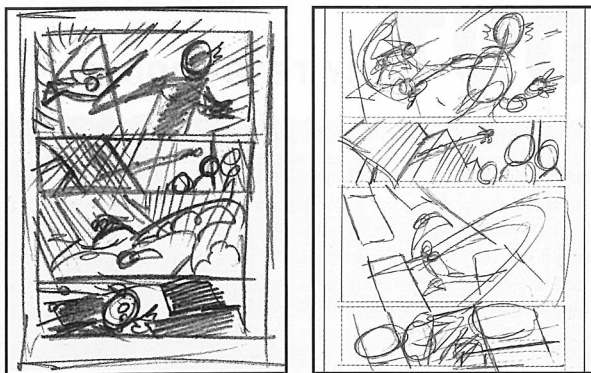


FIGURE D

PANEL LAYOUT



THE THUMBNAILS

I draw my initial thumbnails as small as possible (2" x 3") in order to be able to see the whole thing at once. Also, by doing such small pencil drawings, I don't get attached to them and am more able to alter the drawings later.

The first panel is a medium shot, shot at a slight up angle to feel the menace of the Green Goblin. I enlarge the panel size since we need to see good establishments of both main characters for the next few pages. The second panel I thin down to expand the horizontal movement of the Goblin. The third panel is enlarged because so much information needs to be conveyed, and we get a cool shot of Spidey and Goblin with different size figures to make the page look more interesting. Finally, in the last panel I went inside the car to really feel the impact of Goblin and Spidey.

PENCILING

Once I'm happy with the thumbnails, I begin roughing in the page full-size. I compare the thumbnails to the actual page, making sure everything relates, double-checking for word balloon space, etc. A lot of pencilers actually enlarge their thumbnails from the small size to full-size and then trace them off, but I really enjoy drawing full-size and trying to capture the essence of the initial little drawings.

Next, I start working on the first panel at the top of the page. You can start with the panel that excites you most; however, working top to bottom, left to right prevents smearing. I find the horizon line and all the perspective points in the panel, then draw in a perspective grid based on those points, with light blue pencil (Figure E). A lot of times the grid helps solve drawing and compositional problems by just having "something" in the panel. After that, I rough in the figure in blue pencil (Figure F) before moving on to the final pencils (Figure G). In this sequence, a lot of the figure is unseen and goes into the other panel. Go ahead and draw right into that next panel. Don't guess; just draw it now and erase it later.

FIGURE E

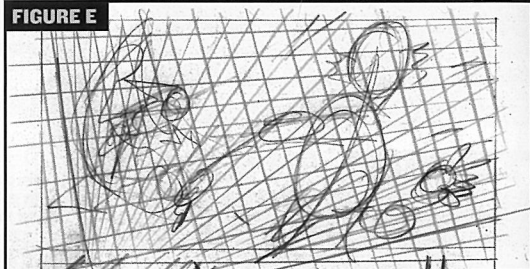


FIGURE F

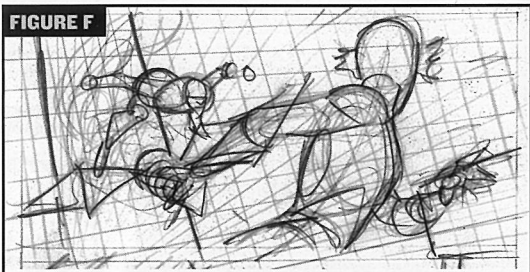


FIGURE G

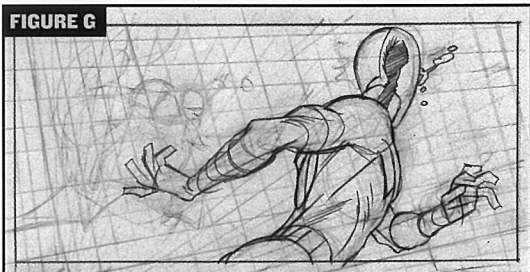
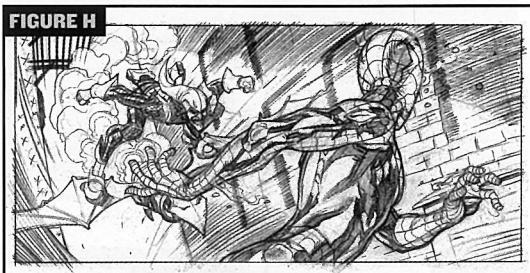


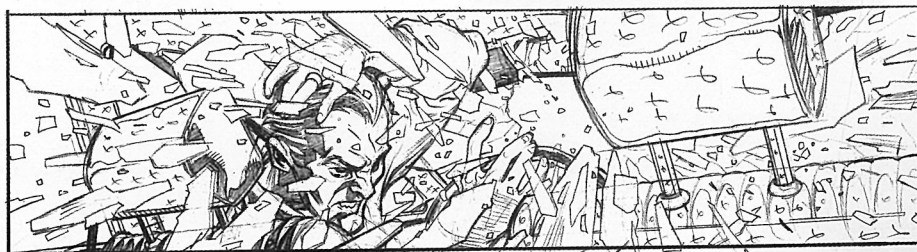
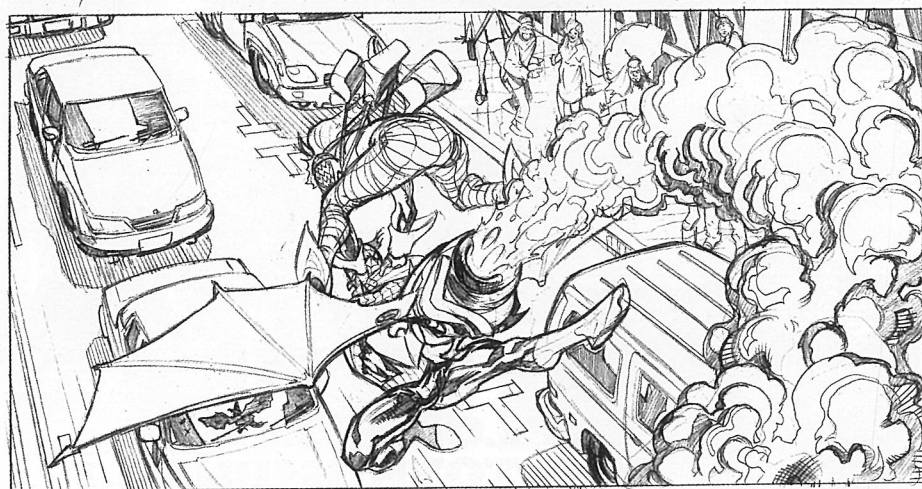
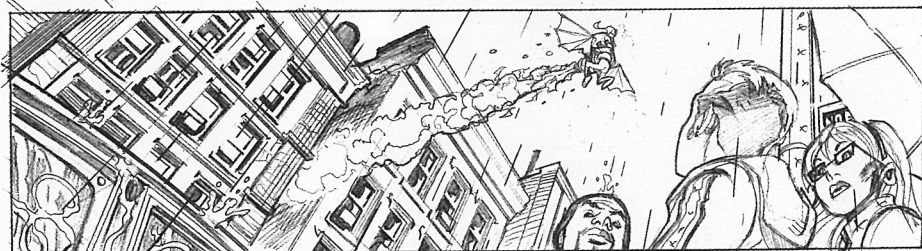
FIGURE H



THE DETAILS

After I'm satisfied with the construction of the drawing, I erase it with a gray kneaded eraser (which leaves the "ghost" of a drawing behind) and then draw in borders. The panel borders give me restricted space and limitations to draw in. I do the finer line work with an HB pencil.

I then finish penciling and add blacks and background details (Figure H). In this particular panel, I ended up changing the typical perspective I had been using and used a "curved" perspective on the background to really feel the power of the Goblin's glider. Also, I decided to use mostly speed lines to define the background instead of the actual building lines for the same purpose.



THE FINAL PAGE

After I complete the first panel, I go ahead and repeat the process for the rest of the page.

Eventually, we're left with the final pencils ready for the inks. No major changes from my thumbnails. The great thing about thumbnails is if you make all your mistakes at the small

size, you don't have to worry about it at the full size. The only thing left is the good part, the drawing!



Terry Dodson has laid the groundwork for a stellar career on titles such as Marvel Knights Spider-Man and Wonder Woman.

ADVANCED LAYOUT BY FRANK, LIEBER, MAHNKE AND MOORE

The way an artist lays out a page can make or break a story, no matter how well written it may be. So whether readers realize it or not, layout and sequencing play a huge part in shaping a comic.

Readability is key in panel layout. Breaking out of a standard nine-panel layout may help keep the layout fresh and engaging, but straying

too far from standard left-to-right, top-to-bottom layouts can confuse readers and take them out of the story. Utilizing panels in terms of focus, size and number can also add to, or detract from, storytelling.

Concepts like those are just the tip of the iceberg. With so many choices, here are a few tips from the pros to suck a reader right into your scene.

TOTHUMBNAIL...?

"I use lots and lots of tiny little thumbnails. I do them about the size of two postage stamps, two inches tall. I like to make my mistakes small, in a form where there are no consequences. I think most of the important thinking in a comic's development happens at the thumbnail stage. You want to be free to brainstorm and reject some ideas, look and see if you're doing something you've done before and erase it. If I was to just dive in on the page, the first thing I would go to would probably be something that I've done before because I know it works, and it's safe, and it's fast, and it's easy. Whereas if I'm working off of tiny little thumbnails, I can push myself harder to try something that I haven't come up with before." ■ Steve Lieber (*Detective Comics, Whiteout*)

FREEZE FRAME ▶ To figure out a complex scene of U.S. Marshal Carrie Stetko's battle against hypothermia in *Whiteout* #2, Steve Lieber maps out the action with thumbnails.



...OR NOT TOTHUMBNAIL?

"I don't [use thumbnails]. I'm pretty low-tech and use a regular H pencil. I don't use rulers or anything; I just kind of sketch it onto the board. It's all pretty fluid at that stage. I'll push panels around and mess around with panels if they don't seem to be working, but it's very seldom that you'll need to start a page [over] again, simply because you're not putting down anything hard enough that it can't be changed at that stage.

"Sometimes what I'll do is sketch out three pages at once, but I won't jump ahead in the book. The problem with that approach, as I found early on in my career, is that you tend to draw the pages that you want to draw and then you kind of have a mental block with the rest, because [on the later pages] you're doing the stuff that you put off, the stuff that you didn't really want to do." ■ Gary Frank (*Avengers, Squadron Supreme*)

◀ **SHAKE THINGS UP** Gary Frank doesn't like to use thumbnails, so well-crafted gags like Namor's rejection of Cap's membership proposal in *Avengers* #61 flow directly onto his drawing board.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

"Read the script. Basically, just give it a quick read-through on a page-by-page basis. I look to see how many panels there are per page, then I read through it again and try to work out which [panel] is going to need to be the impact shot—if there's going to be an impact shot on any of the panels—and then work around that. If there's a particular image, something that's particularly striking about that page, then I'm kind of mentally allocating extra space for that and trying to find a way to move the other, smaller panels and the less important things around."

■ Gary Frank (*Avengers, Squadron Supreme*)

DEEP IMPACT ▶ Gary Frank will shrink panels to free up more room for an impact shot, as with this Hyperion vs. Dr. Spectrum slugfest in *Supreme Power* #8.



SCENESHIFTS

"I start with what I think of as the first scene. I think of my book as having three, four, five scenes in it, like a TV show. I have a setup interior, then I have a setup outside, then I have a setup on location somewhere. Sometimes when I get halfway through the book or near the end, I start rearranging scenes, or I may take the pages and interlace them so that as you read it you're bouncing around more. It's kind of like being an editor for a TV show. Drawing those pages is just like shooting it with a camera." ■ Terry Moore (*Strangers in Paradise*)

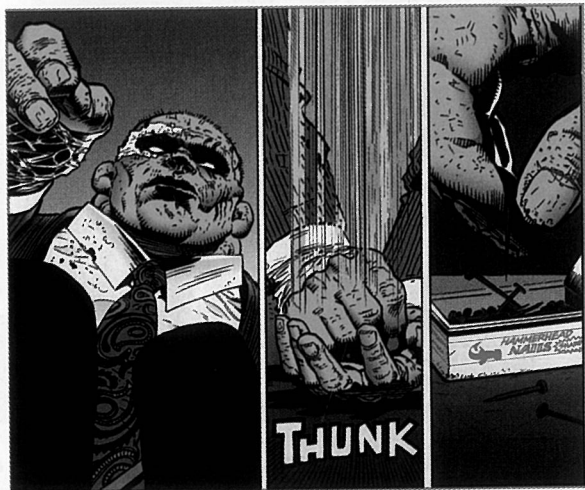
◀ **CHOP CHOP** Quick scene cuts, like the jump from Katchoo's bedroom to Francine getting on the bus in *Strangers in Paradise* #5, will speed up your pacing.



REPETITION EQUALS BORING

"I've grown to really like either doing very narrow panels or very wide panels, as a rule, in my own stuff. If I can do something that's tall and narrow, I'll do it, if it can fit enough information. But if you've got a lot of people speaking or multiple layers of conversation in a single panel, obviously that doesn't work too well. The biggest thing that I focus on is not being repetitive as you turn the page. I don't like to have the same structural layout on one page next to another." ■ Doug Mahnke (*Batman, The Mask*)

THICK OR THIN ▶ In *The Mask Strikes Back* #4, Doug Mahnke puts the masochistic hitman Walter on a diet with a series of taller, vertical panels.



ADVANCED LAYOUT

CHOOSING THE RIGHT NUMBER

"For the number of panels on a page, more often than not, that's determined in the script. I will occasionally add a panel or two if I think that a pause is good in a scene. I'll add a silent panel. If I'm working with someone like [writer] Greg Rucka, who encourages me to play with these things, I'll sit down with him [to work out certain scenes]. On one occasion, I took a page from five panels to 16 panels, and we worked that out very carefully." ■ Steve Lieber (*Detective Comics*, *Whiteout*)

◀ **PAUSE & EFFECT** Steve Lieber uses a silent panel (panel five) to delay U.S. Marshal Carrie Stetko before she enters a place she really doesn't want to be in *Whiteout* #1.



STORYTELLING

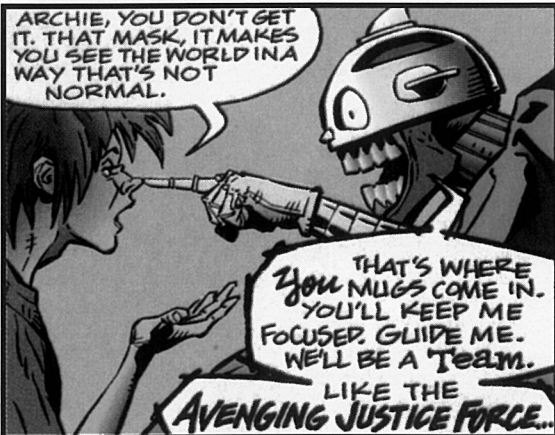
"Sometimes everything on the page is built around, say, three girls standing there talking. I'll give them a full-length panel that'll run top to bottom and build the other dialogue around that. The opposite of that would be, for instance, [in *Strangers in Paradise* #76] where one of the guys is in the middle of an argument with Katchoo and he pays her a compliment. I wanted to show several panels in a row where her whole demeanor changes. So I went to little squares and just showed her face change over three or four panels." ■ Terry Moore (*Strangers in Paradise*)

THE OL' SWITCHEROO ▶ *Strangers in Paradise*'s Katchoo receives a compliment in the middle of a co-worker's tirade, and it changes her whole perception of the conversation.

WORD BALLOONS

"I don't pencil in any balloons. [Estimating how much room you have] is really something that you gain from experience and it gets easier as you go along. Let's say you have a really wordy panel, an artist is going to shoot himself in the foot by filling it with lush and beautiful backgrounds and endless detail, only to find it all gets covered up by word balloons. I'll certainly work out [panel breakdowns] if I have a real complicated series of word balloons that have to be connected or overlap, just to make sure." ■ Doug Mahnke (*Batman*, *The Mask*)

◀ **THE LAST WORD** Doug Mahnke might only pencil in figures, as in this panel to the left from *The Mask Strikes Back*, if the panel will be overrun with word balloons.



Award-winning artists Gary Frank, Steve Lieber, Doug Mahnke and Terry Moore have probably laid out enough pages to stretch around the equator 26 times.

SPLASH PAGES

BY JIM CALAFIORE



Show 'em where ya live. When I was a kid playing baseball in little league, what we'd yell out to a teammate batting at the plate—"Show 'em where ya live." It meant, *hit a home run*. It was a challenge wrapped up in encouragement—just like each

chance to draw a splash page. Whenever I get a new plot and I'm going over the splash page, I feel like the writer is saying "*Show 'em where ya live!*" It's my opportunity to knock one out of the park.

Which is why I start to look for a place to hide when I sometimes hit a dribbler to third. Everyone does it from time to time, but it's not a good thing, so let's look at how I try to avoid that.

STEPPING UPTO THE PLATE

There's often more than one chance in an issue for a home run, but what we're examining here is the opening splash page, usually on page one. It can be the most important page, and more than just a "money shot." It sets the tone of the story. Ideally, it grabs the reader and propels him into the rest of the issue.

And, from a strictly mercenary point of view, it can determine a sale to the browsing customer. If the splash doesn't grab them, back in the rack it goes. First impressions can be everything.

Here's our scenario: An action shot. The Hulk and Daredevil are in mid-battle on a New York City street, devastation all around. The Hulk is pounding the pavement with a powerhouse blow that ol' Hornhead has just leapt clear of.

PRO TIPS

TAKE A STAND

"A person's posture can tell us his age, social status, vocation, even what he's thinking. Concentrate on the spine, shoulders and bend of the knee." —Rags Morales, *Identity Crisis*

THE SWING

My first step in working out an image is a series of small sketches called thumbnails. They're very rough—the characters barely more than stick-figures—but it's the best way to run through ideas quickly.

These first two are similar. In both I'm using the perspective lines of the building to focus the eye. **Figure A** is looking down at the combatants in a crater of destruction, while **Figure B** is at ground level looking on from one end of a trail of destruction. The perspective gives a nice feel, but both suffer from the same shortcoming. The characters are too far away from us. On a splash, unless there's a plot reason against it, I want to be close to the action.



FIGURE A

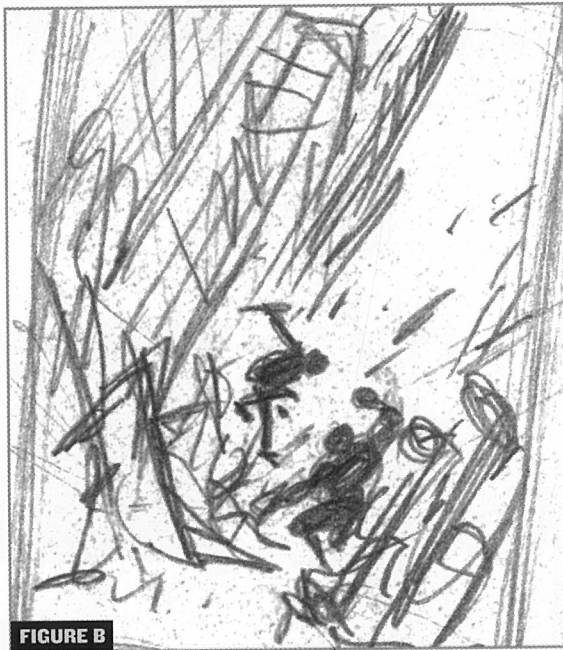


FIGURE B

SPLASHPAGES

FIGURE C



THE FOLLOW-THROUGH

The next idea, **Figure C**, is fine, but that's all it is. Everything is there (the Hulk, DD, the city in the background, etc.), but I didn't do anything interesting with it. I'll often have an "O.K." idea which I'll take a second look at, and think about rotating the camera for more interesting positions.

FIGURE D

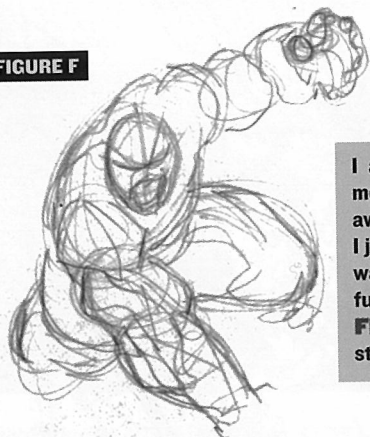


Figure D's better. Moving the camera around to behind Daredevil now has the Hulk coming more towards us, involving us in the action. The only problem here is that Daredevil isn't facing us. I want both characters facing us, so I played with the DD figure separately (**Figure E**). I used the old facing-us-but-not-facing-us dodge: Twisting the figure by turning Daredevil's torso mostly towards us, then turning his head to look back at the Hulk, keeps his face at least in profile.

FIGURE E



FIGURE F



I also wanted to tweak the Hulk a bit. His motion in the thumbnail is down and to the left, away from Daredevil. To have him going at DD, I just flopped the figure (**Figure F**). But I still wasn't happy with the pose, and pushed it further to put more oomph in the blow. Look at **Figure G**—he's really jack-hammering the street now! All of which led to the next step.



FIGURE G

STRIKEONE

Figure H is a larger, more detailed sketch, putting it all together. "But why isn't it finished?" you ask. Well, at this point I realized it wasn't working. Remember, I said that the first splash should propel the reader through the rest of the book. While I now have a more interesting angle, there just isn't enough excitement. That's the point of this process: to find what doesn't work as well as what does.

Oh well, back to the drawing board. Literally.

FIGURE H

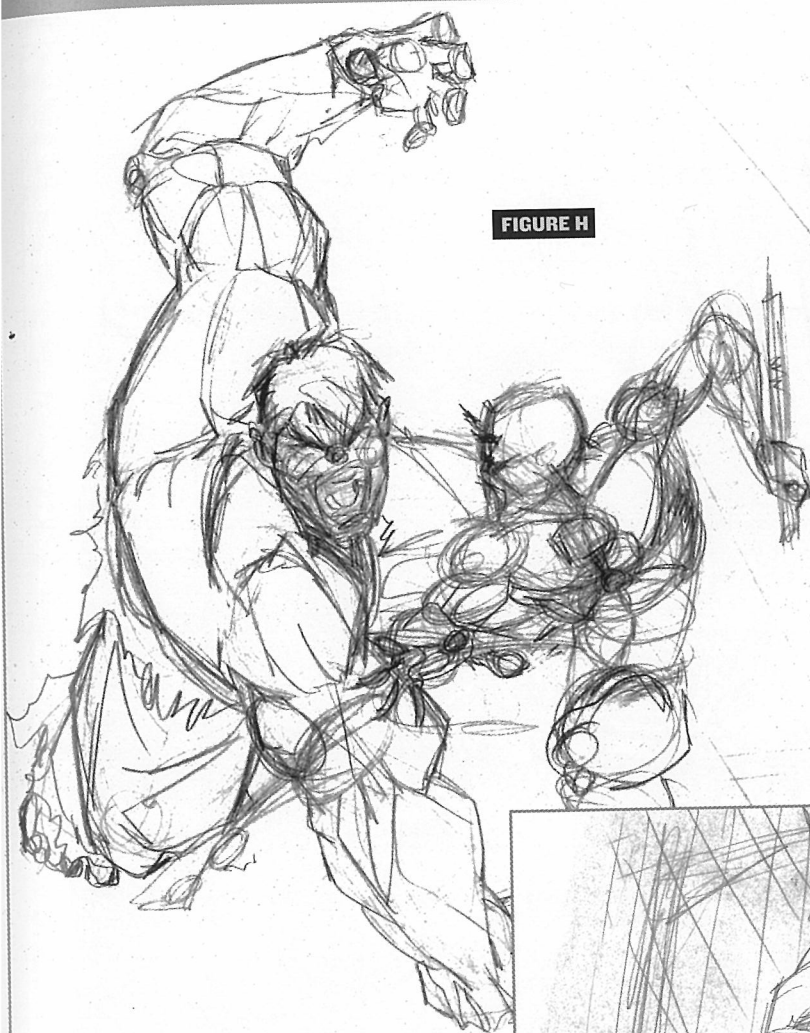


FIGURE I

CRACK!

Now **Figure I** is more like it.

We've got the Hulk coming right at us, tearing up the pavement. A dodging Daredevil is also coming towards us, squeezed between the Hulk and the camera (stuck between a rock and a hard place, so to speak), so close that he can smell the broccoli Hulk had for lunch on the green guy's breath.


In the more detailed layout (**Figure J**), I rotated the Hulk a bit to put more punch in his punch and added the flying debris around DD. Behind the Hulk you can see lines indicating where I plan to put some buildings to establish the city.

FIGURE J



SPLASHPAGES



And here is the finished product. If this were an actual story, I'd suggest to the editor to put the title at the top, behind the Hulk, and in outline type to let the city show though. And the credits would look good in white on the pavement chunks. 

Jim Calafiore has made a splash on the comics scene with his fine pencils on books like DC's Aquaman and Marvel's Exiles.

MAXIMIZING THE SPLASH

You can start with a bang, but you'll end with a thud if you're not careful. Sometimes a comic book page needs a little boost from the normal panel-to-panel story; sometimes it doesn't. There might be an exciting moment or a big reveal that requires more attention than just one tiny panel, in which case you break out the "splash page." These large

real estate, high-impact pages can be very useful tools for an artist, but, if overused, they can also become a cheap gimmick that can ruin a story. So how should artists approach this controversial comic device? The next time you set out to make big waves with your pages, keep these tips from the pros in mind.



FIGURE A

◀ RYAN SOOK ON TITLE PAGES

"My favorite use of a splash is as the title page [Figure A], just because it's a great way to show the reader a 'sneak peek' into what the rest of the issue holds. The title, in combination with that opening shot, really makes or breaks it for me. Plus, it's usually my only chance to do interesting lettering, which I love."

▼ MARK BAGLEY ON THE SMALL SCALE

"Technically, when I do [a splash page], depending on what's being called for, I generally work on them half-size or a third-size and then blow them up, because when you're working on that large an image, especially if it's a large head or something like that, it's very easy to get your construction lines off. It's a lot easier to do it smaller and then blow it up [Figure B]. When I'm working on a regular comic page with five or six panels, then I just draw the panels; I don't tend to blow it up. But when it's a large image, it makes the layout go a lot faster."



FIGURE B

JONATHAN LUNA ON PANEL ECONOMY

"There really are no rules, but if there was a book where every page was a splash page, [readers] may not feel content because there wasn't enough happening in the issue. However, it may be appropriate for an issue with a big event to show the grand scale of things [Figure C]. In another context, an artist could use a whole page to establish a scene when they could have used a little panel that would've been just as effective. Economy is important in storytelling. Everything should be balanced."



FIGURE C

EVOLUTION OF A PAGE BY TOM RANEY AND SCOTT HANNA



RANEY

HANNA

Okay, you've got a plot and a blank sheet of paper. How do you turn this into a piece of black-and-white artwork ready for reproduction? Tom Raney and I will show you our respective step-by-step processes of penciling and inking an

actual page from *Thor* #50. Besides *Thor*, we've worked together on books like *X-Men*, *Ultimate X-Men* and *Uncanny X-Men*. As in many comics, the end product is the result of a group effort. Here's how our part is done. Take it away, Tom!

When I get Dan Jurgens' plot for *Thor*, I read it through, noting my general impressions of what's going on in the issue. I try to get a sense of pacing for the whole book. But we're only dealing with a single page, a single image in fact! So let's get started!

THUMBNAILS

One of the most important parts of the job! Here I decide what needs to be included on the page to get the story across clearly. Composition is planned out at this stage. These thumbnails (**Figures A & B**) are actual size. I like to work very small; if it's clearly legible at this scale, it will be in print. Dan was looking for a powerful upshot of Thor with the buildings of New York behind him as well as storm clouds gathering above. My first attempt included everything needed to tell the story, but I felt that it needed more of a left-to-right flow. Since we read from left to right, your eye naturally seeks out that kind of movement. It creates a more comfortable, immediate image.

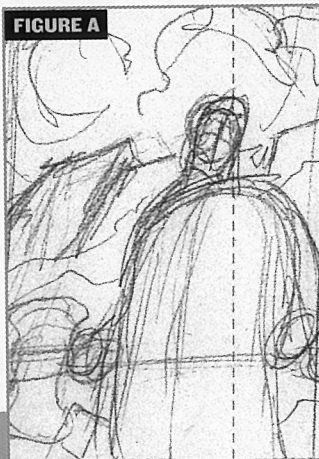


FIGURE A



FIGURE B

LAYOUTS

Now on to the actual page (**Figure C**). Layouts are where I place all of my basic shapes. At this point I'm thinking about proportions and general structure. No detail here! It's easy to get caught up in small sections of the page that are fun to draw, but it's crucial to plan everything out at the beginning. Poor planning quite often results in massive redrawing and lots of erasing! A quick note about tools: I use a mechanical drafting pencil (2H lead), magic rub and electric erasers, and an assortment of ruling triangles and circle templates.

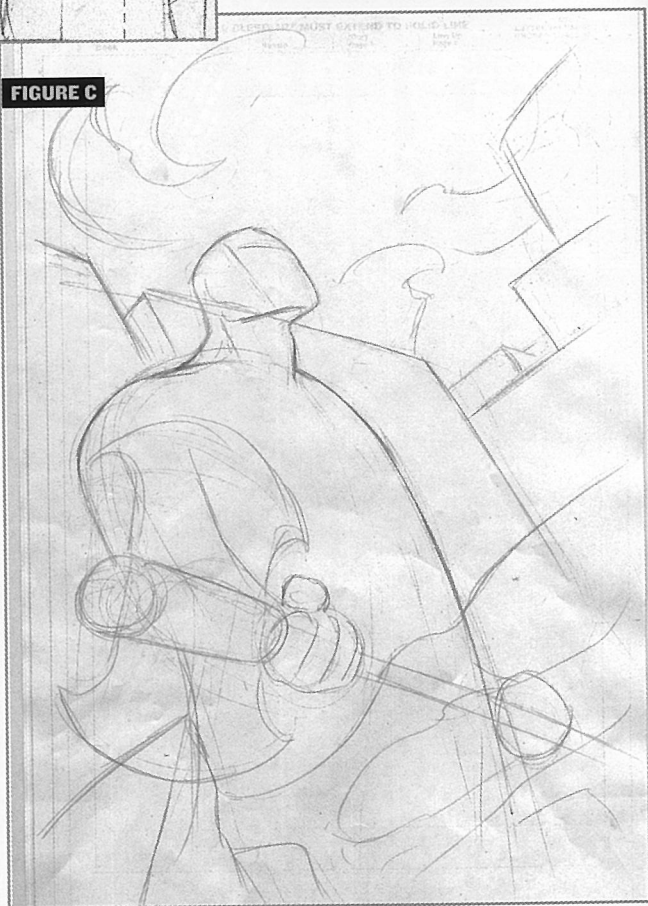


FIGURE C

ROUGHING IT IN

"Keep it loose" is the name of the game here (**Figure D**)! I lay in my basic anatomy, start to lay out costuming and, while not pictured here, I lay in my perspective grid. I try to keep my pencil lines very light because almost none of them will end up on the final page.



CLEANLINE

Here I finalized my linework (**Figure E**). I hunt through the rough lines from the previous step and choose the single lines that I like, making sure that costuming, props (like Thor's hammer) and environment are all designed and on the page. For me, this is the most time-consuming part of the job. By placing all of my exterior linework first, I eliminate the need to backtrack. Mistakes are the bane of the deadlines!

SPOTTING BLACKS

Black adds weight to a page. It helps direct the eye and establish mood, so always try to establish a sense of balance. I wanted this image to feel very grounded; placing large bodies of solid black at the bottom gives the impression of "solidity," while breaking up the black areas at the top helps it to feel lighter (**Figure F**). Also, placing black around the openness of Thor's face helps draw the eye there.



EVOLUTION OF A PAGE

FIGURE G



FINISHED PENCILS

This is the fun part. All of the rendering and detail work comes into play (**Figure G**): Thor's hair, the clouds, cracks on the buildings, texture, mist, etc. As with the previous step, I try to keep a sense of balance on the page. I don't want any of it to feel over-rendered or as though I gave less thought or attention to any other section. To wrap up, I'd like to point out that carefully planning your page right from the start will give you much better results. Figure out what you want to achieve on the page and attack it!

Now on to Scott!

PRO TIPS

SMILE!

"Drawing characters with realistic smiles on their faces really seems to attract reader attention. Fans are so used to seeing bleak, harsh grimaces and scowls, that looking at, say, Wonder Woman smiling back at them is effective somehow. Comics needn't always be so negative. Positive images, because of their rarity in this medium, seem to sell better right now." —Ethan Van Sciver, *Green Lantern: Rebirth*

BRUSHINGUP

After I receive Tom's pencils, I usually give him a call to exclaim over his excellent work! Tom is a very tight and clean penciler. In a lot of ways, he makes my job easier because he has already done so much work with the textures, the lighting and the attention to detail. On the other hand, it's now my job to keep all of his fine work in the translation to inks and enhance it if possible.

I try to analyze the style of the particular artist I'm working with. Tom's style tends to be organic and fluid, not sharp and angular, illustrative as opposed to graphic. Therefore, I do most of the beginning stages with brush and ink to keep the fluidity of his line and style. Over another penciler I might start with pen instead of brush.



FINISH THE BLACKS

I continue with the large brush and finish the black areas in the sky (**Figure I**). I start using a bit of dry brush technique (allowing the ink on the brush to dry out slightly before painting with it) in the clouds to make them a different texture than the nearby hair. While I'm up there, I start some of the line work on the face, neck and hair. To do the buildings, I use a #102 crow quill pen and a straightedge (I use a plastic triangle with an inking lip) to outline the black areas and do some of the straight-line work before finishing the blacks. I prefer the crow quill to technical pens. Tech pens have only one even line width. This is called a dead line, as it has no life to it. With a quill pen I can vary the line thickness without changing pens or retracing lines.

FILLING THE BLACKS

I begin with a #4 sable brush, painting in all of the large black areas first and the main outlines of the body and hands (**Figure H**). This enables me to quickly get a feel for the major light source, the balance of the blacks on the page and a good sense of form. It is also a great feeling of accomplishment seeing that a large part of the drawing is covered quickly.

I tend to start with the bottom of the page and work my way up. When starting with a pen, I usually work down from the top left so I don't smear the pen lines. None of my rules are permanent. I adjust them according to the art. Every page is different, so every page is inked differently.



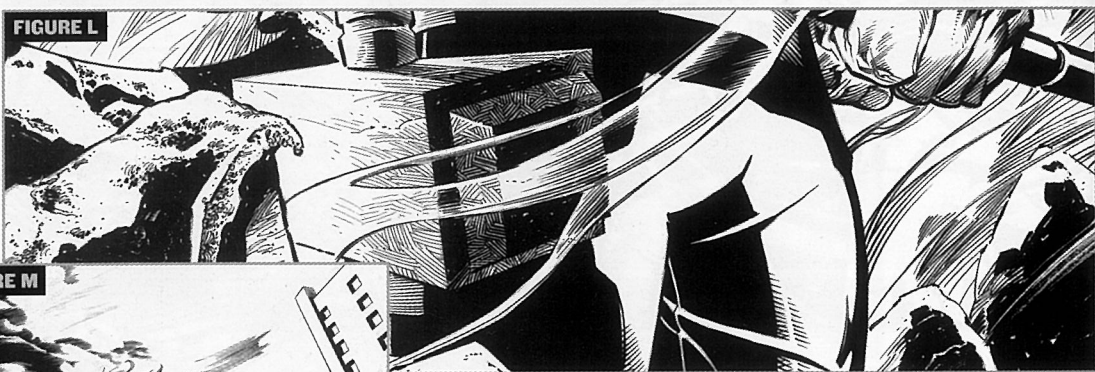
FIGURE J

THE FINE BRUSHWORK

I now switch to a #3 sable brush for a little more control with the finer detail (**Figure J**). The main concentration here is the hair and beard. Again, I use the brush to keep the flow and texture of the hair fitting with Tom's style. A pen can make the hair feel scratchy or stiff. Tom pays a lot of attention to the hair, so I do too. It takes practice and control with a brush to do this kind of detail. For many beginning inkers, hair is the hardest thing to master.

ARMANDAXE

After I finish the hair, beard and eyebrows, I go back to the #102 pen and start some of the feathering on the axe and Thor's arms (**Figure K**). I want the axe to feel metallic, so the lines are kept very smooth and even. I use a French curve with the pen to make the axe head feel man-made and technical. Clouds are rougher and done freehand in order to seem natural. This is very subtle in the printed comic but the eye can see it. The details can tell an almost subliminal message to enhance the imagery.

FIGURE K**FIGURE L****FIGURE M**

TEXTURE

Now that all the large blacks and outlines are done, it's time to concentrate even more on the details (**Figure L**). For the foreground rocks and hammer I use a #108 pen point. This pen is more flexible and has a wider range of thick to thin lines. I have been aware of texture throughout, but now it becomes the focus. The tarmac rubble, hammer, smoke and hands should feel quite different from each other. Tom is great with textures so his efforts allow me to push it even further. This section of the page is now complete.

THE FINE PENWORK

Tom's level of detail requires more fine linework than most, so the majority of the penwork is accomplished with the #102 (**Figure M**). I may use three or four different pens on other pencilers' work to achieve various styles. Using the straightedge and pen, I ink the main lines of the closer building. Then, I work on the details and shading of Thor, finish the axe and hammer and add a bit more to the clouds.

FINISHED PAGE

The fine linework can be time-consuming, but the end results are worth the effort. Using the same pen, I complete the sky and Thor's face. Then, I do the texture linework on the buildings. Here I decide to add some extra touches to some of the windows in order to increase their variety. Blacks are also

added in the windows near Thor. This adds dimension, balances the black levels in the background buildings and, most importantly, helps accentuate Thor.

Lastly, I finish up the body hair and belt buckle, and the inks are done.



THE ORIGINAL black-and-white art is complete, but the teamwork continues. Dan Jurgens does the scripting after receiving a copy of the finished pencils. The page is scanned into the computer and sent to the colorist, Dave Kemp, and then the letterer. Then, we get to start all over again on the other 21 pages in order to finish the issue!

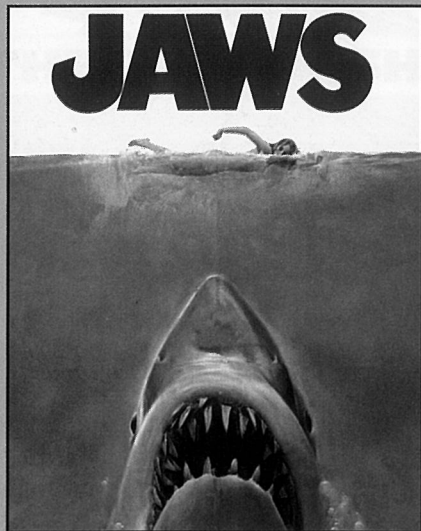


Tom Raney and Scott Hanna have dropped their artistic hammer on many titles, including DC's Outsiders.

REEL ADVICE

When 007 flashes his trusty Walter PPK or Jaws chomps on a flesh-and-blood sandwich, those moments stick in a movie viewer's brain even more than the memory of a prom night smooch. As an artist, it's your job to make fans remember your

comic scenes just as well. Fortunately, movies and comics are both visual media, and three of the comic industry's most notable celebs relate how the movie-making experience can evolve your comic page.



◀ PHIL JIMENEZ ON 'JAWS'

"Storytelling is all about composition choices. It's about getting the most bang for your buck. So if I have any tricks—say, there's a tense moment and I'm a little confused on it—I do like to look at movies. If I was doing something horrific, I would watch a favorite horror movie and look at the shots, figure out why they're horrifying, figure out if it's a matter of color, light and dark. Is it music? There's a lot in movies to build tension, like the 'Jaws' theme. But if you don't have that music, you have to rely purely on visuals. In 'Jaws,' for example, one of the cool things is you always saw the shark briefly until the last 2/3 of the movie. There's just something under the water. Look to other sources that do tension really well, like a movie, and figure out how did they do it, what tricks did they use, and try to steal them."

KEITH GIFFEN ON 'CITIZEN KANE' ▶

"Definitely draw as much as you can, find your own voice on the page, but also learn how to tell a story linearly. Pay attention to movement, pay attention to how visual stories move, how story beats are played out on the page. Page through a comic and don't read any of the word balloons. Can you still tell, basically, what the story is about? If you can't, then the artist has not done his job."

"Another suggestion I usually give is to find a really good, solid, visual movie: 'Citizen Kane,' perhaps, or 'North by Northwest' is another good one. Watch it with the sound off, to force yourself to pay attention to movement, the composition of the scene, how the characters are placed, when to shoot past something, when to go for the long shot, how they never forget their sense of place."



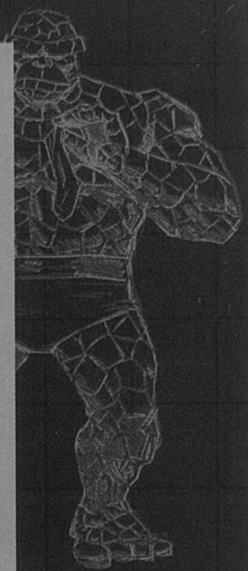

JAMES BOND IS BACK IN ACTION!



◀ GENE HA ON JAMES BOND

"The most obvious mistake [while laying out a tension-filled page] is ramping up the action too quickly, without enough set-up. Take your time to make the reader care about the outcome. Let them know what good things might happen—or what horrible things could happen. The opening sequence in a James Bond movie is full of overkill; there's not much mystery or suspense. The only question is exactly how Bond will kick the villains' asses."

"The other obvious mistake is giving away the ending with overkill. What made Sean Connery the greatest James Bond? He looked like he had to struggle to win. Everything looked easy for Pierce Brosnan and Roger Moore, so they never felt imperiled."



CHAPTER TWO: SECRETS OF STORYTELLING

- PACING A SCENE
- PACING AN ISSUE
- DRAMATIC TENSION
- EMOTIONAL IMPACT
- TENSION & PACING
 - SETTINGS
- SETTINGS AT WORK
 - BACKGROUNDS
- BACKGROUND DETAILS
 - GROUP SHOTS
 - GROUP DYNAMICS
 - SHADOWS
 - SILHOUETTES
 - NEGATIVE SPACE
 - SOUND EFFECTS
- MASTER STORYTELLING



NK I'M BEAUTIFUL?



KOOO

PACING A SCENE

BY JIM CALAFIORE

Hey, Jim Calafiore here. In previous columns, we've briefly mentioned the importance of mood and setting up a scene, but now let's examine it a little more closely.

What we're looking at this time is how to set up a mood in the first page of a scene (if you haven't done it in the first page...well,

you're in trouble). There are several important components to this, camera angle and lighting being two, but what I find most important is pacing. How is the page laid out? How is the situation presented to the reader? Does the pacing involve the reader in the scene? Depending on the script, a good deal of this could be left up to you, the artist.

CHECK THE SCRIPT

A very tight script, broken down page by page, panel by panel and with camera angles specified, determines the pacing already. In that case, the writer does this work for you. On the other hand, loose plots leave a lot up to the artist. So let's assume that's what we're working with. Here's the scenario:

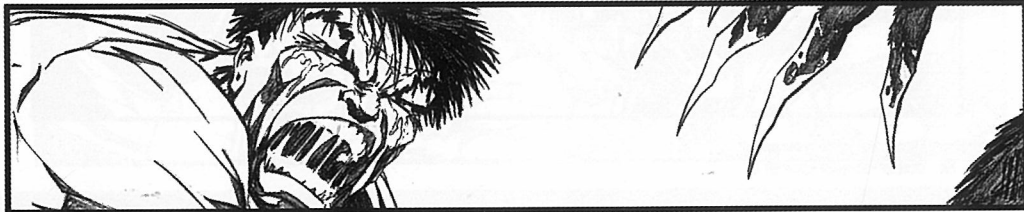
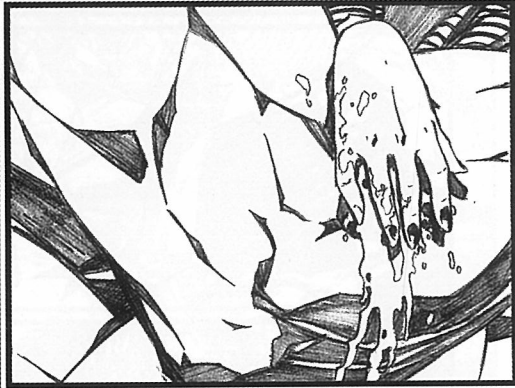
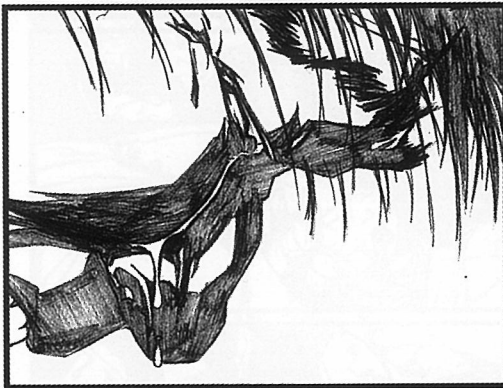
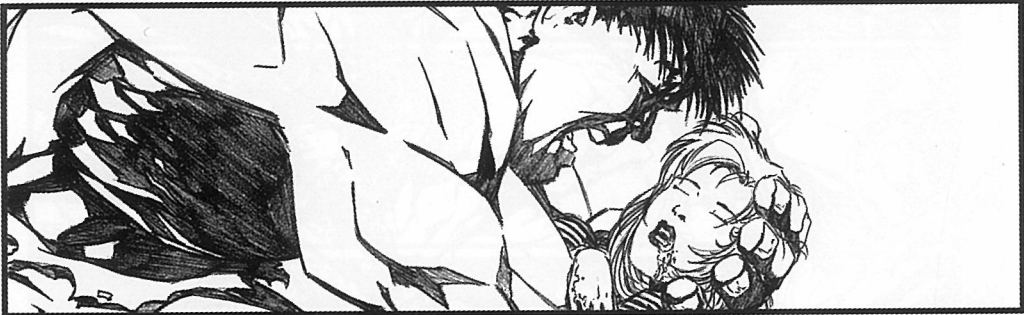
"The HULK kneels on the ground, cradling the bloodied

body of BETTY, surrounded by several of his most fearsome foes (ABOMINATION, RHINO, WENDIGO and JUGGERNAUT). BETTY's blood stains the ground around them. HULK's head hangs down as he speaks softly to BETTY; tears roll from his eyes. Finally, he raises his head in anguished rage towards his enemies."



SURROUNDED

One of the keys in pacing and mood is the establishing shot and how it's used. Generally, every scene needs one (see one of my other lessons, "Settings," on page 54), but every scene doesn't use the establishing shot in the same way. Here's ours. As you can see, it has all the basic information necessary to set the scene. Now what do we do with it?



SMASHCUT

This first example is a conventional approach. The establishing shot is the first panel, giving the reader just about all the visual information he needs when he enters the page. It's a quick start for the scene, and gets the reader right into it. I consider this a "smash cut" method of setting the

mood and pace, with the information "up front" for clarity. The drawback here is that it doesn't involve the reader a great deal. Beyond the visual itself, the pacing doesn't "compel" him into the scene since it's all right there. This puts a lot of pressure on the dialogue to reinforce the mood.



THE TEASER

In this next example, I open with a series of tight, isolated images, followed by the establishing shot. The extreme close-up panels aren't designed to give the reader any concrete visual facts about the scene; their sole intent is to give emotional information. I'm setting the mood before the situation...or at least some of it. I'm teasing the reader a bit, inviting him in with a little mystery while supplying definite signs—the bloody hand, the teary eye, etc. (I chose to go with

several inset panels here, but a single isolated image works just as well sometimes.) Then, as I hit the reader with the full scene, the overall impact is stronger.

This technique works with a variety of scenarios. For a party, the close-up panels might be of happy faces, balloons, confetti, champagne glasses, whatever, to set up a mood of celebration. In a somber moment for a character, I might isolate personal items in the room before the establishing shot.



SURPRISESHOT

In this example, I've taken a very different approach to the pacing by having the establishing shot come at the end, giving no hint of the surrounding villains in any of the panels leading up to it. This pacing sets up a revelation of mood. The first panel says, "This doesn't look good." The next three say, "This is bad." The last panel says, "Oh, boy! This is really bad."

You probably noticed that in all three examples, I basically used the same shots. This shows how by simply moving them around I can create three distinct variations of mood. That's the effect of pacing. Think about what you're conveying with your art beyond strictly the visual information: Pin-up shots are great, but a scene should have a mood.



PACING AN ISSUE

BY PHIL HESTER

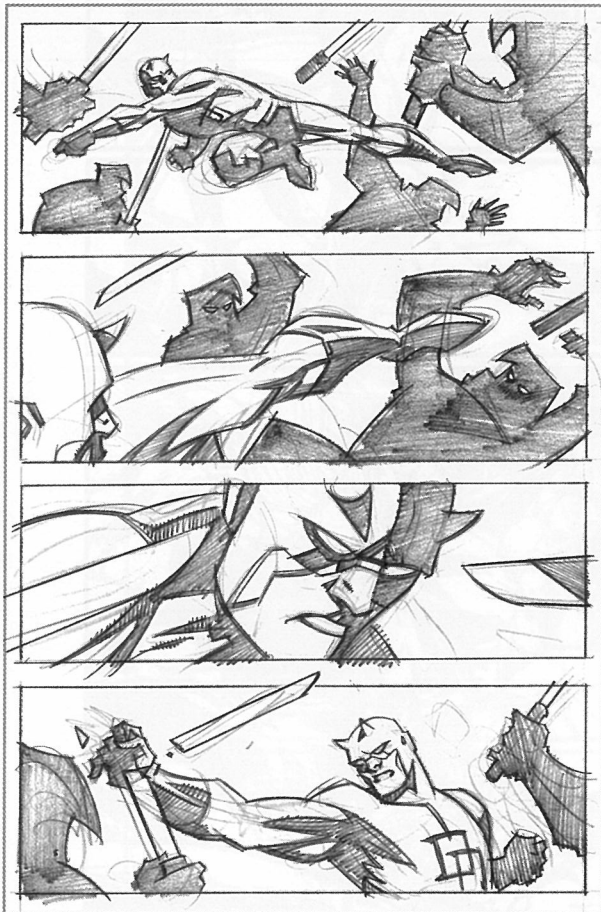


Superman? A wimp. Thor? A weaking. Galactus? An amateur. They're all powerful characters, but in the end, just tools at my disposal. Any time a cartoonist puts pencil to paper and begins to lay out a story, they have the ultimate control over all that takes place on the page. And if they're any good, they'll have control of you, the reader.

The previous pacing lesson was limited to the single scene. I'll be tackling a larger issue: how to effectively pace a longer scene, story or even an entire issue. Obviously

I can't give you 22-page examples of each of the techniques, but I will try to share some insight on the tricks of the trade I have picked up over my two decades in the funnybook business.

Remember, the stuff I'm about to share is just the tip of the iceberg. A meager taste. For a true lesson in pacing, I implore you to pick up pretty much anything by Will Eisner, Harvey Kurtzman, Frank Miller or Bernie Krigstein, among others.

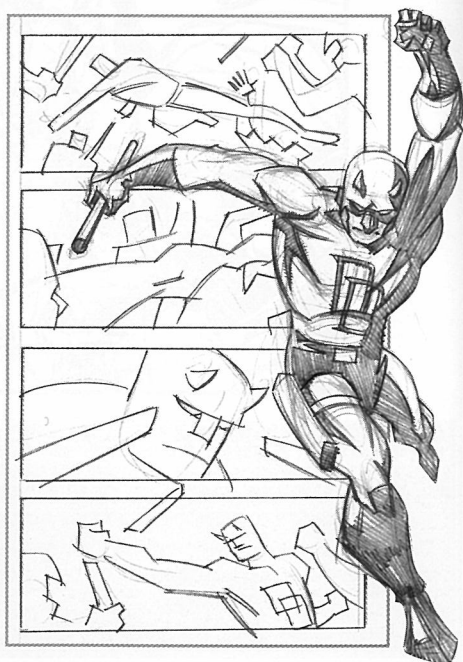


THE BREAKOUT

Here you'll see the same horizontal scene punctuated by a giant figure that surges into the foreground of the entire page, breaking free of the restrictive panel borders. Daredevil is triumphant, superseding even the framework of the page. A great way to illustrate power or release. My friends and I call this the marquee, or poster shot. It's a powerful tool, but easily abused. It's the comic book equivalent of the guitar solo. Unless you're Jim Steranko, use it sparingly or it loses all meaning. Please.

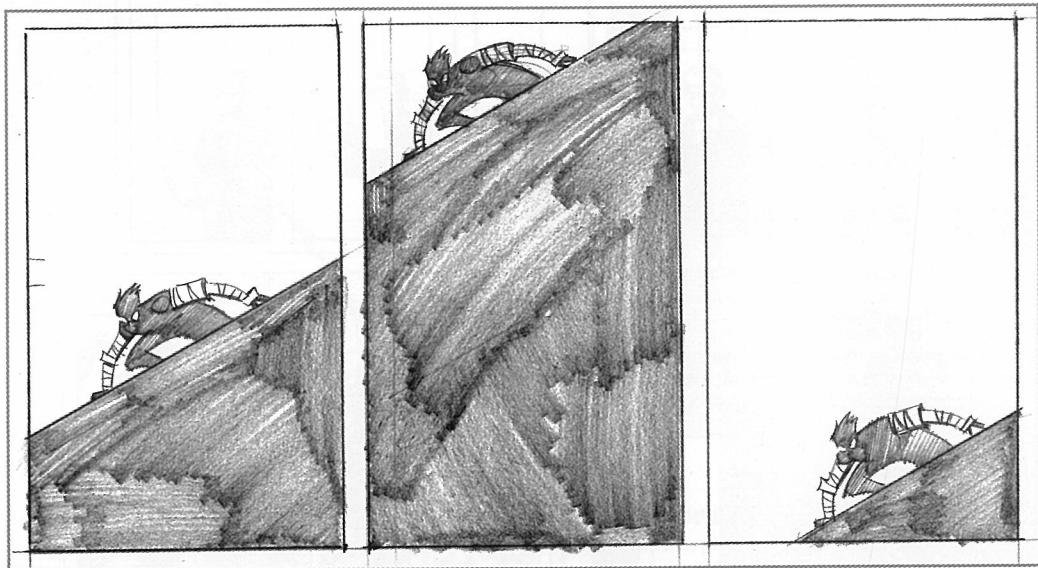
GET HORIZONTAL

The name of the game in today's mainstream comic book world is action. In my book, there's no better way to convey sweeping, fast, powerful action than pages of stacked, horizontal panels. These wide panels give us plenty of room to stage our action, display our dynamic figures and take advantage of the reader's natural, left-to-right reading eye motion. You'll notice in the last panel I've switched the flow of the action back against the left-to-right flow. It's a great way to bring a scene to a halt, forcing the reader to stop and absorb an important nugget of information. Do a whole issue this way and it will fly by, but still be gratifying for the reader. The best of examples of this kind of pacing can be found in Frank Miller's *Ronin*, Goseki Kojima's *Lone Wolf and Cub*, and nearly all of Gil Kane's fight scenes.



COMPOSITION=SPACE=MOOD

It's not always what you draw, but how you frame it that affects the reading experience. In this example I'm presenting the same drawing, but cropped or framed in different ways to convey different moods. Take a look at Thor here. He's doing the exact same thing in both drawings. The only difference is the relative closeness of the camera (the reader's view). The first example is the widescreen version so ably applied in today's comics by guys like Bryan Hitch or Frank Quitely. Pulling back from a scene of pure power can provide scope and a level of detachment that let's the reader soak in the immensity of the event. The second panel is the same image, but in "Kirbyvision." In this version you are inescapably immersed in the action. You are not an observer; you are a participant. Something cosmic is about to go upside your head. Again, all that changed was how close we were to the action.



SPACE IMPLIES DISPOSITION

In the next example, my character the Wretch sits atop a wall. He is in the same neutral pose in each shot, but the camera shifts in each panel. In the first shot, the wall bisects the panel. Negative and positive spaces are equal. The character is balanced. In the second, the positive space of the wall dominates. Now the Wretch is above us, at the top of a sheer,

imposing wall of blackness. He is threatening. In the last panel, the blank, white negative space of the sky dominates. Now the Wretch is tiny, dwarfed by the oblivion implied by the empty space yawning out above him. He is humbled. Same drawing each time, but shifting the angle of view induces a completely different reading experience.

PACING AN ISSUE

RHYTHM—STACCATO

This scene between the Silver Surfer and Galactus illustrates how staccato, or rapid-fire panels, can imply speed and tension even when they do not depict action scenes. It's simply a talking heads scene, but by cutting back and forth between Galactus and the Surfer with equal-sized panels, a rhythm is established in the reader's mind. The characters are not engaged in a physical altercation, but the relentless pace of quick cuts implies anxiety. Now, to really ratchet up the tension, imagine such a

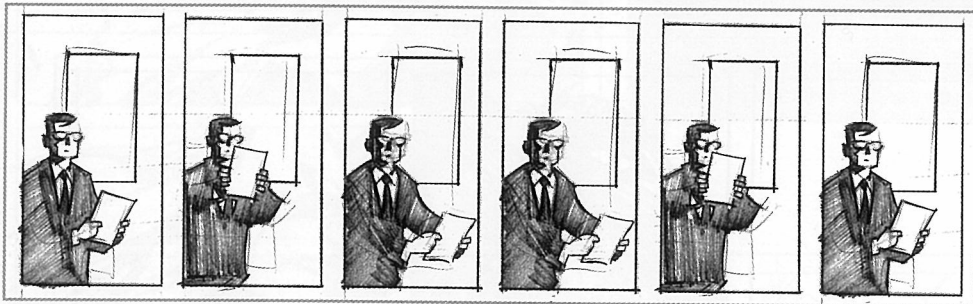
staccato treatment of an action scene. Also, as Eisner tells us, every time a reader turns a page he sees the coming page as a whole—or "metapanel"—instantly, even before he begins reading panels in proper order. Seeing a series of tight, tumbling panels crowding the page reinforces that tense mood you're after. You can best see this technique in play in Frank Miller's *Daredevil* (there's that man again), Bendis & Oeming's *Powers* and, specifically, the classic Kurtzman war story, "Corpse on the Imjin."



RHYTHM—MONOTONY

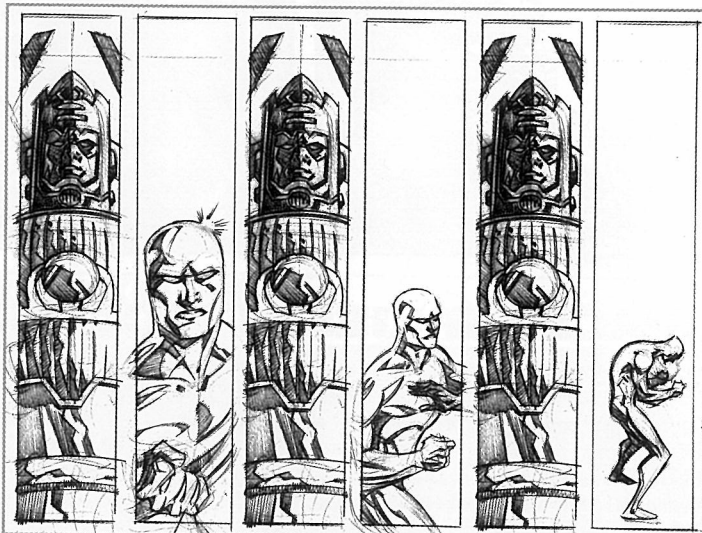
In the second illustration below we see how the exact same panel structure can accomplish the opposite effect. By staying with nearly the same image in relentless rhythm,

monotony is conveyed. Chris Ware provides the best modern example of this technique in *Acme Novelty Library*.



RHYTHM—INEVITABILITY

Let's go back to Galactus and the Surfer. We'll use the same cuts, but alter the panel shape. Now the characters are framed by tall panels. We'll also bring the spatial technique from earlier in the lesson into play. Galactus dominates his panels, an implacable monolith. While the Surfer is trapped at the bottom of his panels, helpless. The reader must start at the top of each panel and fall down through negative space to observe the subject. This slow, up-and-down rhythm is useful for implying inevitability, confinement or the inexorable nature of a character's fate.




THE SPLASH AS PUNCTUATION

Okay, so you've drawn yourself an entire funnybook using the techniques we've discussed. How do you top it all off? The splash page. Most comics, no matter what flavor, use a splash page at some point. In most instances, at the beginning of a book, but often at the end. I like to think of the splash as punctuation. Not too much storytelling can be accomplished with a single image, but the splash can kick off or close out your story with a bang. One of my favorite techniques for drawing a reader into a story is the "What the—?" splash. Nothing draws a reader in like dropping her into an unexpected situation. Throwing a familiar character into an uncharacteristic situation, as I have here by depicting Dr. Doom in Dr. Strange's raiment, is a great way to make your reader wonder what comes next.



THE GUT PUNCH

It's also fun to end books with a startling or unexpected image. Here we have the Hulk in just such an unexpected situation. We've isolated him in a corner of the page. He's small, wounded and vulnerable. Seeing the Hulk like this will either fill a Hulk fan with sympathy ("My poor Hulk!") or anger ("The Hulk is going to come out swinging next issue, you'll see!"). Either way, the reader has been piqued and will come back for part two.

I HOPE I'VE PIQUED YOUR INTEREST in storytelling the same way. Whether a fan or an artist, this lesson was designed to help you develop a keener appreciation for the craft of storytelling and make your future reading experiences all the more enjoyable. 

Phil Hester has paced his career to a critically acclaimed level of success, including work on such books as DC's Swamp Thing and Green Arrow, and his '96 Eisner Award-nominee The Wretch.

DRAMATIC TENSION

BY JIM CALAFIORE

I'm a manipulator.

No, I don't mean that kind of manipulation, (though my wife is nodding in enthusiastic agreement); I manipulate the reader. That's my job. That's the job of any storyteller, writers and artists—to manipulate the reader into whatever emotional state is necessary for a particular scene to have impact.

The best tool we manipulators have is pacing—how we let the scene play out for the reader. We're in control of the story, and thus (hopefully) in control of the reader. If we do our job right, the reader will follow us and the story almost anywhere. If not, we're lost, and the reader isn't going to keep turning the pages.

FUTURETENSE

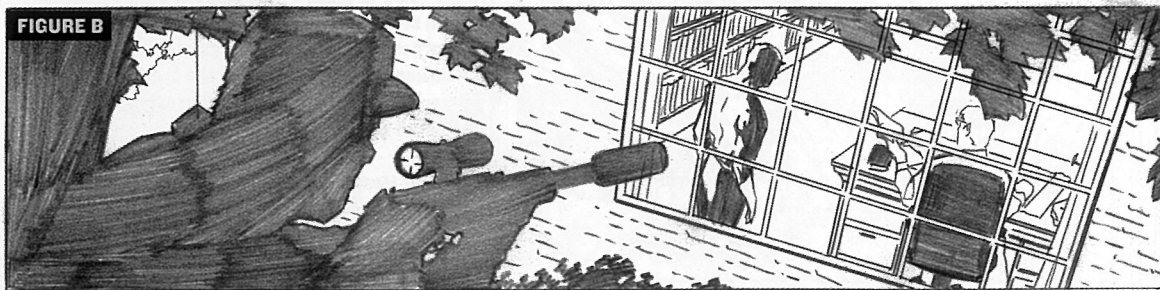
Tension at its simplest is about anticipation: setting up a potential event in the mind of the reader, and then making them wait as long as possible before getting to the actual event. The event is the payoff, but the tension is in the moments before. And that's where to concentrate on hooking the reader and reeling him in.

Creating a tense situation is the writer's task. Mine is to make it last, even when, unfortunately, there's often only a single page to do that in; sometimes even less.



Here are two establishing shots. The first (**Figure A**): The Sniper crouches, rifle with silencer at the ready. Tense, yes, and setting a mood, but I want to get more information in to the establishing shot, especially if the length of the scene is a factor.

The second shot (**Figure B**) adds in Daredevil and Ben Urich, and gives us some perspective on the situation. But this single panel probably isn't going to carry all the tension we want to create. What we can do to turn it into a scene?



THE SHOWDOWN

This first example is a duel scenario: *Two gunfighters stand in the middle of a deserted street, hands poised above their holstered guns, waiting for either to make the first move. A showdown.*

This pacing is a variation on that. Simply put, the

protagonist (Daredevil) is completely aware of the antagonist (the Sniper) and his intentions. Daredevil sees the potential event coming before the Sniper takes action; I want the reader to stay in that moment, to live it as long as possible. Anticipation.



The moment is only a split second in this case. I need to extend the moment artificially. In a film, the director accomplishes this by using slow motion, but we can't do that in a comic book since we're dealing with static images. The solution is to stretch time out by adding panels, small insets

of various details.

As you can see, I'm not using the term "showdown" literally since this isn't a duel. I'm using it to refer to a scenario where two or more characters are aware of each other and the potential event at the same time.

DRAMATIC TENSION

CAUSE AND EFFECT

In the next example, I've situated the tension in the moment between the potential event and the action causing it. Cause and effect: *The dastardly villain has tied the helpless girl to the tracks in front of an oncoming locomotive; will our hero be able*

to save her before the train slices her into three, easy-to-carry pieces?

Here, the Sniper fires immediately. Will DD be able to save his target, Ben Urich?



In both these first two examples, I'm telescoping time, making the instant I've chosen last longer than real time by adding panels. To the reader, often subconsciously, panels equal time. More panels, more time.

Also note that in both I've used a somewhat unconventional panel alignment. It slows the eye down, making the reader work a

little harder, which I've found helps to stretch time. (The extreme close-ups of details have a similar effect.)

In panel eight, I've added information: Urich doesn't know he's about to lose some gray matter. Adding visual information during the tense moments is a good idea, but you have to be careful. Too much, especially if it's not pertinent to the tension, can diffuse it.

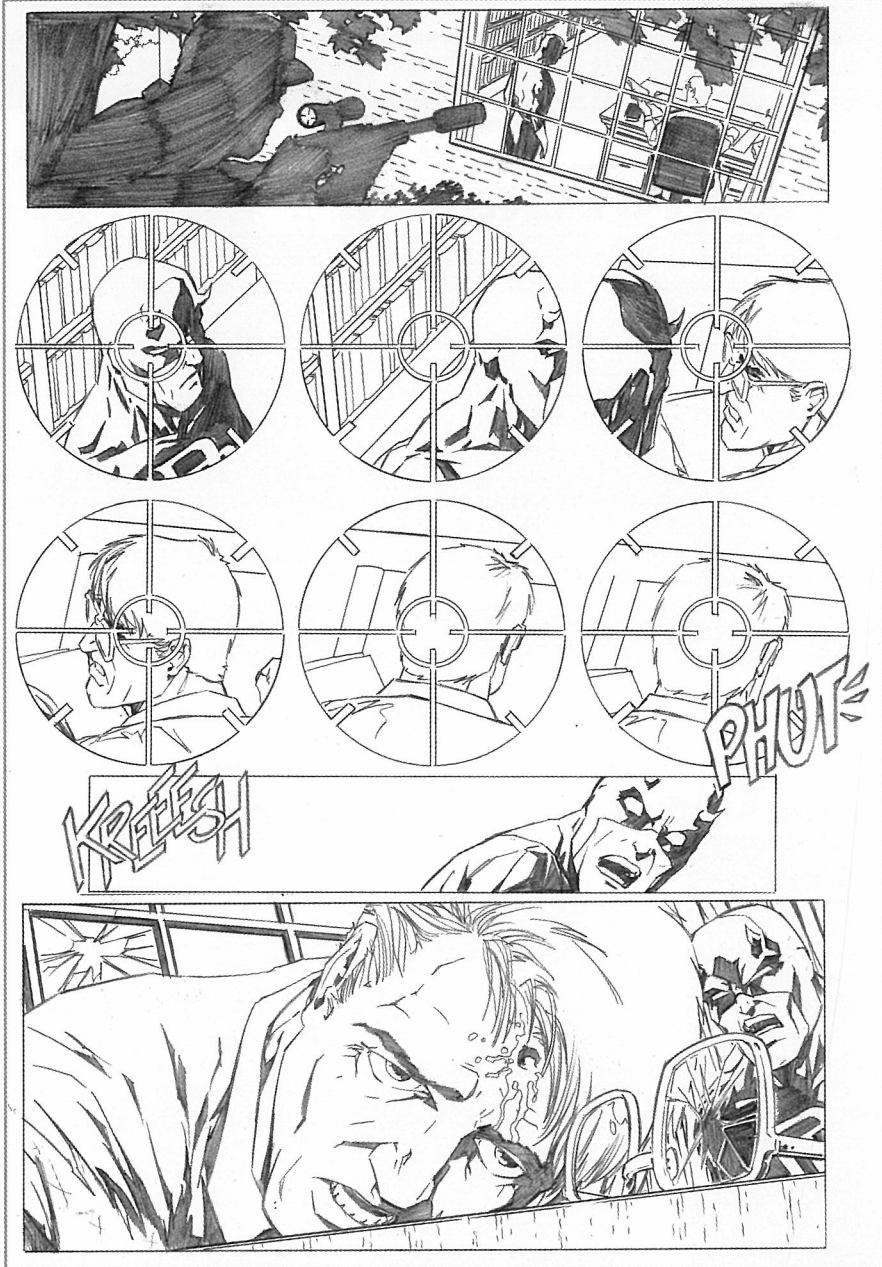
THE UNKNOWN

Here, I've gone back to the establishing shot for a different aspect of the tension: The protagonist has absolutely no knowledge of the antagonist's intended action. (We're the only ones aware of the potential event.)

I've not really added any new information, but kept the point of view from the Sniper, using the gun-sight panels to retain a "being

watched" feel. In fact, we are the Sniper. Also, I've left the target up in the air, focusing on Daredevil, not settling on Ulrich until the last "gun-sight" panels. Uncertainty always adds spice to a tension stew.

In cases like this where there's no need to distort time, I can play out the tension as long as I want, but again it's tricky. Too long could dissipate the tension.



AS A LAST EXAMPLE I offer a suggestion: Watch "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly," specifically the final showdown, and see how long the director stretches the tension before anyone fires their gun. Watch the scene and think about how each shot is fairly static. He's using "panels" to extend the moment, the anticipation.

Anticipation. That's what it's all about.



EMOTIONAL IMPACT BY GARY FRANK



Something terrible may or may not be about to happen. The world may or may not blow up. The victim may or may not reach the telephone. The spongecake may or may not rise evenly.

There are going to be times when, as a comic artist, you are going to want to get those

readers biting their nails and turning those pages like Rain Man with a new *TV Guide*. There are tricks and devices you can use to accomplish this. Some of them are going to have to be employed by the writer and, since this is a "How to Draw" piece, I'll stick to stuff that the artist can handle. (After all, there is no point in a penciler trying to shoe-horn a ticking time-bomb into a scene about a kid trying to pass his exams.)

ATTENTION TENSION

There are two very basic rules that I think are important, so I'm going to concentrate almost entirely on them for this lesson. So repeat after me:

#1 Take your time.

#2 Don't show too much.

First off, take your time. Sure it's possible to drag something out until it gets boring, but, much more often, the readers get given the cake before they realize that they're hungry.

Make them wait. There is a tendency with modern, splash-orientated page layouts to give everything up too quickly, but tension and suspense take a while to build properly.

Little panels with little actions give a feeling of quiet before the storm. Also, if you have every panel containing just one, single, clear action, the reader will become more immersed and

caught up in events than if he has to hunt around for three or four different points of action in a large panel.

Secondly, it's really best to imply as much as you can without drawing it. This isn't going to speed up your work rate. I'm not talking about blank panels here. I'm talking about restricting the readers' supply of information.

Why are people scared of the dark? Because they can't see what's in it. Hint at stuff rather than make it explicit. When the human imagination fills in the gaps it tends to tailor the images to the particular fears of the individual. No matter what I can come up with, it's probably not going to be as scary as something that the reader's subconscious can conjure. (Unless I could come up with something like that girl in "The Ring." And even she was scary because her hair was covering her face.)

PRO TIPS

HIDDEN MEANING

"When I did the first *Whiteout* series I noticed that there were times when [main character] Carrie Stotko was very, very emotionally repressed. I realized that there were a few scenes where there was intense emotion, and I found that I could incorporate an abstract pattern into every one of those scenes. Sort of the way they used color in 'The Sixth Sense.' When I wanted to tag that the emotions were really intense, I would work a pattern into the background in some way. It was like a chain-linked fence pattern of crossed X's, and I found different places where I could incorporate that." —Steve

Lieber, *Whiteout*

THE SPLASH-ORIENTED PAGE

The example on the next page is of splash-orientated storytelling. This kind of approach was made popular when we pencilers got too big for our boots and started thinking that our pictures were more important than what the writers were doing.

The most obvious difference between the layout on p. 49 and the following layout on p. 51 is the panel-count. Some of you may be thinking that the first page looks cooler because it jumps off the page more, and—you know what?—I'd agree with you. But, while the extra size of the panels might

have more impact when you flip through the book in the comic store, they lack power in a storytelling context because they don't allow the tension to build.

I've also given the bad guy in the first page a few advantages in the scary stakes. He has a big old knife for one thing. And, for another, he's clearly pretty mad. I could have gone further and given him fangs or a swastika tattooed on his forehead (assuming that the writer was veeerrrry relaxed about the character design), but it wouldn't have made him scarier.





THE TENSION BUILD-UP PAGE



WALKING TALL Characters like Gary Frank's version of Hyperion from Squadron Supreme stand out large and in charge as epic heroes, but if you want to build up some dramatic tension, Frank advises the "less is more" approach.

Now, if you look at the second version to the right, the guy could be armed with a toothbrush for all we know—and yet he's still more unsettling than the first guy. The reason is simple. We know less, and so we are more uneasy. We know that he's a sinister-looking guy, and then we see that he's entering the girl's house. That's enough for the whole thing to be scary. If we add more, it's like sticking a bayonet on the front of a cruise missile. It doesn't make it more effective and, in fact, could look ridiculous.

This less-is-more storytelling device is used again in the last panel where we can compare the effect of the knife-wielding maniac to that of...well...a simple shadow falling across the floor.

And this panel brings me to another little rule: **#3 Always try to leave the big reveal until the first panel of a new page.**

You really don't want the readers' eyes straying down and right to the panel which shows that the stalker is... well, whoever he is, or which shows that the victim does indeed get a little ventilated in the end.


This rule goes for the climax of any scene in which you have built tension. If the first four panels of a page are of Steve Spy trying to diffuse a bomb, there's no point in having a big explosion in panel five, since the reader will inevitably see it before he should. Make sure that the page has to be turned before he can get the payoff.

PRO TIPS

WORKING WITH WRITERS

"I always read through the entire script. You've got to look at what's ahead. You've got to get a feel for just how much work you need to do by looking at the writer's style. Look at the panel counts. What can I expect out of this script?"

"Even if a writer has something that's particularly challenging, I'll still spend a great deal of time trying to get it to say what the writer seems to have in mind. The biggest conflict I have with writers is when they try to tell too much in too little a space. You might have to add a panel or leave out an element because it's just become too cumbersome. But hey, writers have big ideas, and sometimes they don't have nearly enough panels to say it." —Doug Mahnke, *Batman*

SO, THERE WE HAVE IT. Two simple rules to help build a little tension into a scene. When it comes to revealing detail, less is often more but, when it comes to time (and therefore panels), it's usually the case that more is more. 

Gary Frank's work has a big impact on such comics as Marvel's Squadron Supreme, Incredible Hulk and mature-readers Supreme Power, as well as DC's Supergirl.



FORESHADOWING

"You have to be able to foreshadow events. You have to know what the culmination of the scene is so you can give visual cues that something's going to happen. That could be with heavy shadowing, or it could come with people doing certain activities—not just sitting there conveying information through a word balloon.

"I remember a sequence where I had two people talking about whatever it was and the scene was shot through an open window. They're on the street. You could see partly in the room of where the scene was being shot, and there was a person who had nothing to do with the story [in that room], but he had a refrigerator open and there was a human head in it. It had nothing to do with anything, but it laid down [a general uneasy feeling]." ■ Kelley Jones (*Batman, 13th Son*)

ALIEN AUTOPSY ▶ Artists, like Kelley Jones in this scene from *Aliens Hive #1*, must dissect a story and then decide where to plant foreshadowing hints of things to come.



BODYLINGO

"Body language is so important. I teach a class about life drawing, and my rule is that your characters are actors. It's your job as the artist—kind of as the director—to pull the best performance out of them.

"The choices I make are all scene-dependent. If Superman just found out Lois Lane is cheating on him, I'm going to want to use just two shots of them, make it super-personal, zoom in on them, their faces, their body language. Are they sad? Is he fuming? Is he ready to break down because he can't believe it? His body has to reflect that." ■ Phil Jimenez (*The Invisibles*)

◀ **CAUGHT IN THE ACT** Every character in this interrogation scene from *Invisibles #7* reacts with a unique response, whether it be surprise, anger or despair.



THREAT AND CONFLICT

"Here's a quick story with a threat, but no conflict. A nice subdivision is about to be hit by an undetected meteor. The story introduces all the residents who might get killed by the falling rock. Is it the WWII vet who hates kids? The young couple hit by downsizing? The nurse who just learned she has cancer? BOOM! Who was it? If the characters know about the meteor, then set up the same issues. But now you also get to show how each character changes with the threat of losing everything."

■ Gene Ha (*Top 10, The Authority*)

WHODUNNIT? ▶ The classic murder mystery, as Gene Ha sets up in *Top 10 #10*, poses an immediate conflict with a resolution you're dying to see.



Phil Jimenez re-aligned the DCU with his art on *Infinite Crisis*; Kelley Jones made things tense for the *13th Son* and Gene Ha is one of comics' Top 10 artists.

SETTINGS

BY JIM CALAFIORE

Superheroes live in the real world. True, not our world, but while a reader's between the covers of a comic book, what they're reading comes real close...or at least it should. A good artist can make you forget you're reading fiction. How? The devil is

in the details. Look around. See how much information is in the setting you're in—all the "things." They're what give a setting personality and depth, and they can make an unreal one real enough to draw a reader in and make him believe in it.

WHERE ARE WE?

The comic writer usually answers that question by describing each scene's setting; usually with a single panel shot encompassing most of the location, called an "establishing shot." But setting descriptions vary widely depending on the writer, from page-long detailed notes to a single sentence like "Deadpool enters his fleabag hotel room." The latter leaves much up to the artist.

This illustration is a simple solution to the above description. Everything is there: walls, ceiling, window, door, beat-up table and bed—but even with grungy detailing, it has no life. Such bareness is an extreme, but I've seen amateurs and pros try to get away with even less and call it a "setting."



DETAILS, BABY

This version is different. I've added details: guns on the bed, a leftover breakfast of Froot Loops and hand grenades, door panels, a light source (the bare bulb), a door in the hallway for depth, the neon light and the building across the street out the window. Also note the subtle things: the dead-bolt on the door and jamb, the light switch, the stripped rod to explain the lack of curtains. There's even an outlet with electrical burns around it. I could even have added more guns, cockroaches running up the walls—maybe even a mouse scurrying away in fright. But just the additions I've done are enough to invite the viewer into the room and experience it rather than simply look at it.



FIGURE A

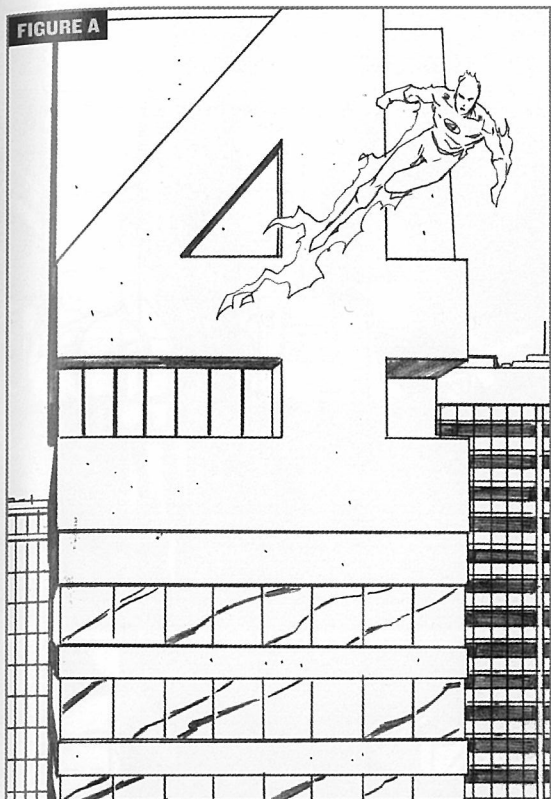


FIGURE B



LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Next question: How do we present the setting? If the writer hasn't specified a camera angle for the establishing shot, it's up to the artist to interpret the emotion and impact of the scene and the attitude of the character(s). And the attitude of the setting. Yes, the setting. It's as much a part of the scene as the people in it.

Figure A is a straight-on angle. We're on a par with the Human Torch here, as if we're on the roof across the street. It's very matter-of-fact.

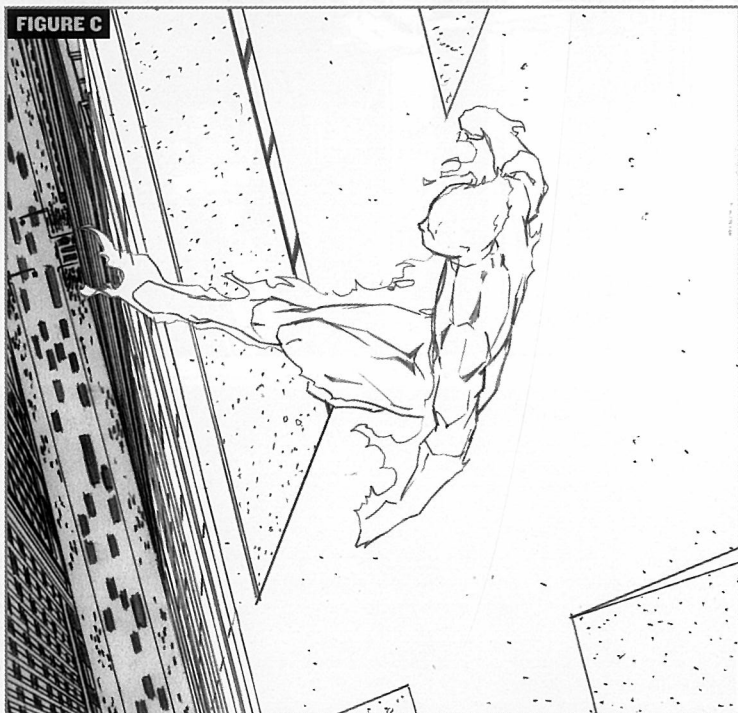
Figure B is a more dramatic, upward angle, like a child looking up in awe at an adult. Or mortals looking up at a god.

Figure C has a completely different feel. The down angle reveals more of the city, and while Torchy seems smaller in comparison, he still soars above the "specks" below, keeping protective watch.

And watch the details: The buildings in **A** and **C** aren't just big boxes with lines for windows; they're each different and distinct. Reference books are good for this—I have three picture books on New York City alone. And look on the street corners: There's a heavier concentration of people waiting for the light to cross!

Notice that even in **Figure A**, the whole of the Baxter Building's "4" isn't visible. The advantage of using a well-known landmark is that a small section is enough to convey the whole.

FIGURE C



SETTINGS

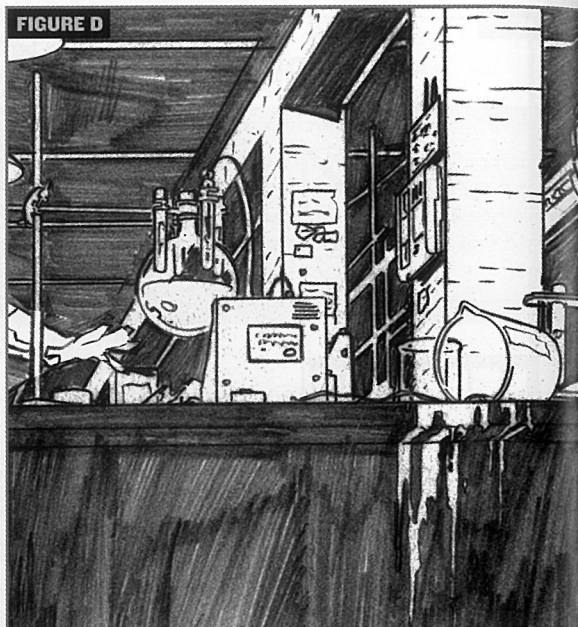
NIGHTFALL

Let's see how this works in the context of actual panel-to-panel storytelling. In our establishing shot, Daredevil's in one of his usual dark settings. But despite the amount of black in the panel, there's still loads of information: lotsa lab equipment, the slight mess, the overturned biohazard waste container and the subtle touches like the fire extinguishers and clock (check out the details in **Figure D**). Dark settings don't excuse the artist from a responsibility to create a solid setting (**Figure E**).

PRO TIPS

BODY BEAUTIFUL

"If you're looking for muscle references for the male superhero figure, instead of men go to the women! And not the bodybuilding women—the fitness/workout women. They're really buff and toned, but not so exaggerated that they look clunky."—Mark Bagley, *Ultimate Spider-Man*



It's almost impossible to execute complex backgrounds in every panel, in every page, and still make a monthly deadline. (Trust me, I've tried.) But that's precisely why it's important you establish a solid setting—you need not include it in every panel, especially in scenes concentrating on the action. If you've done the work to start, panels bereft of background have a much better chance of not confusing the reader. But if you give the reader a light, insubstantial setting, followed by panels without backgrounds, there's no flow. He could spend more time worrying about where the characters are than the story.

What I've discussed here goes for any setting, indoors or out. Do you think a forest is just a lot of trees? Then go out for a walk in the woods and really look around. Is the desert just a sea of identical sand dunes on into the horizon? Watch "Lawrence of Arabia" and see how much variety a desert has. In the ocean, there are countless species of coral, and a single fish does not make a school. This applies even to "unreal" locales. Watch your favorite science-fiction film, and look at all that goes into creating a believable setting. Details. The reality is in the details.



THE PAYOFF

Now, how does this technique fit on a comic page? Although it's usually the first panel, an establishing shot can go almost anywhere in a scene. (It can even come at the end of a scene if the setting is intended as a sort of revelation.) In the page above, I've chosen to make it the second panel, with the first panel an isolation shot to set the mood. Daredevil's intent, searching stare, with the broken test tubes in the background, sets a definite uneasy feel, which is then reinforced by revealing the whole of the setting.

For a different pacing, I could have had three or four

panels before the establishing shot—close-up isolations of different elements, stretching out the scene to create tension before revealing the whole. Your choices are dictated only by what best serves the story. Notice that in the establishing shot, I chose a low-angle, wider view of the room, to ensure that I got the light fixtures in. I needed them included so that when we got to panel three, there was no confusion. Panel three is meant only to focus the readers' attention up and prepare them for panel four, which zooms in to reveal Baron Blood in the rafters. You've now set a scene!



SETTINGS AT WORK

BY PIA GUERRA

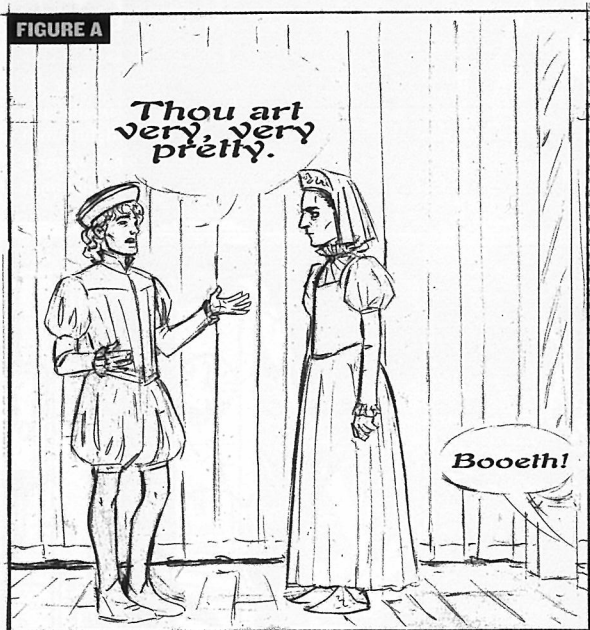


Probably the most challenging job an artist has is to set the scene in a story. The fun part is drawing your favorite characters duking it out with one another, but to really make the action pop you need to have a sense of place and scale to give the action a more realistic feel.

But the key to good setting isn't just dropping a

building in the background to tell the reader, "Oh yeah, they're outside," nor is it cramming as much detail as the panel can hold. An artist has to decide both what to put in *and what to leave out* in order to guide the reader through a story. Detail is important—it gives depth and meaning; it invites a reader to explore the world created—but too much detail and that world becomes a great big headache.

FIGURE A



BACKINTHEDAY

And who better to study setting a scene than the master, William Shakespeare? You read that right: The bard himself, the best writer of all time—no matter how many people think it was actually Marlowe doing all the work, or Bacon (pft, yeah right)—is a prime example of setting a scene using only words.

Back in Willy's day, there wasn't any money for elaborate sets, lighting or sound effects. Actors scrounged together what clothes they could to get a character across, sometimes going without food in order to buy some cheap costume jewelry to accentuate a queen or lady in waiting. And, oh yeah, only guys were allowed to perform, so you better believe if you wanted to convince an audience that Julio was really Juliet, you had to really work at it to earn your pay. See **Figure A**. Uh uh.

HI-DEF STORYTELLING

What made Shakespeare's job even tougher was the fact that his audiences had grown very sophisticated over the years. The demand for "hi-def" descriptive storytelling was high, and they made their wishes known loud and clear (**Figure B**). If a scene was bad they let you know it. If they liked what they saw they would cheer for a replay of a scene...and the actors would do it, sometimes up to four or five times until the audience tired of it and wanted the story to move on. Not too different from some fan audiences of today, come to think of it.

FIGURE B

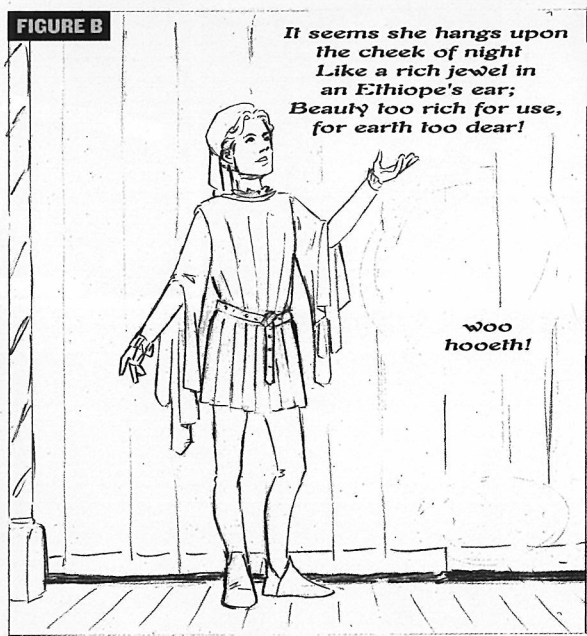


FIGURE C



WHATTHE?!?

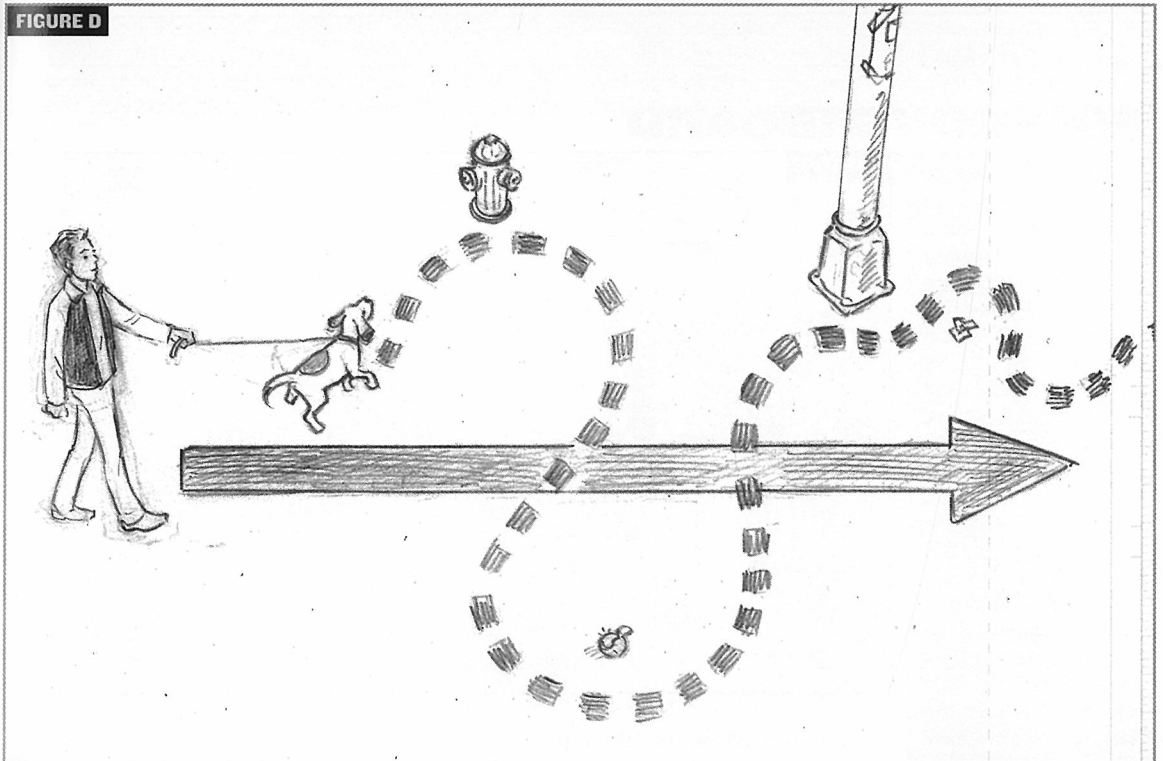
There was a limit, though, to how much embellishment could be employed before you lost your viewers. Yes, your beloved is beautiful. Yes, she can be compared to a summer's day. But do we really need to know the exact humidity and distance from sea level where this summer's day takes place? So where do you draw the line, so to speak? See **Figure C** for an actual monologue by Marlowe. Now tell me he wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream*! So anyway, that line...

PUPPYLOVE

Imagine taking a little puppy for a walk (**Figure D**). You, the walker, have a pretty clear idea where you want to go, but that puppy has other ideas. He wants to investigate every nook and cranny along the way—that fire hydrant has some interesting smells on it, that discarded ball looks like a lot of

fun and hey, that gum wrapper promises some entertainment. Your job as the walker is to make the walk interesting, letting your puppy learn about his environment, but still keep him on track lest you end up in Jersey, lost and confused. And no one wants to end up in Jersey.

FIGURE D



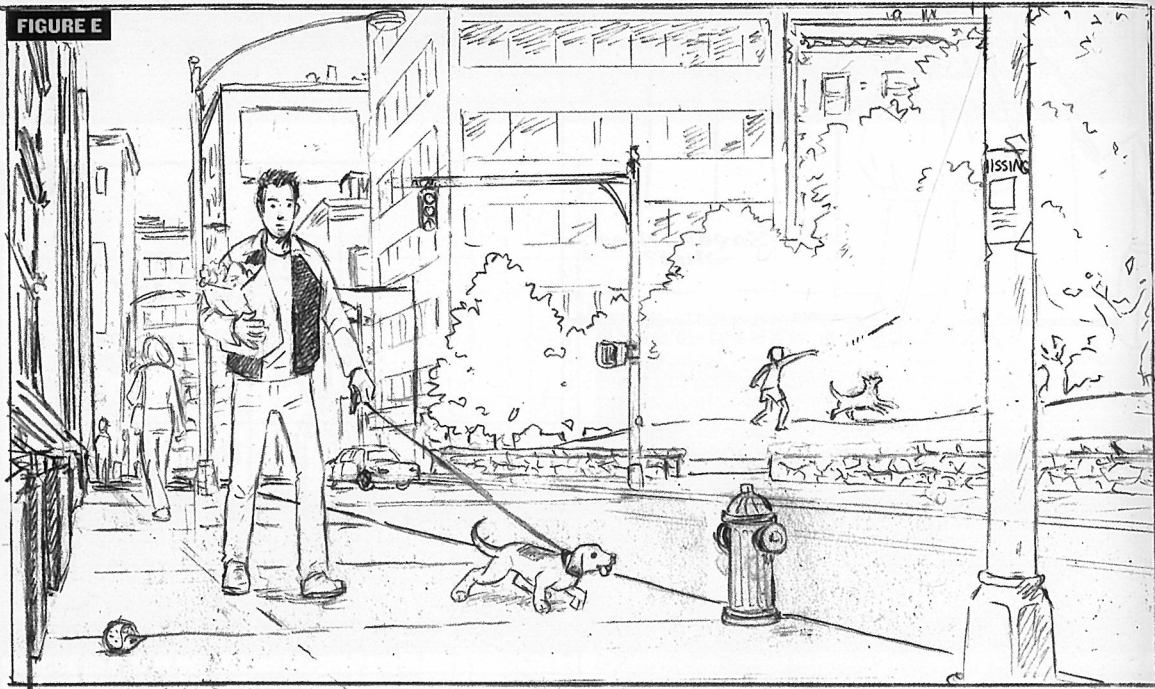
SETTINGS AT WORK

WALKING THE WALK

Here's our puppy out for a walk on a summer's day (a different summer's day, but quite lovely all the same). **Figure E** says a lot about the scene using some key details. The walker and puppy are walking toward us, behind them we see a park where other dogs and their owners are playing, leading us to believe these two are returning home

from the park. The walker is carrying a small bag of groceries; looks like he's planning a dinner at home. That lamppost has a missing persons poster on it. Will this have anything to do with the story later on? Maybe. And the dog is looking at that fire hydrant...guess they'll be making a brief stop.

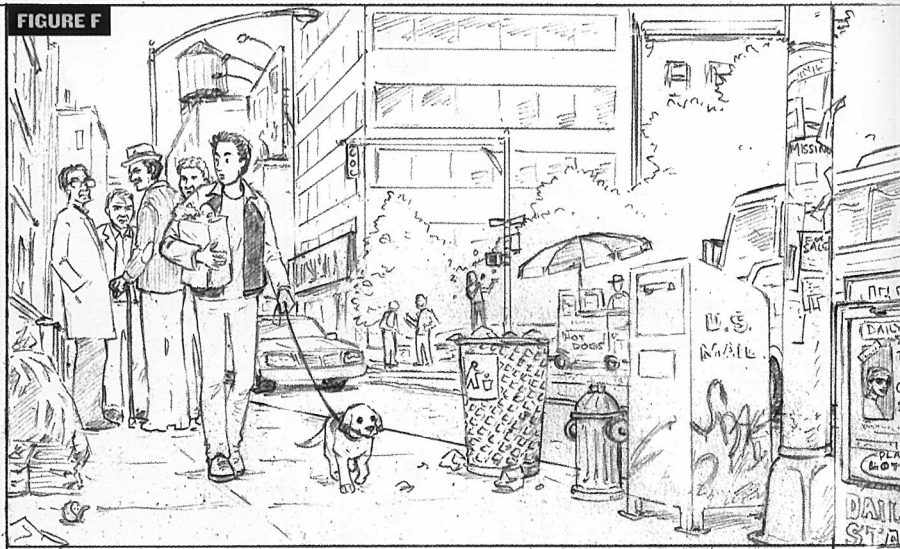
FIGURE E



GOING OVERBOARD

Details help when setting a scene, but go overboard and you shift the whole tone. **Figure F** shows what happens when there's too much going on. Not only do we feel claustrophobic, but we lose those implied and foreshadowed actions from the previous panel. Did they come from the park or were they just walking around the block? Did they just talk to that group of people huddling together behind them? Do we even notice the missing persons poster now with all those other notices on the lamppost? Are they lost?

FIGURE F



ASURETHING

Now let's apply this to comics. **Figure G** has our walker and puppy, only now it's the Thing and Lockjaw out for a walk. In the background we have some aftermath of their jaunt in the park. We have a few bystanders gawking at the pair; one has a newspaper with a little foreshadowing—looks like the Mole Man is out creating chaos as usual. The Baxter

Building is in the distant background, which tells us their day out is not over yet, leaving the reader to wonder what other mischief they can get up to? Perhaps something to do with that fire hydrant?

All these little details can add depth to your storytelling, making your big action more complete and more satisfying.



FIGHTCLUB

And now to our final fight scene (**Figure H**). The action is pretty focused on our characters; the background is doing light duty here in order to focus on the fun in the foreground. We know the Thing and Lockjaw were out having a day downtown and here now is the slightly foreshadowed capper. The atmosphere created is light, which works really well if the writer has given you a humorous script to match.

In an ideal world, every panel would have a background to help the story along, but that's not always possible with comics

and the time frames allowed to meet a deadline. Cheating happens—an artist will toss in some speed lines, puffs of smoke, a hint of lamppost or a cloud in the sky with a bird flying by—in order to avoid time-consuming backgrounds, but employed too often and so much of your story can be lost.

By choosing wisely, picking key details and establishing a well-balanced stage, your storytelling will be more complete. You look good as an artist, the writer gets a story well told and the reader gets a more valuable read. Everybody wins! **W**



Pia Guerra sets the stage for suspense and surprises with her artistic flair on titles like Y: The Last Man.

BACKGROUNDS BY PHIL JIMENEZ



A lot of artists hate drawing backgrounds. I'm not sure why. I love to draw them. I'm one of those guys known for my detailed backgrounds. When fans and editors meet me, I often hear something like, "Hey, you're the detail guy" or, "We know

you can draw backgrounds, so you've got the job."

I just love drawing chairs and buildings and people and mountains and animals. If you love to draw, why wouldn't you want to draw everything you can if given the chance? I've learned a lot just by doing the research to draw these things. And now I'm going to try and give you some tips I've picked up along the way.

GROUNDED IN REALITY

There's nothing quite so impressive as a splash page with a favorite character like Wolverine or Spider-Man, charging at us with speedlines dashing past our face and theirs. Like I said above, a lot of folks don't like to draw backgrounds. So before I get into the how of it, I'd like to touch on the why.

Backgrounds give a character context; they establish the type of world he lives in. They also give us an environment, a place for the character to interact. Thanks to backgrounds, we can imagine our character in a particular backdrop, at a particular size, with particular objects and climate. Take a look at the image of the Incredible Hulk below.

PRO TIPS

MOVIE BUFF

"Since I can't watch TV while I'm painting, I like to play a movie I've already seen, and just simply listen to it as I work. I've listened to *Jaws* about 200 times."

—Greg Horn, *Emma Frost*



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Now, take a look at him here. See what I mean? He's no longer in some Beverly Hills living room. He's surrounded by rubble and smoke and ruin—and he's raging. He is the Hulk, after all!

In both drawings, I've established an environment in which the Hulk can interact, and which gives us an idea of his size and demeanor (body language). In the living room, he's looking a little out of place—and I've drawn his body language to reflect that. But I've also drawn his body to reflect that—note his size compared to the other objects in the room. Compare that to his raging self amid the rubble above. See how when the context changes, so does he? Backgrounds help establish the world a character lives in.

MAKE REFERENCE YOUR PREFERENCE

If you're drawing the Grand Canyon or New York City, you need reference to surround you so that you know what things actually look like. My best sources for reference are magazines and books—anything with photos in it—including nature, architecture and furniture magazines, books on everything from animals to castles, and even old photographs.

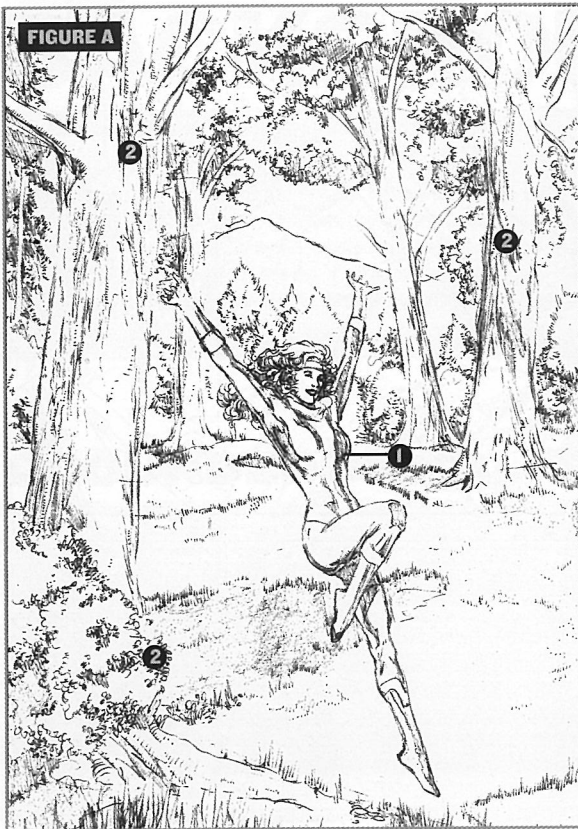


LAY IT DOWN

Below is a quick look at my process. First, I establish with a loose drawing where the character's going to be, and in what action pose, with a slight hint of the background. Then I go in and start to add the details, adding more to the background elements in front and in back of the figure, remembering not to fill in the whole background, because word balloons will help with that. Once that's established, I start filling it all in.



BACKGROUNDS

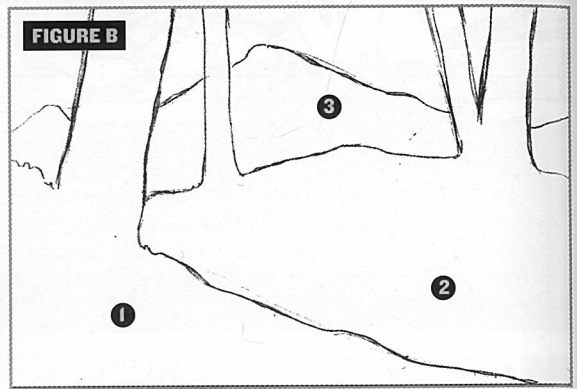


BEAN ENVIRONMENTALIST

So here comes Rogue, flying down to enjoy some peace and quiet on a sunny day in the woods. How do I establish this environment and how do I lay it all down? Glad you asked.

First, I snag the reference. I wanted a park-like forest, so I checked my magazines and books—even animal books, because they have backgrounds, too—and found the right type of trees and grass. Whether you're drawing airplanes or grassy knolls, it's all the same. Sure, the reference might be different, but the process is the same.

Then, I sketch in Rogue (**Figure A-1**) while filling in the details of the trees and shrubs around her (**Figure A-2**), keeping in mind things like light sources and shadow.



SETDESIGN

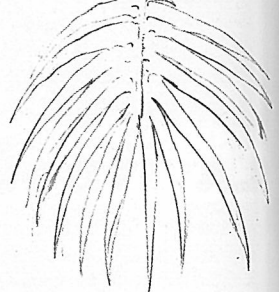
A good way to work is to think of your characters as “actors,” and the backgrounds as the “stage” or “set.” There are three parts to the “set”: the foreground, the middle ground and the background. These are the three planes of a background, and we use them to create a “room” for the character to act in.

The foreground (**Figure B-1**) is the part that’s “closest” to us, the viewers; it’s usually in our face, almost as if we were there. Our hand could reach out and touch the foreground in some cases. The middle ground (**Figure B-2**) is often the part where the character interacts, because it’s the center and focus of the panel. The background (**Figure B-3**) is the stuff waaaay in the back (although not always that far) that creates the far “wall” of the room the character’s acting in.

FIGURE C



FIGURE D



CHANGE OF SCENERY

You can draw a character in any environment, with any background, on any kind of set you want. That’s the cool part about comics. But remember: If you change anything on the set, you change the context, and the character’s behavior should change appropriately.

Check out the leaves above. They suggest different types of environment. The bushy leaves on the left (**Figure C**) suggest a drier, more foresty kind of place. The leaves on the right are from a humid South American jungle (**Figure D**).

See what happens when I draw one kind of forest and not the other (**Figure E-1**)? The whole environment changes, and Rogue’s reaction (surprise and trepidation) in **Figure E-2** changes appropriately. Your background will dictate how your character reacts within it.



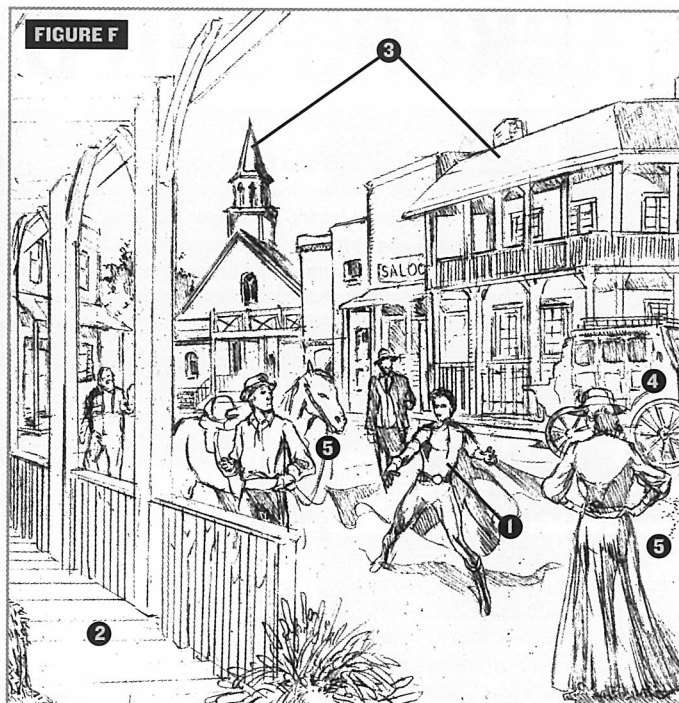
SETTING THE STAGE

Okay, say your hero was transported to the Old West in a time tunnel. How do we create the background (the environment) for him to work in?

First, we get the reference: books on the Old West, photo books and movie reviews on Western movies from the 1920s to the '90s, anything with appropriate visual reference.

Then, we lay it all in. I sketched in our hero (Figure F-1) with an appropriate shocked pose (he's from a present-day Big City, after all). I put him in the middle ground, as our focus.

Then I started to build the scene around him. A saloon's terrace (Figure F-2) is in the foreground, which helps establish where we, the viewer, are standing. Then I took several different photos and combined them to create the background (Figure F-3) (the church and hotel are from two different sources). I added a stagecoach (Figure F-4) as a prop to help add some more local "flavor." Everything in your background should feel like it belongs. And you don't need to add everything and the kitchen sink—just enough to help establish the overall environment. Finally, I added people (Figure F-5)—locals, dressed in time-appropriate attire—as the final, most important element of a background. After all, if heroes don't have other people to save and interact with, what's the point?



YOU GOTTA BELIEVE

It doesn't matter if your style is cartoony or realistic, simple or rendered. All that matters is you create a believable environment for your character to work in. That's all that's important. If it's a house from a child's fairy tale, a building in Manhattan or a futuristic cityscape, it's your job to create a believable context in which your characters can live.



THERE'S SO MUCH to say about backgrounds, and this barely scratches the surface. Just remember that they are important, comic readers like seeing them and they help your characters (your "actors") work stronger. It's the same reason actors have an easier time with real set pieces than blue screens—they can get into their parts more easily. Whatever you do, just enjoy drawing, and keep practicing...it'll come to you with practice. And don't be so quick to dump those old *National Geographic* magazines in the garbage—they're the best reference!



Phil Jimenez has taken flight as both artist and writer in books like DC's *Infinite Crisis*, *Wonder Woman* and DC/*Vertigo's Otherworld*.

BACKGROUND DETAILS BY GERHARD



Creator Dave Sim and I have covered a lot of ground in *Cerebus*; from caves to courtyards, battlefields to banks, cathedrals to slums, the moon to Jupiter and beyond. All of these are fun to draw. And while I can show you how I handle the backgrounds for *Cerebus*, everyone's style is a bit different. Hopefully I can steer you in the right direction and give you a good

starting ground. But you should definitely take advantage of your local library. Whenever I'm stuck for a period or style, whether it's castles, English taverns or whatever, I just look up what I need and familiarize myself with the different architectural whatnots. The emphasis in *Cerebus*, however, is on the characters' interactions, and people tend to stay put while interacting.

PLANNING AHEAD

For me, the keys to drawing one location for an extended period are floor plans and keeping the layout fairly simple. In "Jaka's Story" (*Cerebus* #114-#136), I had all manners of plans for Jaka's apartment (Figure A), Pud's tavern and Oscar's house. I always draw floor plans for places that we're going to be hanging around for a while, such as the apartment's living room (Figure B) and *Cerebus*' guest room (Figure C). For some rooms I even draw up more detailed sketches to add some texture and see how the rooms would look with real furniture in them. Just remember: The important thing is not to clutter things up.

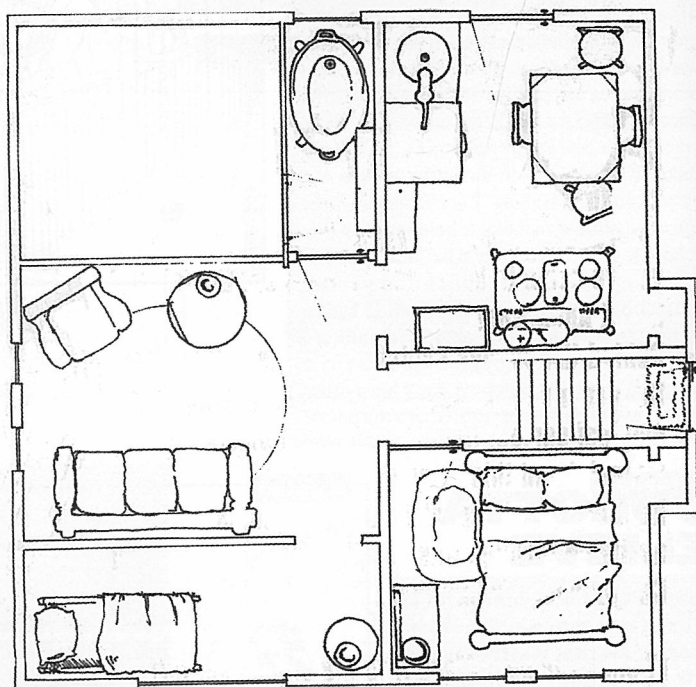


FIGURE A

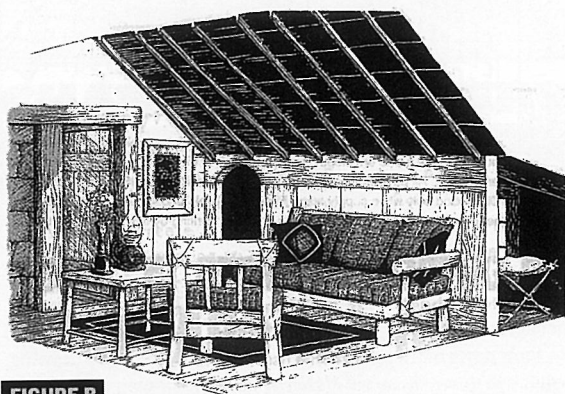


FIGURE B

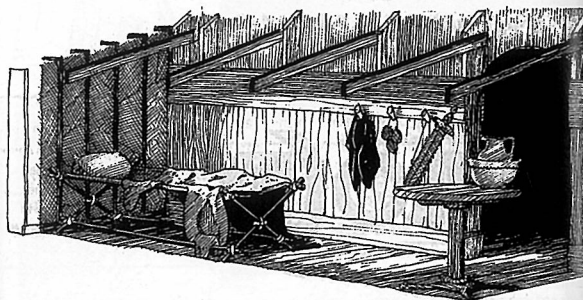
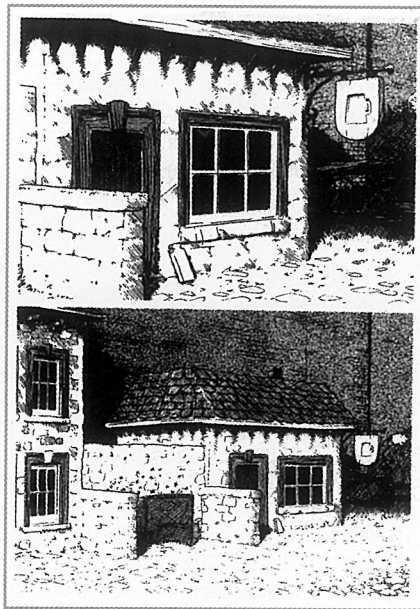


FIGURE C

ESTABLISHING THE STORY

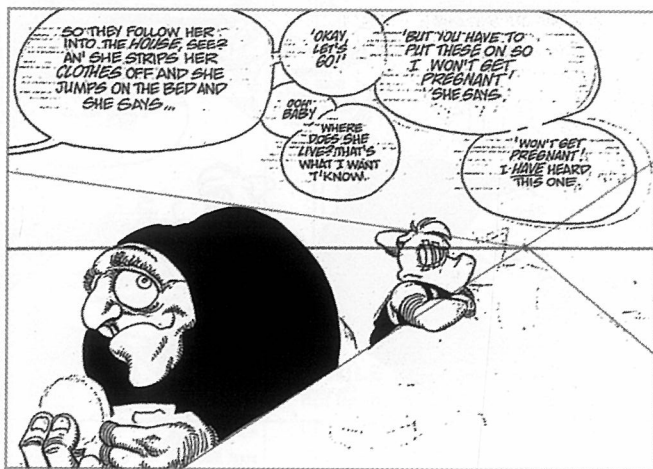
Now, the way Dave and I work on the book is by no means standard in comics. When I get a page, Dave has already laid it out, and has penciled and inked all the characters, word balloons and sound effects. My job is to put these characters in context. Lighting plays a huge part in this. What direction has Dave used for a light source? How intense is that source? How will the light affect the mood and intention of the panel? And how long until lunchtime?

In every other issue or so, there is usually something of an establishing shot. This gives a context for the smaller panels and the therefore necessarily smaller amount of visual information expressed in that panel. This establishing shot to the right sets up the feel of when and where we are. The backgrounds in the subsequent panels need only retain that feel, suggesting the same level of lighting and texture.



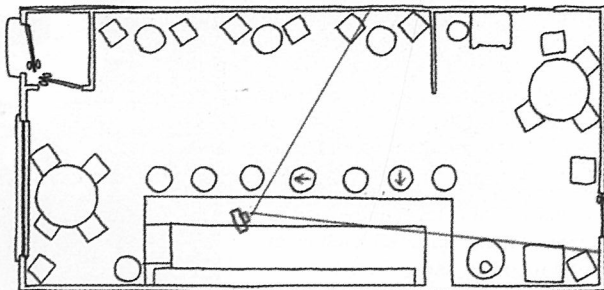
MAKING A POINT

This is a panel as Dave has left it. The jug of soda, rice cakes and edge of the bar are in pencil. For me, the first thing is to determine where the characters are and where the viewer is. So you need to find the vanishing point—the point of convergence way down the line. (It helps to think of it like looking down a set of railroad tracks. Where it looks like they converge all the way off in the distance is the vanishing point.) To position it, I need to know where the “eye level,” or the horizon line, is. In this case, it’s established by the edge of the bar and the relative sizes of the characters. Since Cerebus is roughly three feet tall, his eye level is usually pretty low. (Yeah, he tends to see under a lot of tables.) I figure Martin, the hunchbacked fellow, is about the same height, sitting there, as Cerebus is. I draw a line with a non-reproducible blue pencil from the top of the hunchback extending past Cerebus’ head, and another along the existing edge of the bar. I find the lines converge near enough to Cerebus’ eye level. This places the vanishing point just above his pitcher of soda (which appears in later versions of the panel). Now I can figure out just where I am in relation to the characters.



SAY CHEESE

On the floor plan to the right, I've indicated that Cerebus is on the second-to-last bar stool, facing the bar, and Martin is two stools over, sitting parallel to it. The panel borders can help you figure out exactly where the “camera” (or more specifically, you) is positioned and the field of view plotted. You now know just where you're sitting in the room and can determine what you'll see behind our two friends.



BACKGROUNDDETAILS

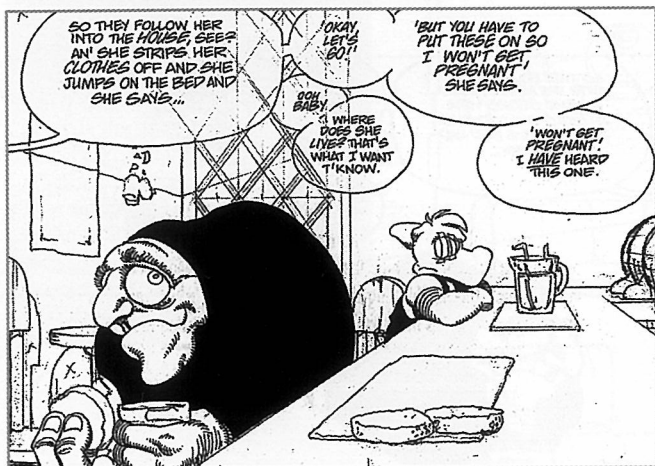
BACKTOBLACK

At this stage I determine where to spot the blacks. Large areas of solid black play an important role in drawing *Cerebus*. They add weight and emphasis to the page, as well as contrast. And contrast is key. The idea is to accentuate the characters and word balloons, while trying to add a richness of mood and setting. *Cerebus* will have a 30-percent gray tone applied to him, so he needs either solid black or solid white around him to contrast effectively. The hunchbacked fellow is wearing black, so he needs something behind him to avoid disappearing. I've placed the room divider screen in the background—as indicated on the floor plan—so as to span the width of Martin, allowing me to black in the back part of the room behind *Cerebus*, with just the back of a chair visible to bring out his black vest. I rough all of this in with a non-reproducible blue pencil. I usually complete these steps for all of the panels on the page and the facing page before proceeding with lunch.



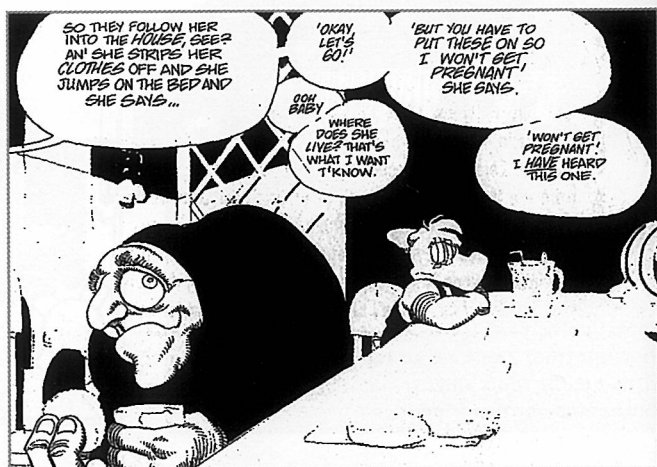
CLEANINGUP

I can now move on to tightening up the rough "blue squiggly line" stage. I do the tighter rendering with a 3H graphite pencil, a metal ruler (with a cork back for inking), sometimes an assortment of circle and ellipse templates, sometimes (yeah, right) an eraser, and always with the previous issues at hand for reference. At this point, I figure out incidental shadows and try to put in a few details without cluttering things up. If it detracts from the main images, ditch it. Occasionally I run into sound effects and have to decide (or consult Dave on) whether to fade the backgrounds around them, outline the sound effects or have them reversed to white by the printer so they're not lost in a black background.



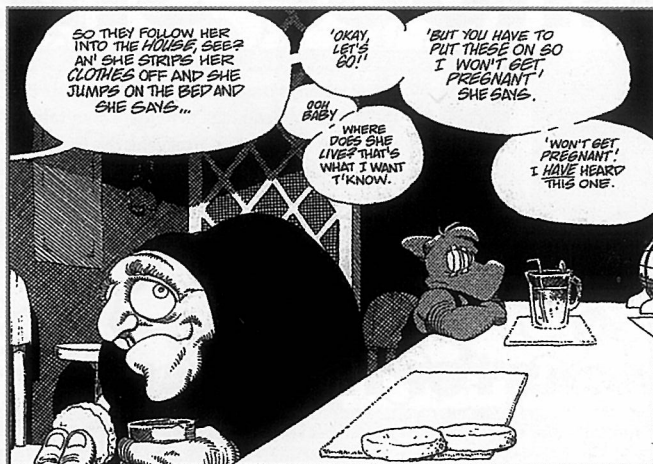
FADETOBLACK

I like to have the blacks filled in next. It gives substance to the backgrounds, giving me a better feel for the compositions (which I can still fix at this point if I'm unhappy with them), and helping me determine how much or little cross-hatching or tone I'll need to achieve the various shades I have in mind. This is usually the only time I use a technical pen, to outline the black areas. I then fill them in with brushes, going for a good, even coating of jet-black ink.



FINISHING TOUCHES

With a Hunt 102 crow quill pen, I add outlines, details and cross-hatching. I try to stay consistent with the weight and style of line Dave has used on the characters so that they blend, to a certain extent, to form a unified visual experience. The inclination in *Cerebus* has been toward characters that are more cartoony in nature, interacting with a more realistic background. This technique is known (thanks to Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*) as masking. In the *Cerebus* storyarc "Guys," however, the backgrounds have become more pliable and even delve into the realm of parody when real-world artists Rick Veitch or Eddie Campbell start hanging around. Finally, after erasing the pencil lines and cleaning up the panel borders, this page is done. It's time to move on to the next page and do it all over again.



SO THEY FOLLOW HER INTO THE HOUSE, SEE? AN' SHE STRIPS HER CLOTHES OFF AND SHE JUMPS ON THE BED AND SHE SAYS...

'OKAY, LET'S GO!'

'BUT YOU HAVE TO PUT THESE ON SO I WON'T GET PREGNANT,' SHE SAYS.

OOH BABY!

WHERE DOES SHE LIVE? THAT'S WHAT I WANT T'KNOW.

'WON'T GET PREGNANT!' I HAVE HEARD THIS ONE.



SO SHE SAYS TO THESE LOWER FELPAN GUYS, SHE SAYS, 'SAY-- DO YOU BOYS WANT TO HAVE SOME... FUN?'

'I'VE HEARD THIS ONE I THINK.'

SO THEY FOLLOW HER INTO THE HOUSE, SEE? AN' SHE STRIPS HER CLOTHES OFF AND SHE JUMPS ON THE BED AND SHE SAYS...

'OKAY, LET'S GO!'

'BUT YOU HAVE TO PUT THESE ON SO I WON'T GET PREGNANT,' SHE SAYS.

OOH BABY!

WHERE DOES SHE LIVE? THAT'S WHAT I WANT T'KNOW.

'WON'T GET PREGNANT!' I HAVE HEARD THIS ONE.'

SO THEY GO AT IT AT BOTH ENDS, SEE? AND THEY'RE JUST HAVING A GRAND OLD TIME...

DIP DIP

SO THAT'S THAT, AND SHE GOES ON HER WAY, SEE? AND THEN A COUPLA DAYS LATER...


CRUNCH

THESE LOWER FELPAN GUYS ARE BACK SITTIN' ON THEIR FRONT PORCH, SEE?

CRUNCH CRUNCH CRUNCH

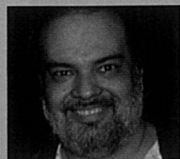
AND THE ONE TURNS TO THE OTHER AN' HE SAYS... HE SAYS...

'I DON'T CARE IF SHE GETS PREGNANT OR NOT-- I'M TAKING MINE OFF!'

WHILE A PAGE LIKE THIS may not be the most fun to draw or the most challenging artistically, I feel it's important to maintain a certain level of continuity with the background, achieving a sense of time and place. This allows the characters to move and interact within a consistent framework, much as a bass player in a band (something I also try to do) joins the drummer in providing an environment for the melodies, harmonies, rhythms and solos to flourish. Backgrounds may not be as noticeable as the main characters on a page, but you'd certainly notice if they were missing. 

Though Gerhard has drawn hundreds of backgrounds for comics such as the legendary *Cerebus*, his considerable talent certainly has emerged into the forefront of indie comics.

GROUP SHOTS BY GEORGE PÉREZ



Hi class! When *Wizard* asked me to host one of these “Basic Training” articles, I was told they had me specifically in mind for this lesson. After 30 years in this business, I knew what that meant. For better or worse, my main claim to fame is drawing

group books. Seldom happy with just getting a half-dozen characters on a page, I’m the type who likes to get as many as he can elbowing for attention. Some say I’m crazy; others say I’m insane. And they’re all correct. Now it’s time for me to pass that insanity on to you.

ACASTOFTHOUSANDS

Actually, it’s only 25. Before I start laying out a group shot, I make a list of the characters I’m going to use, so I can then check them off as I draw them. The characters are usually determined by the script, so picking and choosing is generally not an option. However, since I’m well known for my work on *Avengers* (unabashed self-promotion here!), the guys at *Wizard* figured Earth’s Mightiest Heroes would do nicely. Thus, the cast is set.

1. Beast
2. Black Knight
(on winged horse)
3. Black Panther
4. Black Widow
5. Captain America
6. Crystal
7. Falcon (with Redwing)
8. Giant-Man
9. Hawkeye
10. Hercules
11. Hulk
12. Iron Man
13. Machine Man
14. Magdalene
15. Photon
16. Quicksilver
17. Rage
18. Sandman
19. Sersi
20. Scarlet Witch
21. She-Hulk
22. Stingray
23. Thor
24. Vision
25. Wasp

GROUP DYNAMICS

First off, just as there’s no one way to draw a character, there are many ways of drawing a large group (not counting covers, which is a whole other ball game). Most of the time, that decision is dictated by the script. In my career I’ve found that group shots fall into three major categories:

THE GATHERING

In **Figure A**, the characters are usually in some large room, either talking to each other or reacting to their surroundings. (For the sake of this article, I’m skipping backgrounds altogether.) A major difference with this type of layout compared to the others is you have the option of turning characters away from the reader. In the case of characters with capes, that’s a way to avoid drawing all the detail on a character or two. Just be aware of the comparative sizes of the characters.

THE PORTRAIT

Usually requested for a splash page, this style shows the characters standing in appropriate postures as they look directly at the reader (**Figure B**). Sometimes this portrait consists merely of head shots. The layout I’ve drawn here is somewhere in between.



FIGURE A

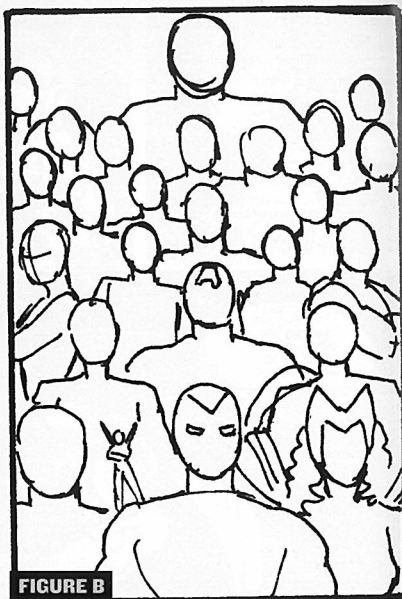


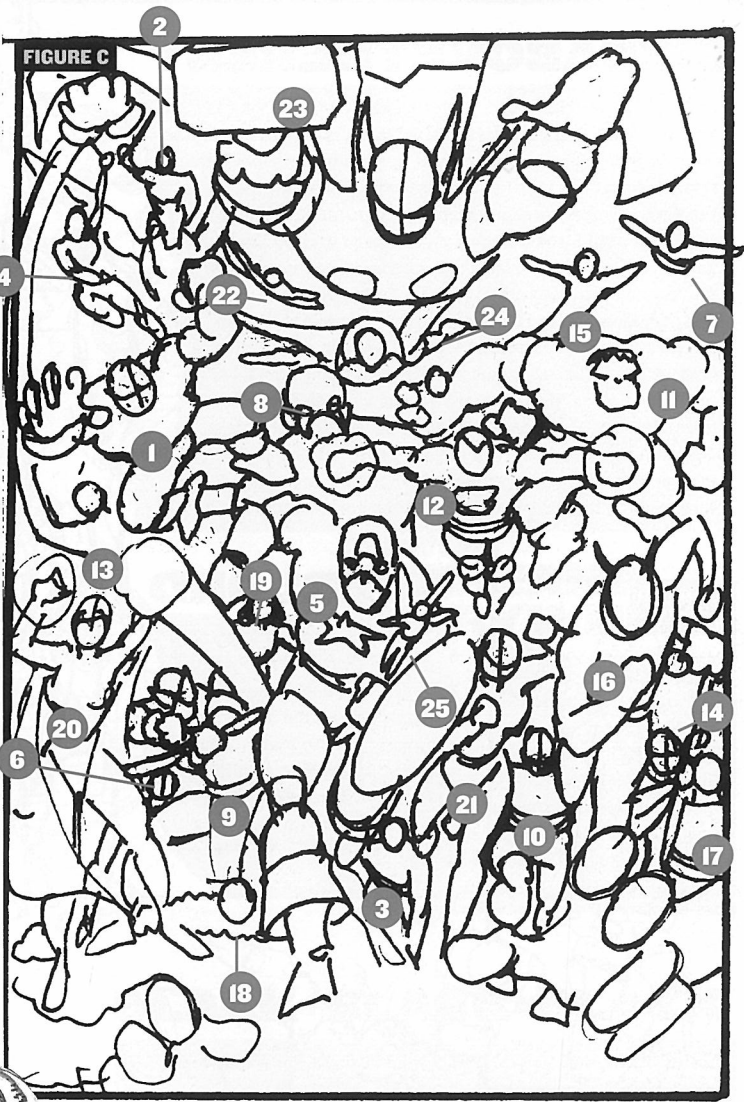
FIGURE B

THE ACTION SHOT

Figure C has got superheroes doing what they do best! They could be charging at the reader, ready for battle, while some use their powers to indicate that an enemy's just out of page range. They could be running at the reader in the same direction or be in the midst of battle with enemies all around. For the sake of this lesson (and since drawing two groups battling is a bit much for now), we'll concentrate on the "Battle Charge" because it utilizes many elements common to all the group shots.

DIRECT EFFECT

Since we read from left to right, there's a sort of bias that establishes the right as the direction of advancement. Having the characters running toward the left seems to imply retreat—unless you've already established that's where the menace is located. While the characters are running straight at the reader, I can still direct them slightly to the right through small turns in their bodies and heads.



METHOD TO THE MADNESS

Unfortunately, there's no way to give equal time to everyone in a group shot—somebody's got to man the rear. This creates a sense of depth and perspective, which is very useful if you decide not to use backgrounds. Choosing which characters will be in front is an artistic decision, which is dictated by who the characters are, what they do and how they do it. In choosing who will be emphasized, several considerations need to be made.

STARPOWER

Character positioning is often based on the popularity of certain characters or their prominence within the group. For example, few will argue Captain America's right to lead an Avengers charge. However, that doesn't necessarily mean Cap will be the absolute front-most Avenger.

GROUPSHOTS

SIZE ABOVE THE REST

As I said earlier, size relationships should always be kept in mind. Usually, larger characters are pushed farther back, while smaller ones are in the foreground. However, make sure that relationships remain clear. Let's take the two size extremes: Giant-Man and the Wasp. Notice how Giant-Man, Iron Man, Scarlet Witch and the Wasp would look standing on the same horizon line, but without any perspective lines or backgrounds to indicate how far they are from each other. Without that scale, Giant-Man and Iron Man seem to be the same height, while the Wasp appears as tall as the Scarlet Witch. Then add perspective lines, and the illusion's exposed. If we drew Giant-Man taller in the first place, though, there'd be no such illusion. So, to maintain Giant-Man's sense of height, always draw him bigger than any other character, regardless of where he is in the picture. Conversely, overlapping the tiny Wasp in front of any larger foreground character fully establishes how tiny she is.

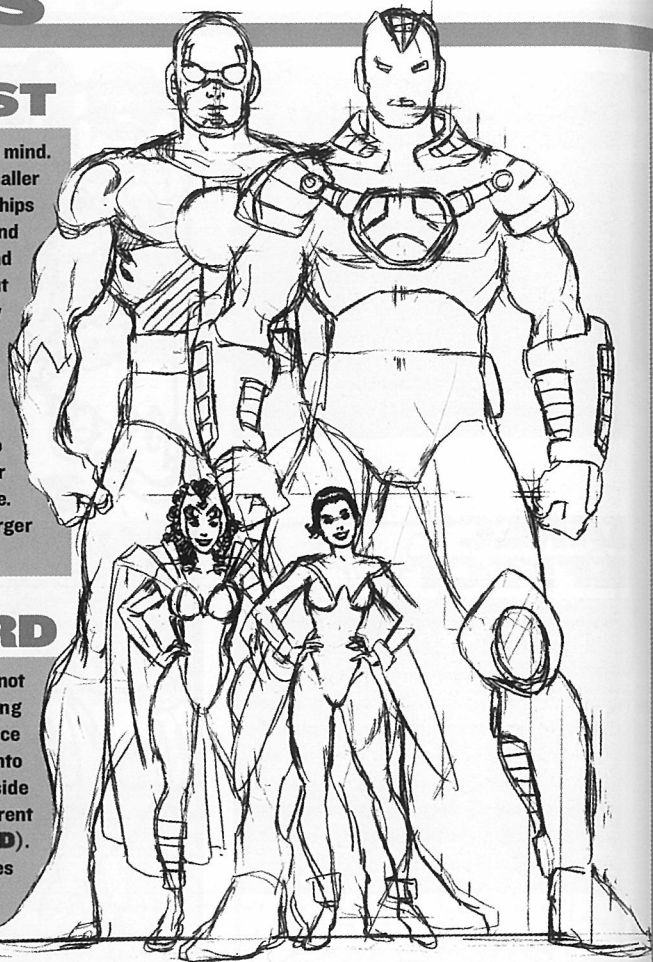
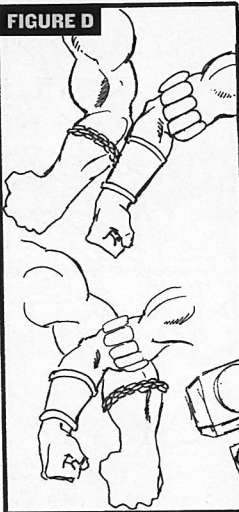


FIGURE D



OVERLORD

Speaking of overlapping, try not to have characters butting elbows with each other, since that might fool the reader into thinking they're standing side by side, rather than on different planes of depth (Figure D). Overlapping definitely solves the problem of who's in front of whom.



FREQUENT FLYERS

Since we've got a vertical space to fill, we should decide which guys and gals are on the top and who's on the bottom. (Get yer minds outta the gutter, class.) The top is easy: To be in the sky, ya gotta fly—although leaping characters like the Hulk and the Beast also fit in this category. Flying characters are useful, since they can be drawn in deep perspective, so all you really need to draw is the character's upper body. This can save quite a bit of space.

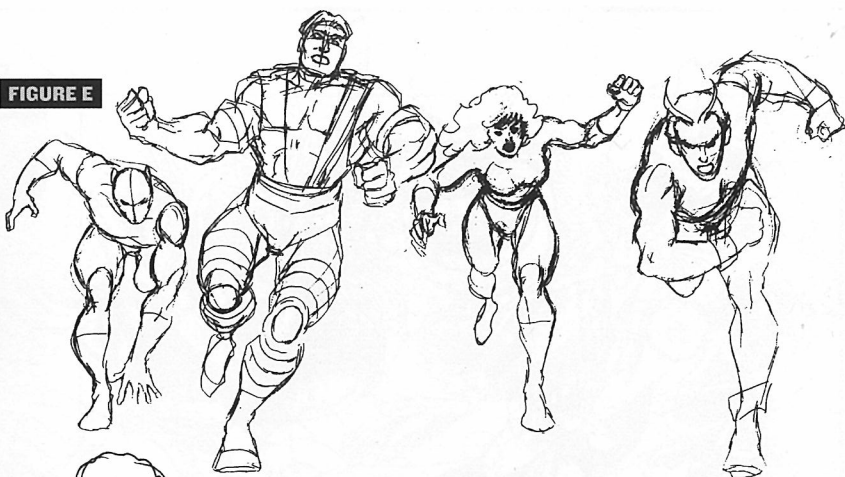
GROUND CONTROL

The lower half of the page is usually where the non-flying members are relegated.

Primarily, they're runners, but all runners aren't created equal—no two characters should run exactly the same way (**Figure E**). Speedsters like Quicksilver would seldom be at the rear of a charge, although we have to slow him down so he doesn't run out of the frame.

And not everyone needs to run. Some characters work better posing, like Hawkeye and Crystal pictured at right. It adds variety to the shot and draws the reader to their area of the page.

FIGURE E



HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE

Then there are those characters who can have it both ways. Characters with expansive abilities, like Machine Man, could actually be in many places at once just by stretching out their bodies and limbs over various points of the illustration. (Check out the finished piece on page 74 to see what I mean.)

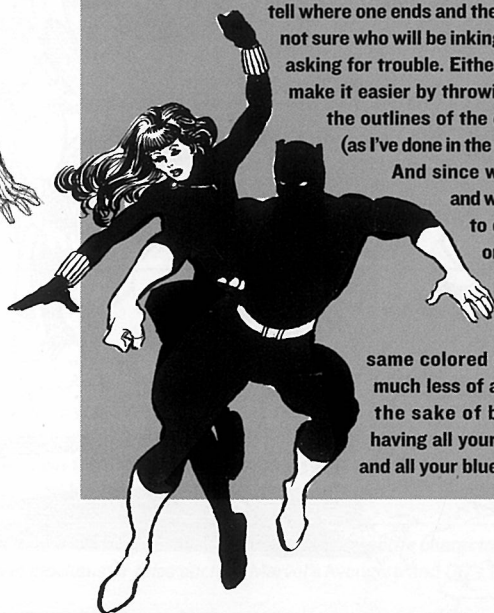
Gimmicks like this bring a sense of design and unity to a group shot.



BLACK+BLACK=BLACK

Be careful to keep characters clear. Drawing two black-suited characters overlapping each other makes it hard to tell where one ends and the other begins. If you're not sure who will be inking the piece, you may be asking for trouble. Either avoid the problem or make it easier by throwing some highlights on the outlines of the conflicting characters (as I've done in the example to the far left).

And since we're drawing in black and white, pencilers often fail to consider color's effect on a group shot. Thanks to modern coloring techniques, placing characters with the same colored costumes together is much less of a worry. (Although, for the sake of balance, try to avoid having all your red guys in one place and all your blues in another.)



GROUPSHOTS




AVENGERS ASSEMBLED

On the finished piece at left, you can see many of the principles I outlined earlier. However, with so many characters doing so many things, even an old pro like myself still makes mistakes. The important thing is to keep the piece interesting and dynamic. For that to work, composing a group shot should be an organic process, with the picture changing as you go along to take care of problems you didn't consider in your original thumbnail sketch. Some examples:

- a) I moved Cap's shield closer into his body and made him run straight toward the reader (a change from the original image). This allowed more of She-Hulk to be seen.
- b) I changed Sandman's left hand to a fist because the open hand looked too much like the Hulk's. I also "pulverized" Sandman's other hand (bottom left) so as not to distract from the Scarlet Witch.
- c) I changed Hawkeye's bow to a vertical position so I wouldn't block Crystal.
- d) I added a stinger blast effect for the Wasp to throw something at the reader. A blast from a larger character would obscure too much of the drawing.
- e) I removed the energy effects on Iron Man's fists so that Giant-Man's face is clear.
- f) I changed the Falcon's posture so it wouldn't look the same as that of the Vision and Stingray.
- g) I added Redwing (the Falcon's falcon) because I didn't know where I'd put him until the drawing was finished.
- h) I changed Black Widow so that she could be holding on to Machine Man's arm.
- i) Because of the immense amount of space the Black Knight and his winged horse would take, he had to be put far into the rear. Now he looks about the same size as the Wasp, but all the overlapping of characters keeps the size ratio clear.
- j) In the "peekaboo" spots, areas where I'm basically just trying to fit parts of characters in when there's no room for full figures, I try to use characters who can be identified even without their full costumes being revealed. In the case of Sersi, I used her glowing eyes to easily identify her.



WELL, there you have it. Those are just a few notes on how I do group shots—your mileage may vary. There is one thing I didn't mention yet, however. As I said, *Wizard* only asked me to put together a primer on drawing a group shot, not a group cover. Imagine having to do this—and leaving room for the logo and UPC box? The padded room awaits! 

George Pérez's amazing ability to spotlight all our favorite characters on a page at once can be seen in blockbuster titles such as Marvel's Avengers and DC's The New Teen Titans.

GROUP DYNAMICS

BY CHEUNG, LARROCA, PORTER & SMITH

When a superhero is facing down a world-destroying threat that just can't be taken down solo, it's handy to have a group of allies around. However, it can be a little tougher on the artist who has to draw that many characters without making any of them boring or static. The need for quality storytelling doesn't lessen with each extra

character—if anything, it increases. There's more to drawing compelling group shots than cramming all the characters into every panel. Where does everyone stand? How do you handle action with so many fighters? Paul Smith, Howard Porter, Salvador Larroca and Jim Cheung are ready to instruct you on the best ways to work with groups without zooming waaaaay out.



▲ **BEEHAVING BADLY** In this group shot from *Leave It To Chance* #12, Paul Smith surrounds his protagonists with an arc of angry insect warriors.



▲ **BUST A MOVE** In *Fantastic Four* #507, Howard Porter uses the team's lunge through a portal to show movement and action.

GETTING IN SHAPE

"Groups will generally form a mass. In what shape does that mass best serve the story? Wedge for piercing, circle for regrouping, arc to surround, line to oppose (line in the sand) or accept (lining up). How do your characters—by personality, powers and body type; preferably in that order—build that shape according to its function? The dynamics change by story more than numbers. Yes, numbers are better for omnidirectional force and singles for precision—think woofers vs. tweeters—but 10 can be as static as one, and one can be as forceful as 1,000." ■ Paul Smith, (*Leave It To Chance*, *Uncanny X-Men*)

SENSE OF MOTION

"I try to vary the character poses a lot and not reuse stock/cliché poses as much as possible. For example, you would never see Batman out in front of the group flexing his muscles and smiling; he would usually be in the darkest part of the scene scowling and covered up by his cape. Also, wherever I can imply a sense of motion in the shot, I will and I try to stay away from the standing around and posing shots as much as possible. Most definitely, the group shot should be the exclamation point at the end of your sentence. It should have a huge impact and make the hair on your arms stand on end when you turn the page and see it."

■ Howard Porter (*Flash*, *JLA*)

PAGEFLOW

"I try to design my shots around the flow of the page. I believe in trying to lead the eye through the page and attempt to do it as best I can through the layout of the page. Single character shots will always be a little easier since there's less confusion and activity going on. With group shots, you have

to worry about the prominence of each character and an abundance of limbs. It can be quite a challenge managing all the chaos, but that's also the fun of it when you work it out. Essentially, though, the approach is the same." ■ Jim Cheung (*Scion, Young Avengers*)



▲ **INCOMING** Jim Cheung's team splash in *Young Avengers* #1 crashes through the panel flow and hits you with impact.



▲ **FOUR-MIDABLE** Even with a large group shot in *X-Men* #177, Salvador Larroca sticks to his "rule of four," drawing the main group of four X-Men with two lingering in the background.

PROFAN

"[When it comes to group shots] certain artists come to mind immediately. George Pérez is a master at this; he pretty much defined how to draw a huge group scene. Alex Ross is second to none at conveying characters' personalities, and almost any book he has done has had a breathtaking shot of a group of heroes. And most recently would be Phil Jimenez in the huge DC crossover *Infinite Crisis*; he definitely can draw and seems like he is saying, 'Is that all the characters you want me to put in the panel? Well, I will give you more!'" ■ Howard Porter (*Flash, JLA*)



SUPREME TEAMS

In *Avengers* #6, Howard Porter's favorite group artist, George Pérez, orchestrates a refreshing angle as the Squadron Supreme confronts the Avengers.

ONEVS.MANY

"When you draw a character alone, you have to try for the most impressive [shot] possible, but with more characters you need to handle different compositions. To me, I prefer several characters—not too many! Maybe four is a good number without it looking too overloaded.

"[Poses] should be balanced. You can't draw all the characters doing the same action pose. Body language is very important in order to make you feel the characters in the right way. Not all characters move in the same way; they have different personalities." ■ Salvador Larroca (*Fantastic Four, X-Men*) **W**

Talk about team players. Howard Porter handled the *Justice League*, Salvador Larroca and Paul Smith both examined the *X-Men* and Jim Cheung allied himself with the *Young Avengers*.

SHADOWS

BY JIM CALAFIORE

Comics are black and white. No, I'm not just talking about independents published without the benefit of the four-color process. All comics are black and white. That's where they begin and, in a sense, end. Colorists complete and enhance the artwork, not finish it. If a page can't stand on its own in black and white, then the penciler

and inker haven't done their jobs. That's what makes working with shadows so critical.

The interplay of black areas with each other and how they compose against the white can convey setting, action, mood and, hopefully, clarity. With that said, I'm here to show you how best to work with shadows. So hit the lights and grab a pencil...



FIGURE A

DARKNESS FALLS

Let's start with an extreme. Here we have Thor in a series of panels surrounded by black or engulfed in shadow. I've handled the interaction three different ways. Now, not one of these is the "right" way. Use whatever fits the situation and your style.

Figure A leaves a halo of white completely around the hero. It clearly separates Thor from the black and doesn't let it interfere with the strength of his outline.



FIGURE B

In **Figure B**, I've let the black in a little more, filling it up to his outline. But to preserve his form, I've put a white halo on the interior of his outline. While he's now more connected to the shadow, he's still distinct from it.



FIGURE C

The last option, **Figure C**, allows the normal shading of the figure to run into the black around him. Now he's deeper in that shadow, almost swimming in it.



FIGURE D



FIGURE E



FIGURE F

SHADOWPLAY

The use of shadows can also further storytelling and convey mood.

In **Figure D**, we have a man obviously in a room somewhere—we see the wall behind him and part of a door but little else in the way of information.

In **Figure E**, I pick a light source—a window off-panel—and cast the rest of the room in black shadow. Instant mood. Note how there's no halo separating the figure from the shadow. It pulls him into the panel, connecting him directly with the mood of the room.

Lastly in **Figure F**, without changing the shot at all, I've added a single element to the shadow and placed him in a very specific setting.

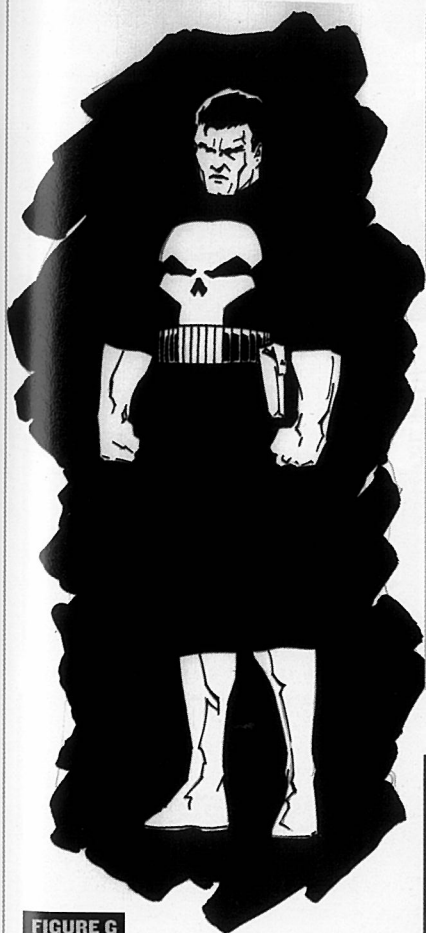


FIGURE G

BLACKHOLES

Don't worry that allowing blacks to run together will hurt clarity (**Figure G**). Sure, our eyes tell our brain that they can't see the Punisher's arms and legs. (Don't worry, Frank fans, they're still there.) But we've seen the human form before, so our brain compensates with that data when translating the information. In other words, it completes the "lines" for us and we can almost see the rest of the Punisher.

A quick note: When deciding whether or not to use heavy shadow and extensive blacks, keep your character in mind. For instance, unless the specific story called for it, I wouldn't use much black with Superman. In fact, given the chance, I would use no shadow at all with him, relying more on the white space and detail to fill his world. He's a positive character who lives in a brightly colored world.

PRO TIPS

HANDS UP

"It took me years to get to the point where I could draw hands believably. I got past it by forcing myself to draw them more frequently, concentrating on hands visually within the story I was drawing—but now I've got a problem with feet!"

—Tony Harris, *Ex Machina*



BACKINBLACK

With a dark-costumed character like Black Panther, on the other hand, there's a lot of interplay with the black areas within the figure itself. In these cases I like to let the shadowed/black areas run together, skirting confusion of the image. If he had a chest emblem, like Daredevil, I'd surround it with black so that it pops out like a beacon.

I've left the underside of the cape mostly open here for the purpose of demonstration. This isn't the best way to handle it, relying too much on cover to complete the image. With the examples at right, I've filled completely the underside of the cape with black.



FIGURE H



FIGURE I

In **Figure H**, I didn't change the shading on the arm. While it's still legible, it doesn't quite work. It's too connected to the cape and is almost sucked back into it.

In **Figure I**, I've added a few highlight areas to the arm. These halos allow the arm to pop and come forward more. Also helping this effect is the drop shadow from the cape onto the arms. Shadows cast from objects can increase a drawing's three-dimensional effect. The heavy shadow across the forearm makes it feel like the arm is emerging from deeper recesses of the cape.



AHULKING SHADOW

Easily recognizable silhouettes can substitute for the characters in any number of ways. The Hulk's shadow, for instance, carries almost as much weight as he does. This poor guy is practically beaten down by it. Surrounded by so much absolute black, I haven't placed too much heavy shadow within the figure, but what there is of it bleeds into the black of the Hulk's shadow, keeping this unlucky fellow firmly pinned against that wall.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Okay, let's put these techniques to practical use. Here's Wolverine in not too good of a situation. Having been through some sort of tussle, and apparently unaware of Sabretooth's presence, he's paused in front of a chain-link fence. Not much of an obstacle for Wolverine, but as a visual element it cages him, heightening the tension. To intensify that, I let the shadow of the fence fall across him. The cage now affects him "physically."

Also, I've kept almost all of Wolvie's shading from running into the black background so he remains separate from it, and more in the foreground. (To do that, I used internal halos here, just as I did in the "B" Thor figure from the first section of this column.)

In contrast, all of Sabretooth's blacks, including the dark areas of his costume, merge with the background, connecting him to it. (Yep, this time I went with the shading technique seen in the "C" Thor figure from the first section.) We get the effect of him emerging menacingly from the shadows. Could Sabretooth really sneak up on Wolverine? 'Course not, but it makes for a cool image.



PRO TIPS

COVER STORY

"I generally try to keep the action on my covers moving left to right. That's how most people read, and the eye is trained to move in that direction." —Joe Quesada,

Daredevil: Father

AND THAT'S ABOUT IT. Of course, shadows can also hide some shortcomings, like the fact that I can't draw a decent self-portrait. That's me to the right. No, really! Thanks for reading and beware the shadows.



SILHOUETTES

BY EDUARDO RISSO



Silhouettes are legitimate tools when you're creating a comic book. For those about to start drawing, it's important first and foremost to do a good job working on the character or thing the silhouette will represent *before* actually transforming it into a silhouette. This may sound naive, but I have seen many

artists make this same huge mistake—drawing the outline of a figure without knowing what was originally going to be there in the first place—and so they fail in the end.

When I first started to draw I thought that silhouettes had a limited use; however, as time went by, I soon discovered that I could break those limits.

LIFESAVER

I began using silhouettes when publishing deadlines started to overwhelm me, and I was running out of time. I didn't want the quality of the work to decay, so I needed to use silhouettes as black spots to achieve an established feel, but without abusing them too

much. Knowing that the majority of the readers love and appreciate the details in the drawings, I had to sharpen my wits if I was going to scale them back. **Figures A** and **B** show how silhouettes bring the panel to life without sacrificing too much detail.



NIGHTANDDAY

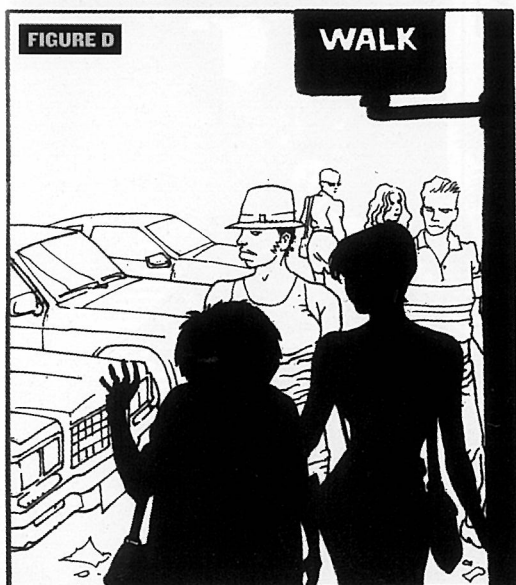
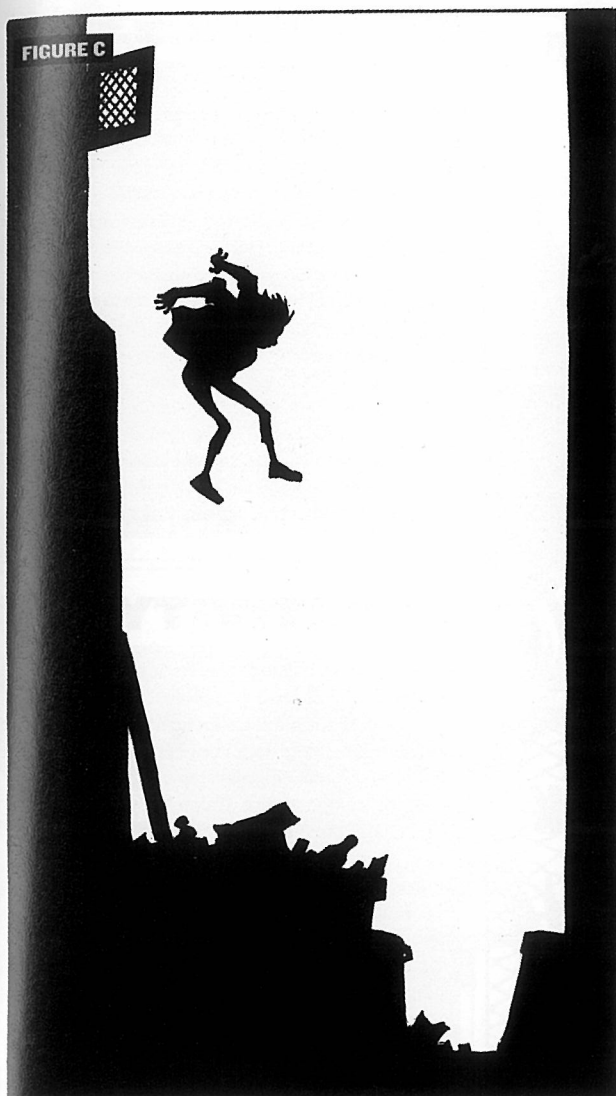
The correct use of silhouettes can help in many situations; for example, in an already established night shot (**Figure C**). They're fast to do, and night shots aren't too detailed to begin with. Also, silhouette panels don't confuse or distract the readers when they're following a sequence. With good composition and proper lighting, a dark silhouette panel can solve your problems and deliver the right message.

But it isn't always nighttime in comic books. In daytime scenes, things get more complicated. But then again, what is the sun if not a powerful light source? In strong daylight, anything and everything casts shadows! In **Figure D**, for example, I can play with silhouettes in total daylight, dropping some kind of solid shade on some characters. Here, the characters are in silhouette because of a shadow cast on them by buildings which line the street that they're crossing. In this way, I can make the readers pay attention to important story elements.

PRO TIPS

EGO TRIPPING

"Put your ego in check. Try to be realistic about yourself: You're not as good as you think you are—but nobody ever is. I've been in the business for 20 years and I still have things to learn." —Mark Bagley, *Ultimate Spider-Man*



SILHOUETTES

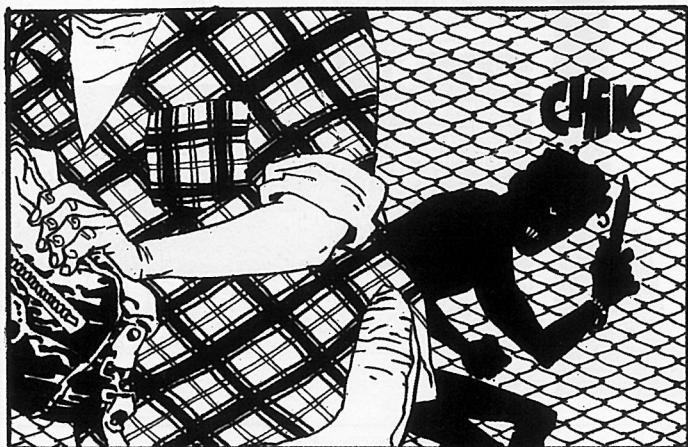
FRAMEJOB

Something that always worries me is how to accurately separate the background from the foreground. If you can find the right frame, I think you can obtain satisfactory results from silhouettes. You can also make facial gestures stronger through silhouetting. Take a look at **Figure E**. Again taking advantage of the shadows of buildings falling on the characters, I've covered the secondary character with them. I'm not concerned about this character, except for his changing facial expressions in the final outcome of the sequence. Meanwhile, I could have chosen to silhouette the main character and the result would not have changed all that much, but I wanted to emphasize her innocent attitude. Leaving her visible while placing the secondary character in silhouette was the way to go.

NEGATIVITY

Figure F is a good choice for a negative silhouette, because it enables you to show restraint. In this panel, silhouettes allowed me to enter inside the dark atmosphere where the action was happening, developing an alternative way to compose the frame. I was able to emphasize the characteristics of the character in the background without losing the sexy movements of the one in the foreground.

Remember, you want to use silhouettes like this in a moment where it's relevant to what's going on in the story. It's possible to play with certain details that suggest things more than showing them, without losing the focus of what really matters inside the panel. One can fall in the temptation to just change the color of the silhouette.



THEBIGPICTURE

The constant search to make my work the best it can be eventually led me to the massive use of silhouettes in the same panel (**Figure G**). At the right moment in the story (as always!), I discovered that using all of these silhouettes could heighten the impact of the main character without losing their personalities. Just remember, readers still have to be able to recognize the individual characters within the mass of silhouettes; you can do this through a good choice of clothes, color of hair, accessories from daily life, etc. These kinds of things also help separate one plane of the drawing from another.

FIGURE G



FIGURE H



FADEOUT

Choosing how to approach a drawing, panel or page is never easy, but I want to leave you with this example (**Figure H**). I chose it not just as a matter of taste in terms of its composition and use of silhouette, but because it's one of the few illustrations I conceived of for use as a comic book cover. Normally I leave this job to those who really know how to do it—my job is, was and always will be, trying to narrate stories in a graphic way—but this shows that each of us can go beyond our personal limits. Good luck going beyond yours!



Hailing from Argentina, Eduardo Riso uses his full arsenal of artistic talents in the pages of DC/Vertigo's 100 Bullets.

PRO TIPS

'FESS UP

"Don't pass the buck to anyone. I hear horror stories all the time about guys lying about when they can get something done, then failing; it simply closes the editor's door to them. Be honest and take your lumps if need be, but let people know your word means something." —John

Cassaday, Astonishing X-Men

NEGATIVE SPACE

BY GREG HORN



Hi everyone. I'm Greg Horn. Before I developed my painting techniques, I penciled for many years, and this provided a great basic knowledge of design and composition I would later use on my color illustrations. Today, we're going to study a few of the concepts behind negative space. What's that? Well,

it's not the place where Annihilus holds his house parties! Negative space is a powerful tool of the artist, and in this lesson, I'm going to reveal a few of its secrets. With proper designing of your negative spaces, you can achieve better balance of composition and a greater sense of chiaroscuro's light and dark elements.

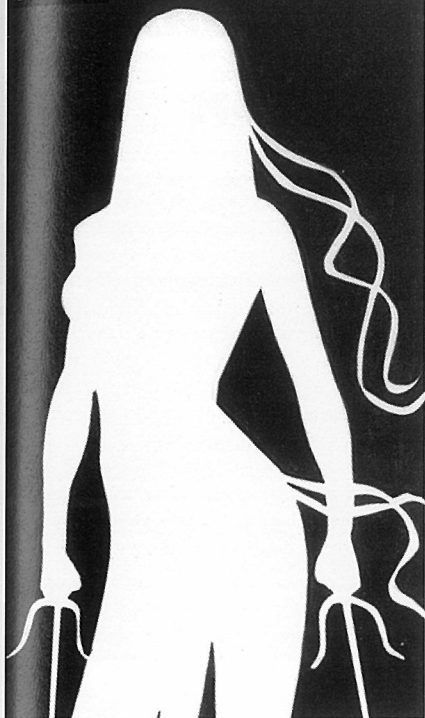
POSITIVELY NEGATIVE

This first drawing to the right is a good example of the techniques. Here, the black shapes I used to design the negative space are visually describing the curve of the woman's hip, waist and back without using any outline work. The solid black tattoos on her legs conform to the roundness of her lovely appendages, giving the illusion of depth and foreshortening by themselves.



The most important aspect of a negative space illustration is the planning of the composition before you even start drawing. It's a good idea to consider beforehand where the black and white areas are going to be placed in the negative and positive spaces. Without a proper balance of these areas, the scene can become hard to decipher, like this example to the left.

FIGURE A



YOU'RE SURROUNDED

Negative space is the term used to describe the areas surrounding the main subject. And the area that the main subject occupies is called (you guessed it) positive space. Above, this simple image of Elektra (**Figure A**) was created by filling in only the negative space areas around her with black. In essence, this is a drawing of Elektra made by actually not drawing her at all.

I must admit, an all-black background is pretty damn lame, isn't it? So the next step is to break up the background by spotting black areas in the negative space that correspond with the spotting of the white areas in the positive space.

FIGURE B

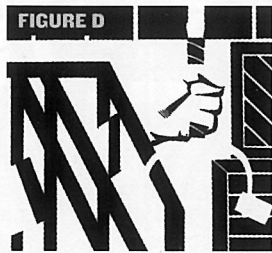
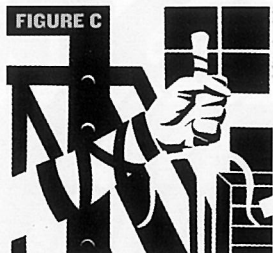


SEESPOTRUN

In real life, there are no outlines, and omitting them from your art can add a graphic realism to your scenes. Invisible lines depend on carefully designed "black spotting" to work correctly.

Spotting black areas refers to the technique of carefully placing black areas in your artwork to strengthen the composition—these black areas can occupy negative or positive space. If you combine the concepts behind spotting blacks with negative space drawing, you get an illustration like **Figure B**. Notice how I have spotted the black areas in the negative space, so that they correspond with adjacent white areas in the positive space and vice versa—there are enough black areas edging her cap to show the shape clearly without an outline, creating an "invisible line" there. Invisible lines are also created inside the positive space of this drawing—the outline of her right wrist is not drawn here, but it is implied by the edges of her wristbands and hair.

NEGATIVE SPACE



IN INVISIBILITY WE TRUST

In the drawing to the left (**Figure C**), there is no outline to represent Elektra's arm, but the spotting of black areas in the negative space clearly shows the edges of the positive space for the reader. I have trust that readers will decipher these unseen lines in their mind's eye. Additionally, the black shapes representing her armbands are curved to give the illusion of volume to her arm.

GOING OFF ON TANGENTS

In line drawings, tangencies really suck, but in a drawing with invisible lines, tangents are 100 times more damaging to the clarity of your scene. Tangency is the term used to describe the confusing effect of line work from different elements in your scene intersecting inadvertently. This effect is compounded if the lines are going in the same direction. Check out this worst-case scenario (**Figure D**). It's practically the same panel as the one to the left, except the diagonal shapes of the background intersect with Elektra's armbands and the hilt of her sai intersects with the window frame. Additionally, the blade doesn't fall over a black negative space and now you've got a black-and-white Picasso, except nobody'll give you any money for it. If you plan your negative space in the layout phase, you can avoid these nasty problems.

TAKING IT UP ANOTCH

Once you understand all the pitfalls of negative space, you can design more complicated compositions. In this drawing, I've gone a step further by spotting grays using parallel lines as a gray tone. Notice how an invisible line is created where the gray tone on her cheek shows the tip of her finger.



PRO TIPS

UNDERGROUND ART

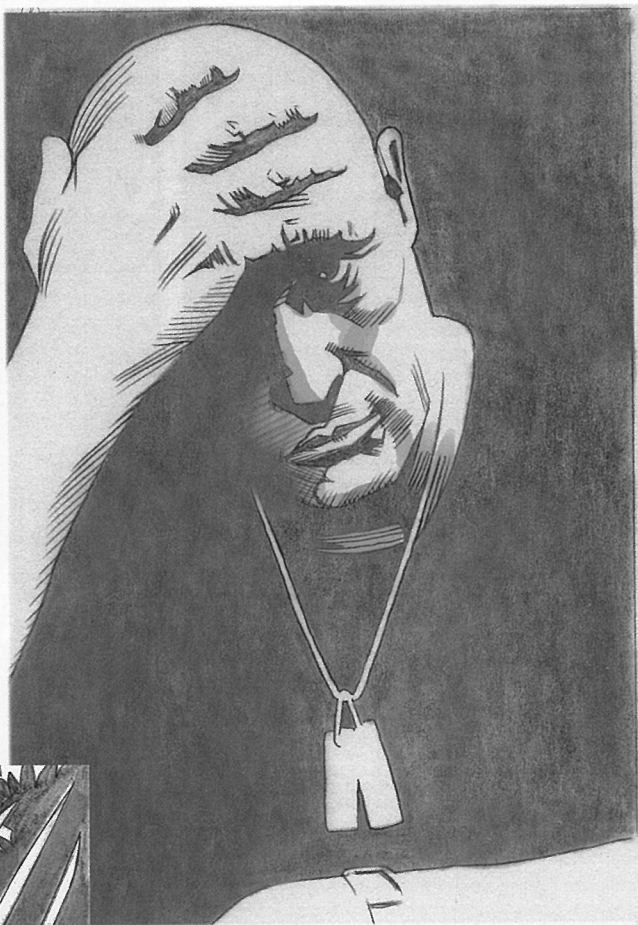
"The subway in New York City is the most inspiring place to work. I laid out my issues on the N train for years."

—Alex Maleev, *Daredevil*

CHIAROSCURO, BABY

The Renaissance masters developed the powerful technique of chiaroscuro in the 14th century to give their paintings realism, mood and atmosphere, and it worked out okay, I guess, if you go for that Rembrandt junk...The basic term referred to an artist using light and shade to depict a three-dimensional space. Today the concept lives on under many different names in art and film, but the idea remains the same. In comics, the guys from Gaijin Studios have done a lot of great work using these concepts, and, of course, *Hellboy* is an awesome example of the mood that can be conjured with light and dark.

A great example of film chiaroscuro is the ending scenes of "Apocalypse Now," where there is a whacked-out meeting between Marlon Brando and Martin Sheen. Their faces are half-hidden in shadow, and the light and darkness seem to mimic the struggle of the characters against each other. The lighting and the overall approach to this film really made an impression on me and changed the way I approach art. I remember drawing panels of my comic book characters with the exact lighting from the movie.

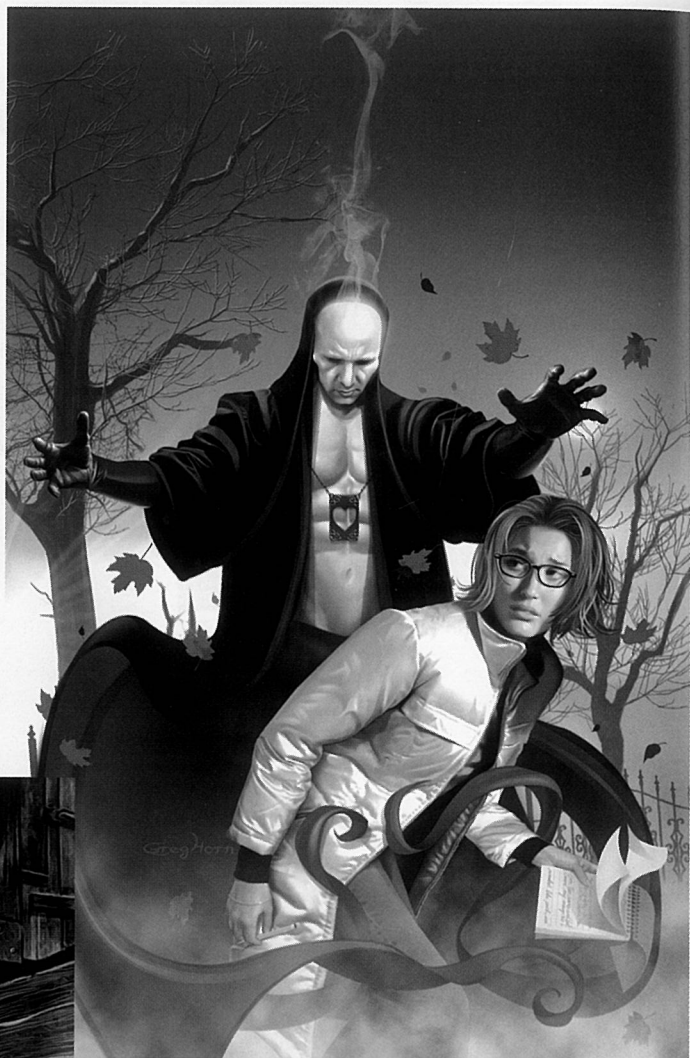


SOURCES OF BLACK

To me chiaroscuro is a state of mind at all phases of the artwork. Even in the most basic layouts, I'm thinking about where the light sources will be and how the shadows are going to affect the scene's coherency. At the same time, I consider the placement of dark and bright objects and silhouettes. For instance, the picture of Wolverine to the left obviously has black areas representing shadows, but there are also other black areas representing a silhouette (the tree leaves) and another black area representing a dark-colored object (his head gear). There are many different sources of black, and all of them must be taken into account for the design to work.

USING THESE CONCEPTS IN COLOR

All the concepts discussed over the preceding pages can be translated directly from black and white to full-color paintings. To the right is Kat Farrell and the Judge from *Deadline*. First, I used the ideas of chiaroscuro in this painting by planning for the darker areas to fall next to light areas. This attention to the design allowed me to cover the bottom third of the scene in fog and still retain clarity of the image. The spotting of black areas lent the scene some strength and legibility—note how the black cuffs of Kat's sweater helped me separate her hands from the jacket and her white note pad was planned beforehand to fall over a black area for contrast. As for the negative space, it was designed to be mostly white to mid-tone around the Judge (whose edges are mostly black) and darker where the fog covers. All of these things allowed me to make a clearly defined painting with minimal outline work or invisible lines.



This *Black Widow* #1 cover to the left is designed using the same principles, except I put more emphasis on highlighting since her outfit is dark and the background is also dark. My other alternative was to brighten the negative space around her, but that might have ruined the mood of the scene.

WELL, that was fun. I work solely as a painter these days, and it is always enjoyable to go back to my penciling roots for a time. I feel very fortunate for all the basics I learned through penciling. Without the skills I learned in black and white, my painting skills would have never developed to be what they are today!



Greg Horn's work can be found on the covers of Marvel's *Emma Frost* and *Mystique*, and be sure to check out his book from Image Comics, *The Art of Greg Horn*.

HOW I DO SOUND EFFECTS



BUT MORE THAN THAT, I LIKE TO FOOL AROUND WITH SOUND EFFECTS.

THEY CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE IN THAT COMIC BOOK YOU'RE WORKING ON...

...BECAUSE THEY CAN REALLY ENHANCE THE IMMEDIACY OF THE STORY FOR YOUR READER.

MISS SOUND EFFECTS

...BUT FIRST, LET ME TAKE YOU ON A LITTLE TOUR THROUGH SOUND!

REMEMBER...

...COMICS ARE A HYBRID MEDIUM, A UNIQUE COMBINATION OF WORDS AND PICTURES...

...WHERE THE PICTURES AMPLIFY AND AUGMENT THE WORDS (OR VICE VERSA!)...

...AND THE WORDS ACTUALLY CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMPOSITION OF THE DRAWING ITSELF.

HEV! OVER HERE, PAL.

I'LL SHOW YOU HOW...

SMACK!

...WHERE THE PICTURES AMPLIFY AND AUGMENT THE WORDS (OR VICE VERSA!)...

...AND THE WORDS ACTUALLY CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMPOSITION OF THE DRAWING ITSELF.

FLOAT! LIFT!

SO SOUND EFFECTS CARRY A DOUBLE LOAD. THEY NOT ONLY HAVE TO CREATE A PHONETIC INTERPRETATION OF WHATEVER SOUND YOU NEED...

...LIKE THIS...

...BUT THEY BECOME AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE PICTURE ITSELF.

LIKE THIS!

BLAM!

SO SOUND EFFECTS CARRY A DOUBLE LOAD. THEY NOT ONLY HAVE TO CREATE A PHONETIC INTERPRETATION OF WHATEVER SOUND YOU NEED...

...LIKE THIS...

...BUT THEY BECOME AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE PICTURE ITSELF.

LIKE THIS!

GERR!

SO SOUND EFFECTS CARRY A DOUBLE LOAD. THEY NOT ONLY HAVE TO CREATE A PHONETIC INTERPRETATION OF WHATEVER SOUND YOU NEED...

...LIKE THIS...

...BUT THEY BECOME AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE PICTURE ITSELF.

LIKE THIS!

BLAM!

© WALTER SIMONSON. ALL CHARACTERS™ & © THEIR RESPECTIVE OWNERS.

SOUNDEFFECTS

IN THEIR BEST INCARNATIONS, SOUND EFFECTS ARE ACTUALLY A VISUALIZATION OF THE SOUNDS WITHIN THE SCENE YOU'RE READING.

SO WHERE DO SOUND EFFECTS COME FROM?

THEY REALLY DERIVE FROM TWO SOURCES... CALLIGRAPHY, OR HAND LETTERING...

...AND TYPOGRAPHY, THE PRINTER'S ART...

...AND THEY CAN CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR STORY IN VERY DIFFERENT WAYS.

**BOOMBOOMBOOM
PUNNEL PUNNEL BANG
CLAW!**

SOME ARTISTS LIKE VAUGHN BODE WENT NUTS WITH 'EM.

IN HIS STORIES, HIS SOUND EFFECTS OFTEN RIVALED HIS PICTURES FOR VISUAL IMPORTANCE.

ON ONE OF WILL EISNER'S SPIRIT PAGES, THE EFFECTS BECAME THE PICTURE!

hear... the scream in the night...
wakened cry of the baby
passerby on the sile
breathing of a m
hissing of a radiat
drumbeat of nothing
the rhythm that is no sound...

**BONG
GONG
GONG
GONG**

VA
VA
VOOM
POW
VOO
DANG A-LANG

WHEN WALLY WOOD WORKED FOR MAD MAGAZINE BACK IN THE '50'S, HE DID A STORY WHERE EVERY WORD WAS A SOUND EFFECT!

Le BOUM

AND AS YOU'D EXPECT, FOREIGN COMICS HAVE FOREIGN SOUND EFFECTS...

AS YOU CAN SEE, THAT'S AN EXPLOSION IN FRENCH!

I'M INTERESTED IN TYPOGRAPHY AND CALLIGRAPHY AND I BRING BOTH THESE ELEMENTS TO MY WORK...

...USING THEM TO SHAPE THE LETTERING I DESIGN.

LET ME GIVE YOU AN EXAMPLE.

IN THIS CAPTAIN FEAR JOB, A STORY OF PIRACY ON THE HIGH SEAS DONE FOR DC, I DELIBERATELY CHOSE A CASLON TYPEFACE.

IT'S AN OLD-FASHIONED FACE WITH A SLIGHTLY MOTH-EATEN LOOK I THOUGHT WOULD EMPHASIZE THE ANTIQUITY OF THE TALE...

...SORT OF LIKE THE BROADSHEETS OF THE 18TH CENTURY.

TH-BOOM!

I ONCE USED THE WORD "DOOM" AS A SOUND EFFECT, A PICTORIAL ELEMENT, A NARRATIVE DEVICE, AND THE TITLE FOR THE STORY...

...ALL IN THE SAME PICTURE IN THE MIGHTY THOR!

LUCKY FOR ME THE WORLD'S DON'T DEMAND OVERTIME.

DOOM!

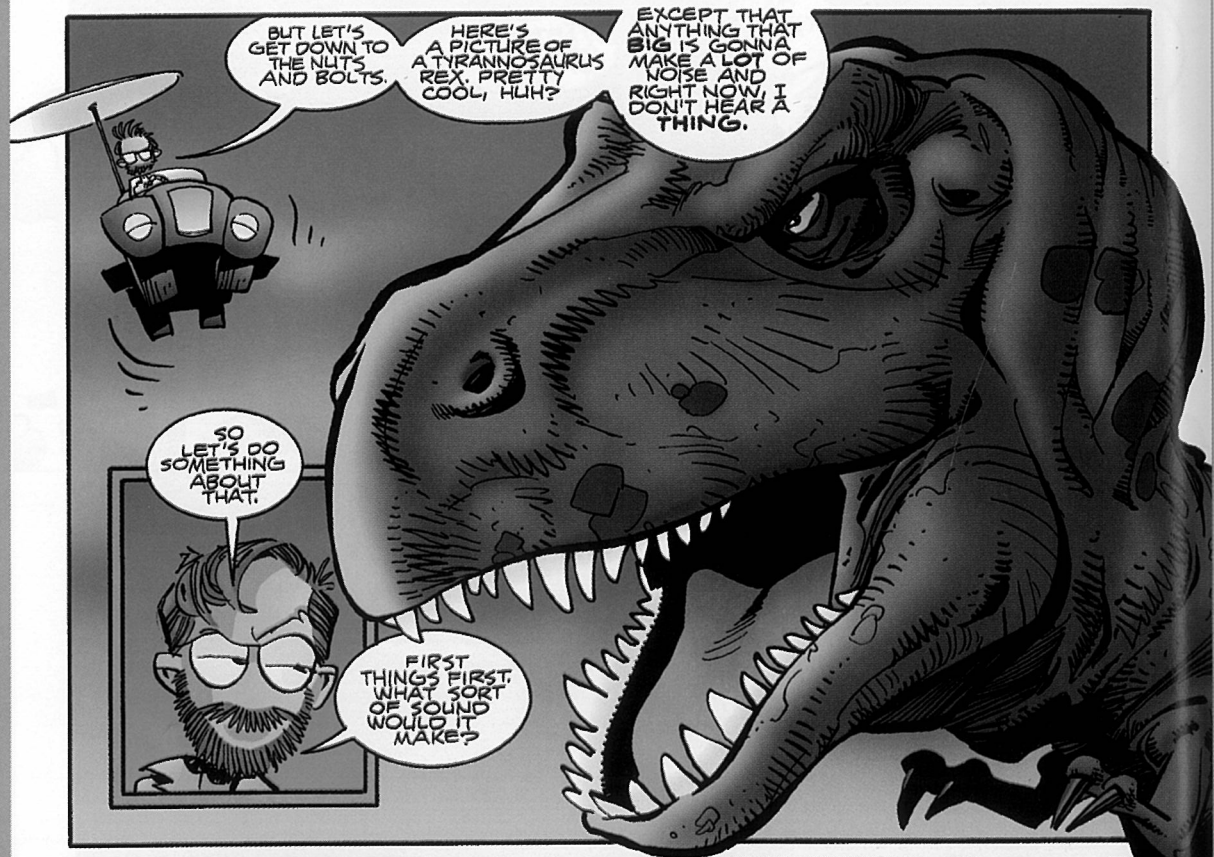
AND IN A RECENT STAR SLAMMERS STORY FOR DARK HORSE PRESENTS, I ADDED A DOUBLE OUTLINE AROUND THE TITLE, BOTH TO EM-BOLDEN THE WORDS...

...AND TO SUGGEST THE FEVER DREAM/HALLUCINOGENIC QUALITY OF THE STORY SUGGESTED BY THE TITLE ITSELF*.

Fever Dream

*OKAY, SO A TITLE ISN'T STRICTLY A SOUND EFFECT. SO SUE ME. ACTUALLY, JOHN WORKMAN SHOULD SUE ME. HE'S THE GUY WHO DOES MOST OF MY LETTERING THESE DAYS. IT WAS HIS TITLE.

SOUNDEFFECTS



BUT LET'S GET DOWN TO THE NUTS AND BOLTS.

HERE'S A PICTURE OF A TYRANNOSAURUS REX. PRETTY COOL, HUH?

EXCEPT THAT ANYTHING THAT BIG IS GONNA MAKE A LOT OF NOISE AND RIGHT NOW I DON'T HEAR A THING.

SO LET'S DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT.

FIRST THINGS FIRST. WHAT SORT OF SOUND WOULD IT MAKE?



SOUND EFFECT FILES
SCREECHES
GROOLES
GROANS
YELLS
ARGHS

SEEMS OBVIOUS SOMETHING LOUD, BIG AND BOLD.

I'D SAY A "ROARRR RRRRR!" SEEMS ABOUT RIGHT.



NEXT, WE NEED TO CHOOSE A TYPEFACE THAT'S APPROPRIATE.

THIS LOOKS LIKE A GOOD ONE. BIG, BOLD, HARD-EDGED...

...JUST THE SORT OF VISUAL SOUND A T. REX WOULD MAKE ROARING IN THE FOREST PRIMEVAL!



THEN WE... WHAT'S THAT?



YOU'RE WONDERING HOW I THINK OF ALL THESE DIFFERENT KINDS OF LETTER-FORMS?

THE TRICK IS... I DON'T. I USE REFERENCE!

IN OUR CULTURE, THERE ARE ALPHABETS EVERYWHERE!

I'VE KEPT PAGES WITH COOL LETTERFORMS ON THEM THAT I TEAR OUT OF MAGAZINES.

FROM ART STORES, I'VE GOTTEN CATALOGS...

...FOR PRESSURE-SENSITIVE TYPE* CONTAINING HUNDREDS OF DIFFERENT ALPHABETS.

AND PUBLISHERS LIKE DOVER BOOKS HAVE INEXPENSIVE BOOKS OF ALPHABETS AVAILABLE, BOTH CALLIGRAPHIC AND TYPOGRAPHIC.

BESIDES, YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SO FORMAL. YOU CAN DESIGN YOUR OWN.

I ONCE CREATED A SOUND EFFECT USING LETTER FORMS INSPIRED BY THE LABEL ON A JAR OF JAM!



*THESE ARE THIN PLASTIC SHEETS PRINTED WITH RUB-OFF LETTERS THAT CAN BE APPLIED TO ARTWORK.

COOL LETTERFORMS ARE OUT THERE ALL OVER THE PLACE JUST WAITING FOR YOU TO FIND THEM.

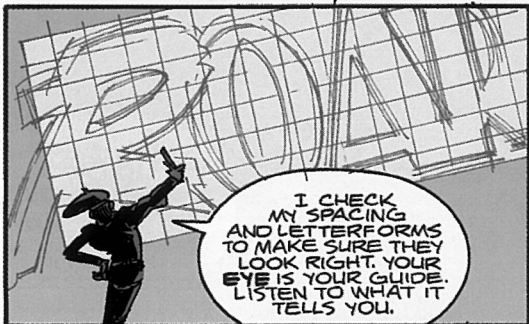
NOW START BY DRAWING A RECTANGLE THE SIZE AND LOCATION OF THE SOUND EFFECT YOU WANT ON YOUR PICTURE.

THAT LOOKS PRETTY GOOD. BIG AND BOLD. AND WE'LL PUT IT ON AN ANGLE TO GIVE IT EMPHASIS!

I USUALLY ADD A GRID TO GIVE ME GUIDANCE, BOTH FOR THE VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL OUTLINES OF THE LETTERFORMS...

...AND FOR HELPING ME SPACE THE LETTERS CORRECTLY.

KEEP IN MIND THAT THE SPACE YOU LEAVE BETWEEN THE LETTERS IS AS IMPORTANT TO THE WAY THE WHOLE WORD LOOKS AS THE FORMS OF THE LETTERS ARE THEMSELVES.



SOUNDEFFECTS

ERASE YOUR PENCIL WORK WITH A SOFT ERASER...



...AND VOILA!

HOW'S THAT FOR ENHANCED IMMEDIACY?



IT'S ALMOST LIKE HAVING A LIVING...



...BREATHING...



...RIGHT IN YOUR ...OWN...



...T-REX...

...LIVING ...ROOM.



WELL, HEHEH... GOTTA RUN! I'VE GOT ANOTHER 'ELRIC' JOB COMING UP AND I'VE NEVER USED SO MANY SOUNDEFFECTS IN MY LIFE!

TAKE CARE EVERYBODY!

HELP!

MASTER STORYTELLING BY THE WIZARD STAFF

It's a given that you have to hold a pencil to become an artist. But to become a really good artist, did you know that you have to challenge a script from time to time, direct your action scenes, experiment with radical methods, manage melodrama and eat a healthy dose of humble pie

once in a while? A master storyteller has to be a jack-of-all-trades and learn to think outside of putting poses on paper and adhering to the laws of anatomy. Here are 11 different pros who have been in the artwork trenches and returned with the recon you need to ace your next assignment.

CHALLENGING SCRIPT

"Don't just read the script—think about it. Read into the writer's words. What does he mean? What is he going for? Do not trust a script before reading it through. Play devil's advocate when reading it—test it. Try different things. Take the craft of storytelling seriously and get into how people read comics and what your role as an artist truly is. Add a panel or combine two panels, if you feel it improves the storytelling. My goal isn't to re-write the page into how I think it should go, just to make sure I can play out the story to the best of my abilities. In the same way I hope the inker or colorist or letterer would think about and add to the integrity of the story, I try to think about and add to the story integrity as well."

■ Scott Kolins (*Flash, Marvel Team-Up*)



TOUGH LOVE ▶ If a scene calls for more panels or a different order, Scott Kolins is ready to mix it up with characters and script.



ACTIONSCENE CHOREOGRAPHY

"Sometimes the action is too dense—then I have to sacrifice some less important things in favor of the storytelling. Some writers are used to being very detailed about choreography. Others leave to the artist the way to develop the fights. In my case, I prefer not to have too many panels when I draw fights, because fewer panels let you draw more spectacular shots. But fewer panels are not always a good thing—the drawings have to be focused for easy understanding of the action, and sometimes being more descriptive with more panels is also very cool."

■ Salvador Larroca (*Fantastic Four, X-Men*)

◀ **FAST AND LOOSE** Larroca prefers to keep his action fast-paced with fewer panels as illustrated by a fight scene with Juggernaut from *X-Men* #160.

KILLINGSUSPENSE

"Set-up involves convincing the reader that something dramatic might happen. If the reader feels sure of the outcome there is no tension, no matter how skilled the writer or the artist. I adore Bill Willingham's *Fables* because I can never know what he'll do next. Any character could die, or betray all of his friends, or lose her job running Fabletown and raise her human/wolf hybrid children in upstate New York. I enjoy his work in *Robin* too, but I don't feel much suspense. Bill's writing is just as brilliant, but there's only so much change that can happen in a mainstream superhero comic. Robin won't die (permanently), he'll still be Batman's junior partner at the end of the day, and the villains' most horrible plans will be foiled." ■ Gene Ha (*Top 10*, *The Authority*)



◀ DEAD RECKONINGS

As one of the officers goes down in *Top 10* #10, Gene Ha's pencils demonstrate how tension can be real in books where anything is possible.



EXPERIMENTATION

"When I used to work with Bill Sienkiewicz—I used to be his assistant at his art studio—he used to use crazy stuff. When he would paint, he would use animation paints, and every once and a while he would glue something to a page, like some circuit board or something like that. He would use all this heavy charcoal, and I swear I thought he used a chocolate bar on something once. He was really experimental, and he would use anything at hand. One time I walked into his studio and there was an *Elektra* page with a footprint on it, so I dunno if it was on purpose or not. [Laughs]" ■ Amanda Conner (*JSA Classified*, *Vampirella*)

◀ **NO FLY ZONE** Amanda Conner breaks convention with a wildly designed page in *Vampirella* #25.

BREAKING THE RULES

"I did [a splash page] where it was revealed that Jean DeWolfe, the police detective [in *Ultimate Spider-Man*], is actually working for the Kingpin, and that sort of breaks my rule of splash pages being this huge exciting image, because it was basically her sitting in a chair looking up at you. But it was this huge reveal that she was not Spidey's friend—she was Spidey's enemy working for the Kingpin—and I think that was a good call on the part of Brian [Bendis, *Ultimate Spider-Man* writer] to call for the splash page." ■ Mark Bagley (*Thunderbolts*, *Ultimate Spider-Man*)

COP OUT ▶ Mark Bagley didn't take any shortcuts in *Ultimate Spider-Man* #85 when he reveals with a splash page that police detective Jean DeWolfe is actually Spidey's enemy.





CALMBEFORE THESTORM

"Learn how to draw really quiet moments. How you do that is you convey information without a large amount of flash. You develop tension that way, and the only way you know you've been in tension is when you have the payoff. But the payoff's got to feel like something paid off, so when you do the flashy panel or the gory panel, it only feels that way if you've taken time to develop those things. You have to learn to draw a whole range of emotions, not just grim people being grim."

■ Kelley Jones (*Batman, Conan: Book of Thoth*)

◀ **MOOD SWING** The characters' expressions in Kelley Jones' *Conan: Book of Thoth* #2 carry the drama and dialogue through a volley of emotions.

PANELMANIA

"I don't think every issue should begin with a splash page. And I don't think every issue should contain at least one splash page. It's totally up to the creators' style of storytelling. One could decide to use 16 panels for every page if appropriate. There are no rules in art. That's the beauty of storytelling."

■ Jonathan Luna (*Spider-Woman: Origin, Ultra*)

EIGHT IS ENOUGH ▶ On this particular page in *Spider-Woman: Origins* #3, Jonathan Luna packs the page with eight panels to pace the story how he wants it to read.



HUMBLEPIE

"As good as you think you are, you're not. That really seems to be the one [tip] that really sank in with me. Also, don't be afraid to admit your weaknesses. In other words if someone goes, 'You want to draw the Rawhide Kid?' and I know I can't draw horses—I couldn't draw a horse if you put a gun to my head—then it's just not a good idea to accept a Western. You know, if you have trouble with architecture, stay away from *Gotham Central*. Know your strengths, know your weak points."

◀ **NO HORISING AROUND** According to Keith Giffen, if you can't draw a horse, don't even think about accepting an assignment for the *Rawhide Kid*.



DIRECTING THE CROWD

"I work out who should be the focus of the panel and work my way out from there. Usually that's the characters with the dialogue. Sometimes, though, the writer might ask for someone else to be doing something in the background, and I pull them forward for the sake of variety and interest. Group shots are always tricky for me, especially when you have a group of people who are simply standing around flapping their jaws. That's when you really have to try and get into their character and figure out how each one might be reacting at that particular time; whether they be waving their arms about, sitting down or eating a chicken drumstick (mmmm)."

■ Jim Cheung (*Scion*, *Young Avengers*)



▲ **FOCUS GROUP** Jim Cheung rotates Ashleigh into the foreground in *Scion* #3 to draw our attention to what she's saying and spice up a standard group shot.



▲ **DRAMA QUEEN** Jimenez shows us believable emotion in Jean Grey's shocked expression, rather than melodrama, in this pivotal scene from *New X-Men* #146.

SOAP OPERA DRAMA

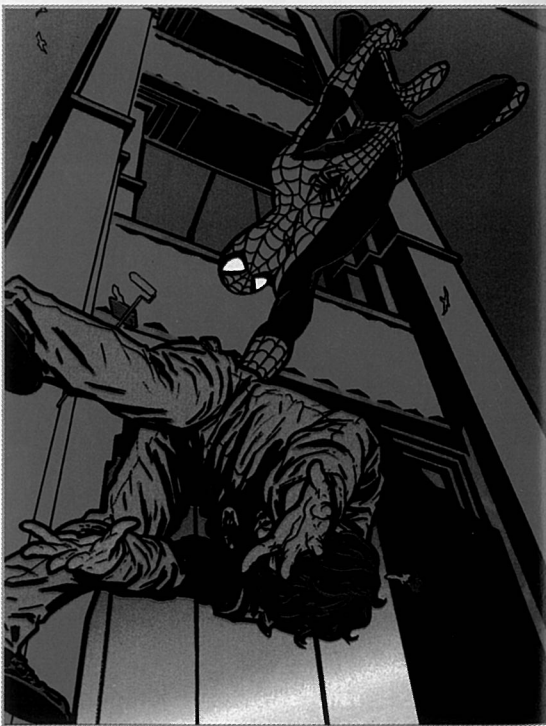
"[With drama] you can very easily go over to soap opera where everything is like, 'Exclamation point! Exclamation point!' and everyone's expression looks like they've just seen the dead come back to life. You don't want to be melodramatic. I don't think you want your tension to be so over the top that people laugh at it. Sometimes you have to be careful."

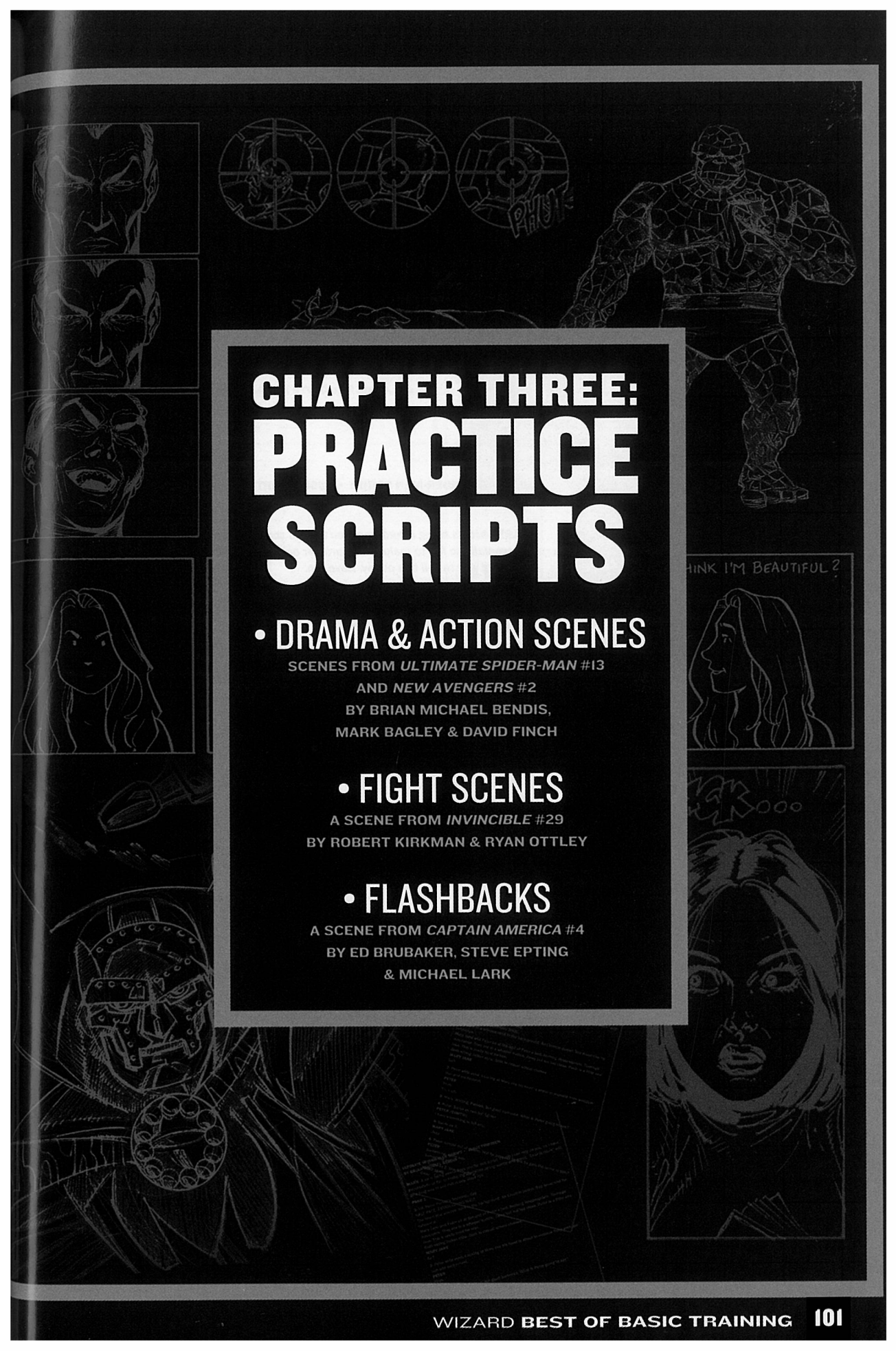
■ Phil Jimenez (*Infinite Crisis*, *New X-Men*)

FORCED TO FOCUS

"First assess what the script calls for, then compose the images so that all the key elements are easily readable. Considering what was on the previous page and the following page is also important because, when telling the story, it is imperative that the image direct the reader's eye from one scene to another and force the viewer to focus on what is most important." ■ Ryan Sook (*Zatanna*, *X-Factor*)

▼ **CATCH YOUR MISTAKES** To avoid errors, Ryan Sook arranges the visuals to be clean and readable, as with this splash in *Spider-Man Unlimited* #8.





CHAPTER THREE: PRACTICE SCRIPTS

• DRAMA & ACTION SCENES

SCENES FROM *ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN* #13
AND *NEW AVENGERS* #2

BY BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS,
MARK BAGLEY & DAVID FINCH

• FIGHT SCENES

A SCENE FROM *INVINCIBLE* #29
BY ROBERT KIRKMAN & RYAN OTTLEY

• FLASHBACKS

A SCENE FROM *CAPTAIN AMERICA* #4
BY ED BRUBAKER, STEVE EPTING
& MICHAEL LARK

DRAMA & ACTION BY BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS



Think you're ready to earn the trust of the biggest writer in comics?

"You really have to trust your collaborator," says Brian Michael Bendis, the megastar scribe of *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *New Avengers*, *Daredevil* and other smash-hit series. "I tell my artists, 'Here's a full script—do what you gotta do. It's your book.'"

And since this is *your* book, Bendis and *Wizard* have joined forces to give you the scripts you need to test your artistic mettle. With him and his artistic partners Mark Bagley (*Ultimate Spider-Man*) and David Finch (*New Avengers*) providing commentary and advice, it's the perfect chance to put the skills you've acquired on the preceding pages to work!

SAMPLE DRAMASCENE

THE SCRIPT: *Ultimate Spider-Man* #13, scene one

THE SETUP: For the first time, Peter Parker is about to reveal to his best friend, the beautiful Mary Jane Watson, that he's Spider-Man.

BENDIS: "This is my favorite issue of the series, but it wasn't in the plan. I said to [then-Marvel President] Bill Jemas and [Editor-in-Chief] Joe Quesada, 'These characters are talkin' to me, and Peter would tell Mary Jane he's Spider-Man.' Particularly feeding off the 15-year-old thing: He's in love with the girl. Plus, Mary Jane's his only friend. He absolutely would tell her. I pitched this and said it would open things up for all kinds of new stories, and Bill said yes. Right then this gig went from good to great."

BAGLEY: "I didn't know how much the fans were gonna like it because I was still, at that point, not quite getting Brian. I'm a little old-school when it comes to funnybooks—when I'd gotten the first script I was like, 'He's not even in costume! What the f--- is with this?' So with this one I just thought, 'Okay, this is gonna be interesting.' And then it came out and everybody went gaga over it, and I was like, 'I guess Brian does know what he's doing.' This really cemented it for me."

*NO CHEATING!
DON'T LOOK AT THE
COMICS THESE SCRIPTS
ARE FROM UNTIL
AFTER YOU'VE DRAWN
'EM YOUR WAY!*

**ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN SCRIPT • ISSUE THIRTEEN
BY BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS**

MARK- *A lot is being asked from you for this script. I hope I can rely on you, as I have successfully so far, to make the character acting subtle and warm. "Less is more" will go a long way to sell this puppy. Have fun.*

PAGE 1-

1- Int. Peter Parker's bedroom- day
HALF PAGE, ESTABLISHING SHOT.

The room of a science nerd in the background. An Einstein poster. See issue one for reference.

Mary Jane and Peter sit at the end of Peter's bed. Nothing inappropriate. Teenage innocence. They are in a whisper huddle, close but not too close. Peter is a little anxious. This is really hard for him.

Both sitting Indian style. Both in casual school clothes.

MARY JANE
So?

2- Peter wide eyed. Looking at Mary like his head is about to explode from anticipation and excitement.

PETER
Yeah.
So, I- uh-

3- Mary. Waiting. Patient. But good humored. What is Peter going to say?

4- Peter. Same as two but tighter.

PETER (CONT'D)
I have something to tell you.

5- Same as 3.

MARY JANE
Okay.

6- Peter almost out of breath. Will he pass out before he gets the nerve to talk?

PETER
Something- whoo boy-
Something big.

7- Same as 2. She waits for it.

MARY JANE
Okay.

CAN'T FIND
REFERENCE FOR A
FACIAL EXPRESSION?
USE A MIRROR.

PAGE 2-

1- Over Mary's shoulder- Peter waves his hands like an umpire.

PETER

And- and you- you can't tell anyone-
I mean... anyone.

2- Same as 3, last page.

MARY JANE

Okay.

3- Same as one, but tighter. Peter getting a read on if she is getting it.

PETER

Ever.

Ev- er!

4- Same as 2.

MARY JANE

Okay.

5- Same as 3, but tighter.

PETER

You gotta promise me.

6- Same as 2.

MARY JANE

I promise.

7- Same as 5, but tighter.

PETER

I mean it, you've got to promise me.

8- Same angle as 2, but Mary is getting annoyed.

MARY JANE

Peter...

9- Peter backs off.

PETER

Okay.

BENDIS: "Pay attention to the one-person shots and two-person shots. The one-shot is when they're not on the same page mentally, or they're thinking different things; the two-shot is when they're very much on the same page. That's something I learned from the movies. There's a subliminal thing the audience is being told, that when there's a two-shot, there's a connection, especially after a series of single-shots like on the previous page. It's a very intimate story, so you tend to really hang on those faces."

BAGLEY: "I have a whole file of photographs of faces from all different angles, from different fashion magazines to local magazines to *Newsweek*. Sometimes, on a larger face, I'll take that to a light table and, while I won't trace it, I'll basically structure the face from that photograph. I try to be very subtle about it and just use it to make sure the eyes get in the right place, the nose gets in the right angle. Then I just go in and I draw. With a lot of artists, when they use photo reference, you look at the face and you can tell it's a photograph. It can take you out of the story, so I try really hard not to do that."

PAGE 3-

1- Peter just stares at her. The words can't even form.

2- Mary waits. She looks a little flushed. Excited. We can see she thinks this is going to be Peter's professing his crush on her.

3- Peter stares at her. His mouth open as if he is about to talk but he isn't.

4- Same as 2.

MARY JANE

Peter...

5- Same as 3.

PETER

I'm Spider-Man.

6- Mary thought she was going to hear: 'I like you.' So this takes a second to process.

BENDIS: "I knew that Mark had been vastly underused as a pencil talent, and that he could absolutely pull off this issue, which is all acting. He takes his faces and his acting of his characters very seriously, probably the most important thing he's added to his repertoire. Quite often I'd be yanking off word balloons from the pages, because the face said it all, or more. That's the biggest compliment I can give to an artist, that I don't think my dialogue is necessary. With this issue, the first draft may have been longer as far as the talky-talky, but you just look at Mary Jane's beaming face, and what else is there to say? I did fall very much in love with Bagley during the process of making this issue."

BAGLEY: "Yeah, we're getting married, actually. I love little bald Jewish men. [Laughs] Actually, I've never been a big fan of my faces. They've been too cartoony, and I'm trying to make them less cartoony as I go along. You look at this stuff versus the stuff I'm drawing now, and I think there's an improvement on the structuring of faces, and the eyes are maybe smaller and less cartoony. Right now, to me, the conversation scenes that I get to draw with Brian's stuff are the most fulfilling."

ONE OF THE TOUGHEST
SKILLS TO MASTER? MAKING
CHARACTERS LOOK CONSISTENT
FROM PANEL TO PANEL.
PAY ATTENTION TO THE SHAPE
OF YOUR CHARACTERS' HEADS, THE
SHAPES OF THEIR MOUTHS, THEIR
HAIR STYLES AND HOW FAR APART
THEIR EYES ARE.

BENDIS: "I do call for repeating the exact same panels sometimes, 'cause there's a lot of back and forth, and there's kind of a timing issue involved. But the fact that Mark will redraw each panel slightly differently rather than statting [photocopying] them does bring a vitality to it. It's funny: [*Powers* artist] Mike Oeming won't stat any more. [*Alias* artist] Michael Gaydos did it, and I liked when Gaydos did it. And [*Daredevil* artist] Alex Maleev does it, but Alex always redesigns the panels. There's no right way or wrong way to make a comic book page."

BAGLEY: "Talking-heads pages can present a challenge, because I try not to do the cheat where you use the same image, even in the script in places where Brian calls for it, like, 'PANEL FIVE: Same as 3.' I really try and break it up visually, so even in a conversation you come in and out of the page. Visually, it makes it more dramatic. If you go through this issue, there are places where it calls for repeat panels, and while I do this a couple of times, mostly I sort of give him what he wants—but not exactly. Brian trusts my storytelling enough to go, 'Okay, this works.' Sometimes it's as effective, or better, than what he calls for. In fact, in 76 issues I think he's had me redraw only three things. Seriously."

PAGE 4-

1- Tight two shot. Profile. Peter shushing a confused Mary.

MARY JANE

What?

What did you just-?

PETER

SSSHH...

MARY JANE

What?!

2- Peter whispering. His finger gently to his mouth as he talks and looks over his shoulder to the closed bedroom door.

PETER

I'm Spider-Man.

3- Mary just looks at him. Slightly confused.

MARY JANE

You're Spider-Man?

4- Peter still shushing her.

PETER

Yes.

5- Same as 3.

MARY JANE

The super-hero?

6- Same as 4.

PETER

Yes.

7- Mary furrows her brow slightly. She thinks. Still processing.

HAVING TROUBLE LAYING OUT A SCENE? WATCH A MOVIE WHERE A SIMILAR SITUATION PLAYS OUT TO HELP GET A HANDLE ON IT.

Page 5-

1- Over Peter's shoulder. Mary bursts out laughing. A big laugh. A big wide-eyed Julia Roberts infectious laugh.

MARY JANE

Ha ha ah ahahahahah

Oh man... hahahah

2- Peter rolls his eyes.

MARY JANE (CONT'D)

Hahahahahahaa whoops...

SPX: Klump

3- Mary pushes at his chest-teasing. Two shot.

MARY JANE (CONT'D)

Shut up.

PETER

I am.

MARY JANE

Stop it.

You are such a goofball.

PETER

Whisper.

MARY JANE

You stop.

4- Peter rolls his eyes to the air, with a look that says: I knew I was going to have to do this...

PETER

I knew I was going to have to do this.

MARY JANE

Stop it.

BENDIS: "This issue is in fact a one-act play. It all takes place in one very small room, and it's all acting, and I knew Mark could do it. I paid very close attention to that when I was writing. This is all I think about all day. I steal every [film director Martin] Scorsese trick I can think of. I read *American Cinematographer* like a lunatic, and there's just tons of storytelling tricks in there that are easily applied to a comic panel. I've studied stuff like this like a mental patient. And I appreciate Mark, because I've learned a lot from him about an economy of style—the simple elegance of telling a good superhero story."

BAGLEY: "When I started in the business, I was working off of plots, and over the last 10 years it's shifted into full scripts. It's made my job easier in one sense because I don't have to pace the entire book—it's sort of paced out for me. It's also restricted what I do a little bit, because you have to respect what the writer does. But on the other hand, the writer's got to respect the fact that it's a visual medium, and the visual part of it is my job. And if you've got a writer that respects what you do and you respect what he does it works out really well. And with Brian, I've had that type of relationship."

PAGE 6-

1- Big panel. Mary in the foreground- her back to us watches Peter, in his socks, as he hops up onto the wall of his bedroom in a graceful leap.

He hops right onto his poster of Einstein's face. Big silent panels of Peter doing this should be awe-inspiring. A moment both epic and intimate. No one has ever seen this before. A teenage boy hopping up on a wall.

This is a big unique moment for a super-hero comic book. And each image should pop in the memory.

2- Big panel. Mary's p.o.v. Peter sticks to the wall with both feet and one hand. Gesturing a 'ta daa' with the other.

3- Birds eye. Tight looking down on Mary as she looks up at us. She just stares blankly- wide eyed. It is still taking a moment to register.

WHEN DOES THE ARTIST'S JOB STOP? IT DOESN'T. EVEN IF THE SCRIPT ISN'T MICRO-DETAIL, GIVE THE READER AN IMMEDIATE FEEL FOR WHO THE CHARACTERS ARE WITH SUBTLE NUANCES. WHILE MANY TEENAGERS HAVE T & A POSTERS ON THEIR WALL, MAYBE THE BRAINY TYPE WOULD OPT FOR AN EINSTEIN POSTER INSTEAD.

BENDIS: "Bagley and I have a very good relationship. I know very well what he wants, what his goals are, what excites him, what intrigues him. We have a good shorthand together. I have a tendency to cut action scenes up into panels of single actions, and he's able to take it and go, 'F--- it, you could do both things in one panel.' I came from independent comics with my hoity-toity jibber-jabber, and he came from the most mainstream of mainstream, workmanlike comics. He'd mainstream me up and I'd indie him down, and right in the middle you have a good comic book."

BAGLEY: "This was such a visual moment, and I try to make more of an impact with the important, significant parts of the page. I didn't want to do a basic five- or six-panel grid, because the one panel where's he's flipping up onto the ceiling is a very vertical-type idea. It worked pretty well, though I could've used another panel in between the two and had him flipping onto his hands, because it's a little confusing as to what he's doing. Actually, the idea of her getting a little vertigo from what he's doing is something we could've incorporated into it—like, 'Whoa!' But hey, nobody's perfect. I think Brian's come to understand that I'm not the best artist in the world, but I'm a pretty good storyteller. And it's all part of the storytelling."

HOW DO YOU MAKE THE OUTLANDISH SEEM EVEN MORE SURREAL? GROUND EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE PANEL IN EVERYDAY LIFE.

BENDIS: "This is a huge moment. The story's from Peter's point of view, and as soon as he hits the wall it switches to being from Mary's point of view. And from Mary's point of view, it's a humungous moment when your boyfriend sticks to the wall. [Laughs] You've got to treat that like it's the biggest thing ever, 'cause it is. It's a shockaroo. Keep in mind that at this point in *Ultimate Spider-Man*, there were no superheroes, so it's doubly crazy."

BAGLEY: "I really think I wanted a money shot here. I really wanted that visual impact—BAM! He's stuck to the wall! Right on this poster of a really bad rendition of Einstein [Laughs]. At this point I still wasn't getting what Brian was doing, so I was sort of trying to push a visual impact on it. This page is also one of the few times that I did repeat MJ's face exactly from one panel to the next. I put three reaction panels at the end of the page that I think work really well, though Brian may not have called for them."

PAGE 7-

1- Tight on Peter- gently smiling from his perch on the wall. He is trying to get a read on her reaction.

2- Mary looks around the room to see what the goof is.

3- Wide of room. Peter flips over backwards and hops on to the ceiling right above Mary's head.

4- Bird's eye tight on Mary calmly looking up at this.

5- Peter upside-down. His hair hanging.

PETER
You okay?

SAMPLE ACTION SCENE

THE SCRIPT: *New Avengers #2*, scene five

THE SETUP: Heroes Luke Cage, Matt Murdock (Daredevil), Jessica Drew (Spider-Woman), Captain America and Spider-Man battle against Mr. Hyde, Carnage and the other escaped inmates of the maximum-security superhuman prison, the Raft.

BENDIS: "I definitely had a tone and feel for this scene that's well documented in the script, and I knew would push Finch and [colorist] Frank D'Armata, who's a big, big part of the final result of that issue. It's claustrophobic, it's a disaster, it's the biggest supervillain blowout ever. It's a mosh pit of supervillains, a pure melee. So to choreograph that and give that feeling, you're gonna have to really trust your artist. I mean, I could write it—I could have someone say, 'Oh my God, this is such a crazy melee!'—but you really have to show it. It's a show scene, not a tell scene. And this bottom-level fight is really like a horror movie. The lights are off—it's *Resident Evil* with supervillains."

FINCH: "Bendis makes it very easy, because everything was in there. He never gives you anything contradictory or impossible to draw, which I've run into before. I try to just think in terms of a foreground, a middleground, and a background, and decide what's the most dominant element—what panel on the page I want to be the biggest and the most dominant, and what's the focal point within each panel."

PAGE 2-

- 1- Big panel! The Sentry stands there. Crackling with golden energy. The hero has returned. The room feels different with him in it. Everyone stops fighting and stares at this golden god. The Sentry's face blank, almost shamed. He stands in front of his now broken cell door.
- 2- The Sentry's p.o.v. Everyone is stunned. Mid fight everyone turns and looks. Even Carnage takes a second.
- 3- From over Sentry's shoulder, Carnage tosses Luke Cage and Jessica aside and violently attacks the Sentry.
- 4- With stunning calm Sentry catches the tentacle that was about to attack him. Like Keanu at the end of the first "Matrix." This is no threat to him.

NEW AVENGERS SCRIPT • ISSUE TWO

By Brian Michael Bendis

PAGE 1-

1- Int. Raft lower level corridor- Same
Matt barely dodges Mr. Hyde's fist. Matt's clothes are pulling off in the bloody, dirty fight.

Mr. Hyde's fist crashes into the wall sending stone debris with it.

In the background, Jessica Drew blasts Carnage in the back of the head with a sparking blast as Luke Cage struggles with Carnage's all-consuming attack.

MISTER HYDE

You put me here, Murdock!!

SPX: spash

MATT MURDOCK

Actually, Zabo, you put you here...

... but I see that you might not be in the mindset to see it that way!

2- Luke Cage is being smothered by Carnage. He is pulling on Carnage's tongue and doing everything he can to keep Carnage from getting near Jessica and the others.

LUKE CAGE

I don't even know what this is I'm fighting.

JESSICA DREW

It's Carnage! It's one of Spider-Man's.

LUKE CAGE

Well, then get him down here!

CARNAGE

I would love that! But you first!

3- Matt high kicks Mister Hyde in the chin. Using the wall to push his entire body in Hyde's face.

Hyde's head crashes into the wall. The size of the hall in Matt's favor.

SPX: crack

4- Jessica grabs into Carnage from behind and shoots a venom blast right into its mouth before it can bite on Luke Cage's head.

Cage and Drew together can only hold it still; they cannot win.

She is yelling to the lone S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent who is crouched down at the dead body of his fellow agents.

JESSICA DREW

Guys, we still don't even know what happened!

There's 87 convicted felons in this prison we have to get out of here and call for...

5- Tight on Jessica. She sees it first. Her mussed hair over one eye. She is shocked and relieved.

JESSICA DREW

Reinforcements...

SPX: krafoom

BENDIS: "It's kind of like a gut instinct, but I had a feeling that Finch would draw an amazing Carnage. I just kind of saw it. 'Cause when I'm writing I really try to get into the head of the artist, and try to imagine what the art would look like, and what could he do that would really kick ass even if he's never done it before. When I got to the page where Carnage first appeared, it was almost exactly what was in my head, but with better lighting. I was feeling really good about what we accomplished here."

FINCH: "I learned a lot about how to spot blacks from working with Marc Silvestri, and from looking at Mike Mignola and Eduardo Riso and Frank Frazetta. I always try and layer my blacks so it doesn't get too muddy. I like the scenes to be really dark, but I find that you can't have a dark overlapping a light. So with blacks, you can layer really deep into a panel without getting muddy. It keeps it separated. Stuff still gets lost, but I think it helps for me anyway. I really like anatomy and shadows and all that stuff, so it makes scenes like this one pretty easy, or enjoyable, anyway."

PAGE 3-

1- Very small panel. Boom! A smashing and a sound effect that we will reveal is the Sentry smashing through an entire floor of the Raft.

This is the Sentry taking Carnage out of the premises by flying straight up.

SPX : boom!

2- Very small panel. Boom! A smashing and a sound effect that we will reveal is the Sentry smashing through another entire floor of the Raft.

SPX : boom!

3- Very small panel. Boom! A smashing and a sound effect that we will reveal is the Sentry smashing through another entire floor of the Raft.

SPX : boom!

4- Very small panel. Boom! A smashing and a sound effect that we will reveal is the Sentry smashing through another entire floor of the Raft.

SPX : boom!

5- Very small panel. Boom! A smashing and a sound effect that we will reveal is the Sentry smashing through another entire floor of the Raft.

SPX : boom!

6- Very small panel. Boom! A smashing and a sound effect that we will reveal is the Sentry smashing through another entire floor of the Raft.

SPX : boom!

7- Very small panel. Boom! A smashing and a sound effect that we will reveal is the Sentry smashing through another entire floor of the Raft.

SPX : boom!

8- Ext. Raft main floor- Same

Captain America is wildly fighting the crowd of supervillains. He is a born war time soldier. He knows how to use the crowd to his advantage. Spider-Man in reeling in pain. His arm broken. He is whipping web into the faces of any villain he can hit. He is helping Cap anyway he can. Peter Parker is not giving up. In the far background, no one even has time to react to the explosion of rubble and steel 100 feet behind them as the Sentry is launching himself and Carnage...

SPX: boom

9- Ext. Raft- Same

Wide profile of the Raft. The Sentry is a golden beam of energy that is thrusting into the night sky in a perfect line, straight for the heavens. In the far background, Manhattan is still in a blackout.

BENDIS: "Like you see in the script, I did have a pretty clear idea about this Carnage/Sentry scene. David made a decision that 90 percent of the time I would go with, to pace it a little more evenly and go for the cinematic quality of it. But I think it was hard to describe, and I kind of switched gears on him halfway through the first issue. It became about iconic, horror, shocking images rather than cinematic storytelling. He was all in the cinematic zone and I kinda switched gears on him. There's nothing wrong with what he did—it was just two different ideas. I ended up having [colorist] Frank D'Armata go back and tiddle around with the pages a little bit. Clearly I didn't describe my original idea well enough."

FINCH: "I mean, it's not too often that things get changed. And it's not too often that I ever change the script. If I ever do, we're always pretty much on the same page, generally. I really try not to change things in a way that would change the intent. With this one, I kinda did. Bendis normally still would let it go, but that was the most important scene in the book, and I didn't really approach it that way. I think it works much better than if we had done it my way."

BENDIS: "I thought that the tactile image of the Sentry ripping Carnage in half was the seller, you know what I mean? So when David changed it, I came back to him and said, 'The beat that's really missing is the big-ass ripping-Carnage-in-half shot. That's the thing that's gonna make people go, "Get out of here! You don't see that every day!"' A lot of the time I find a way to make a change work, but in that instance I just said, 'This is, for a lot of people, the Sentry's introduction, so let's really sell this moment.' If you f---in' hate the book, at least you can say, 'Hey, I saw Carnage get ripped in half.'"

FINCH: "I really wanted to make the panel where Carnage gets ripped in half almost blasé, like this is the kind of thing the Sentry could do every day. I had two more panels of him flying into space, and the panel where he tears Carnage in half was much smaller on the page, and I had a panel of blood flying by his face, and then he turns and looks down at Earth below. I got across the kind of mood I wanted on the page, but it was really not what Bendis was trying to get across at all. Looking at it, when you read the actual story, it was a good call to fix it."

PAGE 4-

1- Ext. Space/earth's orbit- Same

Sentry, draped in golden energy, has flown the crazed, flailing figure of Carnage into %^@&ing orbit.

He does it with determination and style, but his face is pursed with self doubt and neurosis.

But in one %^@&ing panel we see just how powerful the Sentry is. Marvel has their superman.

The earth in the distance. A smattering of cable satellites dancing in orbit. (Technically, this is a bit over the top, but we are essentially expressing how this character is playing by a different set of physical rules than the others)

2- Sentry takes a good section of Carnage's pliable body in each hand and rips him in half.

The Sentry is ending this quickly and finally. Carnage's face is silent screaming in horror at this violent finality. Sentry does do this with effort. But he does it.

3- Sentry tosses Carnage's ruined body aside like its nothing but garbage and looks back down to earth.

PAGE 5-

1- Int. The Raft- Same

Luke Cage has pulled off the Sentry's thick stone and metal prison cell door and smacks it right into the back of Mr. Hyde's head.

Matt diving out of the way.

Jessica Drew is stepping over the rubble on the floor and is pointing to the big hole in the ceiling. Some moonlight pouring in. A beam of hope.

There is water on the ground now.

LUKE CAGE

Ok, now we're talkin'!

SPX: Smash!!

MISTER HYDE

Aaargh!

LUKE CAGE

Arms, legs, and a big %^@&ing mouth... you I can handle!

JESSICA DREW

At least now we have a way out.

2- Spider-Woman is grabbing an amazed Foggy by the arm with one hand and the surviving S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent with the other. She is getting ready to take off. Foggy notices the growing water on the ground. It's up to their ankles all of a sudden.

JESSICA DREW

Mr. Nelson, hold on, I can fly a little, I'm going to get you-

FOGGY NELSON

A little?

JESSICA DREW

Little bit. Might take a couple of tries.

FOGGY NELSON

Where's the water coming from? Are we sinking?

HYDRO-MAN

(off panel) No!

3- From behind Luke and Matt, the huge figure of Hydro-Man steps out of his open cell and starts to bubble into a tidal wave.

HYDRO-MAN

But you are drowning.

4- BLACK AND WHITE ZOOM SHOT! Same but tight black and white zoom shot. Hydro-Man snarls like Elvis. He owns the room.

Type reads:

Name: Morris "Morrie" Bench

Alias: Hydro-Man

Biological liquid transformation

5- BACK TO COLOR! Slightly low looking up. Luke and Matt's tired mouths both drop. This is bad.

LUKE CAGE

Aw Crap...

BENDIS: "The cool thing about the issue was me and [editor] Tom Brevoort digging up all the names of the characters that would be in the Raft, and finding, like, 40 names of supervillains who are all great villains, but just haven't seen the light of day in a few years. Hydro-Man was funny, because I was just trying to do a pile-on. We made a list of all these villains, and I looked down the list and went, 'Okay, we got Mr. Hyde, we got Carnage—who would be the worst one that you could have when you're in the sub-basement of a floating prison? Hey, Hydro-Man!'"

FINCH: "There was no pressure with this fight stuff. I feel comfortable drawing that kind of thing. I don't feel comfortable drawing people standing around page after page talking to each other. That's when I worry, that's when I think, 'Okay, people are just gonna completely not care and walk away.' When I read the scripts, I love it, because Bendis's dialogue is so great, and you care about the characters. But when I'm drawing it, it's easy to kind of get a little distance from that, and I don't feel comfortable drawing that stuff anywhere near as much as I feel comfortable drawing people hitting each other. Storytelling-type stuff—I try to work on that, but it's always been more of a struggle for me."

BENDIS: "If anything, I would have had it more like a typhoon inside, but David did it kind of like that slow-rising 'uh-oh.' His version was pretty scary too. I said, 'F---in' shrink the ceilings and close in the walls.' You can never go wrong with it and it really amps things up. Also, you'll notice Daredevil is appropriately freaked out. That's a subliminal trick: You've got the Man Without Fear, and even though he's not yelling 'Oh, I'm afraid,' he's looking terrified. And that kinda gets the reader to go, 'Oh, sh--! If the Man Without Fear's scared...'"

FINCH: "This was a challenge. Drawing Hydro-Man initially was pretty easy, but how the water would fill up the room and affect the heroes was something that I wasn't sure about. Fortunately, I remembered that in 1990 or 1991, Marc Silvestri drew a sequence with Wolverine in the sewers of New York with all kinds of flooding and everything, so I just opened up that stuff and swiped. [Laughs]"

PAGE 6-

1- Wide of the corridor. This furious angry wave takes Luke Cage, Mister Hyde, Jessica, Foggy, the two S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents and everyone off their feet. The entire tunnel is flooded.

SPX: whooosshh

FOGGY NELSON

Aaggh!

2- Small panel. Jessica is under the swirling water, wide eyed. This isn't good at all. This is terrifying.

3- Small panel. Jessica grabs Foggy's limp body underwater.

4- Big panel. High looking down. Jessica has re-grabbed Foggy with one hand and the S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent with the other, and she is flying right towards us right out the hole the Sentry made in his spectacular escape.

She has Foggy by the back of his collar and the agent by the arm. The waves of water nipping at her heels- helping her fly actually. The wind at her back.

She is pushing herself as hard as she can. She is giving it everything, gritted teeth.

In the background, we see Matt and Luke fighting the waves and being pushed right up and out the top along with the spiraling water.

Everyone is being carried out with Hydro-Man's escape.

5- Int. Raft main corridor- same

Luke, Matt, Jessica and Foggy burst through the hole with a thousand gallons of Hydro-Man. They make it to the ground to everyone surprise, the rushing water knocks a few of the escaping and fighting villains off their feet

Giving Spidey and Cap, in the foreground, a minute to breathe. The unconscious Mr. Hyde also deadflops onto the new floor.

It's a burst of water and even more chaos than there was already.

SPX: foosshh

6- Tight on Spidey and Cap, both very worse for wear. They are both stunned to see the other heroes.

PAGES 7 & 8

1- Huge panel across both pages. The NEW AVENGERS are together- mostly! From over Cap's fighting shoulder, wide of the room. The water is whooshing straight out of the hole in the ceiling, Hydro-Man is escaping and taking a couple of his pals with him. But Matt Murdock, Luke Cage and Jessica Drew dive right into the fight with everything they have.

Spidey is holding his broken arm and kicking Barbados in the back of the head.

Matt Murdock, shirtless, high split kicks taking a couple of the Wrecking Crew in the neck with great karate.

Jessica Drew is stinging the %^@& out of The Crusader.

Luke Cage is fighting by using Mister Hyde's unconscious body as a battering ram and taking out three villains at a time.

Even though everyone is dirty and out of costume and hurt and wet and bloody, there is a real sense that the tables have turned.

There's a real sense of excitement in the chaos. Desperation having turned to thrill.

The handful of armed S.H.I.E.L.D Agents are helping to. Some grabbing Foggy and protecting him.

But all the while any villain that can fly or jump is crawling out of this and making a get-away. We imagine that of the 87 villains that at least fifty are or have escaped through the madness.

SPIDER-MAN

Matt Murdock? What the hell are you doing here?

MATT MURDOCK

You doing ok?

SPIDER-MAN

How do I look?

MATT MURDOCK

You dropped your mask.

SPIDER-MAN

Yeah.

MATT MURDOCK

Not a great career move!

JESSICA DREW

Captain America?? Not that I'm not thrilled to see you!

LUKE CAGE

I ain't thrilled about any of this!

2- Captain America is punching Foolkiller unconscious as his shield swings behind him and clocks Dr. Demonicus before Dr. Demonicus can jump on Cap.

In the foreground, Spidey in a lot of pain, thwips a web off panel.

CAPTAIN AMERICA

Does anyone know how this started?

SPIDER-MAN

No, but you can blame me if you want, everyone else will.

SPX: THWIP

3- Captain America leans around to catch his shield but that leaves him open for the Wrecker to grab Cap by the neck.

CAPTAIN AMERICA

Doesn't matter, we need to contain this and keep as many as we can from escaping!

This is already a disaargh!

4- Low looking up. The Wrecker tosses Cap, with shield, up in the air with all his might and launches him straight out of one of the giant holes in the ceiling. Cap is heading for the roof head first.

Spidey and the others are shocked to see Cap taken out and instantly seem unfocused.

Other villains are also flying or crawling out of the hole, while others fight.

WRECKER

Ha!

SPIDER-MAN

Cap!

5- Ext. Raft- night


Cap is flying out of the Raft as a couple of villains fly by. Cap is about to arc back down and land on the roof of the Raft hard when....

6- Red metal gloves catch him under the arms. Cap is surprised to be saved. He looks up to see who it is that caught him.

IRON MAN

Hey Steve...

BENDIS: This is the first time you see this new group of the Avengers all on the same page. The idea is to have them all in one panel, all fighting for everything there is to fight for. There's kind of a subliminal promise to the reader, when there's one half fighting on the bottom level through most of the issue and the other half on top, that they're gonna meet eventually, and here they are meeting. You want it to look like as soon as they get together, something clicks. For a lot of the characters, it's that as soon as they see Captain America, they go 'phew!' and get a second wind. For the reader, it's 'Look at this group!' It's my job, having torn the Avengers in half, to sell this idea that's been in my head, when I'm putting them back together—this image of this group, connected in a fight."

FINCH: I didn't know what to do with this at all, really. Sometimes Bendis asks for so much stuff! [Laughs] And I don't think he realizes how it's going to look on the page with so much stuff going on. But that was definitely a place where he asked for a lot of stuff, and I really, really tried to get as much of it in as I could. I think I managed to get almost everything in there, actually. I don't normally do little layouts, but since I didn't know how I'd handle this, I did for this one. I knew I wanted to have the main fight going on in the foreground of the panel, and in the background have Foggy surrounded by S.H.I.E.L.D. agents like it says in the script. I planned it out by putting Foggy really small to the right, adding a horizon line, putting Captain America big to the left. I drew 'em both in pretty tight, and then basically drew everything else. The other thing that I did that really helped me was that I drew all the heroes first, because they're the most important and they're the figures that I don't want covered and obscured. Once they were all in there, I drew in the villains around them, so I could make sure they didn't cover the heroes. I didn't end up drawing myself into a corner. That panel took a long time. Maybe I could have skimped a few things! [Laughs]" 

Brian Michael Bendis is the one-man writing machine behind Ultimate Spider-Man, New Avengers, Daredevil, The Pulse and Powers. Mark Bagley has swung with Spider-Man for years, first on Amazing and then on Ultimate. David Finch cut his teeth on Top Cow's Witchblade and Aphrodite IX before heading to Marvel for New Avengers and Moon Knight.

FIGHT SCENES

BY ROBERT KIRKMAN & RYAN OTTLEY



KIRKMAN

When lead character Mark Grayson's father Omni-Man was revealed as a traitor to the planet Earth in *Invincible* #12, creators Robert Kirkman and Ryan Ottley didn't just prove that their Image series was a cut above the normal superhero fare. They proved they were creators in a class all their own with a brutal fight scene that packed as much emotion as it did punches.

For the recent *Invincible* #29, the boys revisited the teen hero's conflict with his father and added several murderous Viltrumite warriors (Omni-Man's original race) to the action. The result is a fight with twice as much action, pathos and inventive technique as the original story. In this lesson, Kirkman and Ottley provide the script for the big fight scene in issue #29, along with key pointers on how to make a big slugfest work for your audience and your story.

SAMPLE FIGHTSCENE

THE SCRIPT: *Invincible* #29, scene one

THE SETUP: Mark Grayson is Invincible, a fledgling superhero with awesome powers and a father, Nolan, who's an alien belonging to the Viltrum Empire. After the Viltrumites exterminate an entire planet's population, Mark consoles his dad about Nolan's human feelings and then gets embroiled in the fight of his life.

KIRKMAN: "[How to start an action sequence] kind of depends on the scene. I don't over-think things too much at all. Sometimes I change things up.

"To a certain extent I was trying to show how Nolan had changed and how he was having trouble dealing with [starting to care about other races besides Viltrumites]. It's good to have the character stuff mixed in with the fight stuff to keep everything lively and whatnot."

OTTLEY: "This fight's a little more brutal [than the similar father-son brawl in *Invincible* #12]. It's a lot bigger of a fight. I just try to get the big emotions in there. No one can look manly getting a tear [on their cheek]. So I put Nolan's thumb up pushing the tear off the cheek like he's so manly."

PAGE 2 & 3: TWO-PAGE SPREAD: Nolan has Mark by the neck in the foreground. Mark has his back arched, like Nolan is pushing him down to the ground, but he's holding him up. Nolan should be in his face, but his pupils should be looking over to the background. About ten or twenty feet away we should see the two Viltrumites, the gray-haired one and the crazy-looking one. The crazy-looking one is talking. They're hovering above the rubble, we can see the sh— as far as the eye can see. They're at the center of this destroyed city, bodies everywhere... much like the spread at the end of last issue.

1- VILTRUMITE: THERE'S the Nolan we've heard stories of.
2- VILTRUMITE: I must admit. You had me WORRIED for a little while there.

INVINCIBLE SCRIPT • ISSUE TWENTY NINE

PANEL 1: Wide panel: Close on Nolan, full of anger, gritting his teeth. He's ready to EXPLODE, he's so angry. He should be wiping the tear from last issue off his eye. With a thumb or something, all manly like... not using his whole hand. There's no more tears coming. Nolan is all business. Mark should be seen behind him. This should be KINDA like the last page of 28, but as a wide panel.

- 1- NOLAN:** They were INFERIOR to us. They were LESSER beings. Their deaths are inconsequential. These are all things I am completely aware of.
- 2- NOLAN:** I should not CARE that they are dead. I've had blood on my hands before—far more than THIS.
- 3- NOLAN:** And yet. I CARE.
- 4- NOLAN (large):** I AM ENRAGED.

PANEL 2: Wide panel: Close on Mark, talking to his dad, reasoning with him. Show some of the rubble and dead Mantis aliens behind him.

- 5- MARK:** That's OKAY, dad. That's NORMAL.
- 6- MARK:** You're not the same person you once were.

PANEL 3: Wide panel: Nolan is zipping around at super-speed, grabbing Mark by the neck. Screaming at him while he chokes him. Mark should look terrified.

- 7- Nolan (large):** WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU KNOW WHAT IS NORMAL?! HOW CAN YOU PRESUME YOUR WAYS ARE RIGHT?!
- 8- Nolan (LARGE):** HOW CAN YOU THINK IT WOULDN'T BE BETTER TO FEEL NOTHING AT TIMES LIKE THESE?!
- 9- Nolan (large):** HOW?!

PANEL 4: Wide panel: Close on Mark, being choked.

- 10- MARK:** DAD—
- 11- MARK (small):** —please.

KIRKMAN: "The bigger the panels are, the faster the story moves. So I wanted to kind of move into the story as quickly as possible and get into the nitty gritty of the fighting. And another thing is that with two-page spreads, it gives you kind of a grand scope, and I wanted to show the demolished city they'd be fighting in that we'd seen in the early issues."

OTTLEY: "I think in the script [Robert] said, 'Put them in really close in the foreground on the left side.' But I kind of chose to leave it more open with the buildings and all that on the bottom. It's the little things that make a splash. I would draw the buildings first, and then drawn little aliens after."

PAGE 4: SPLASH PAGE: Nolan is rocketing forward in the blink of an eye, tackling the crazy-looking Viltrumite. They should both be flying toward us in the foreground. Nolan is flying so fast we should see the other Viltrumite being slammed into the rubble by the force of him zipping by. Mark should be seen in the distance, falling flat on his back, holding his throat, gasping.

1- SFX: THOOM!!

OTTLEY: “[Putting a big action beat on each page is] Kirkman’s style, I think. He just does something per page and it ends perfectly at the end of a page.”

KIRKMAN: “Yeah. I write the pages as pages with beginnings and ends.”

OTTLEY: “So I just get the script and follow it. I don’t usually add panels. I occasionally do, and I’ll ask him about it. But pretty much most of the time, it’s just him I’m following.”

KIRKMAN: “Well, the way I write it’s hard to know where everybody is because I’m literally saying, ‘He bashes this guy in the head and then turns over to see the guy on top of Mark, and then he screams, runs over and grabs the guy, crushes his throat, headbutts him and pops his eye out.’ And then I’ll go, ‘Oh yeah, and then pull out to an overhead shot where you show the two Viltrumites knocked out and Mark’s laying there with Nolan standing over him.’ [Laughs] I don’t know in relation to the background where he’s drawing everybody, so it’s like completely his job to make sure that everybody is in the same spot. It’s definitely a hard part of the job.”

OTTLEY: “I guess it really isn’t a big deal. I think I’ve gotten used to it, where it’s pretty easy to figure out where [everything] is supposed to be.”

KIRKMAN: “A lot of times, Ryan’ll call me up and say, ‘Hey, you had this guy fly through a wall, and now you got him in the same room as this other dude. It’s not going to work.’ Then we’ll talk it over, because things like that happen. It’s part of the process. But that’s totally up to him to keep that all together, and he does a fine job of it.”

OTTLEY: “It’s a lot easier doing these panels [before the characters are all bloodied up]. When it gets into the bloody stuff, I have to keep going back to the last panel to make sure that I’ve drawn someone correct and that’s there a continuation, that they keep getting busted up, and that kind of thing. Then it’s harder to keep track of, but at the same time, it is kind of fun.”

KIRKMAN: “And then you notice I’ve turned the next page into another full-page splash. I like to get everybody into the groove of reading the story as quickly as possible. I like to open with some scenes that have minimal dialogue and some bigger panels to bring people into it, before you start throwing a lot of words at them.”

OTTLEY: “I used to do thumbnail sketches, but now I just get the script and start drawing it. If it’s a really important page like the double-page splash with the huge bloody fight [script pages 12 & 13], I did one there. If it’s a character, I’ll design it separately, but if it’s a background or city, that stuff I’ll just do in my mind while I’m drawing it.”

PAGE 5: FIVE PANELS: From this point on, every page should have rubble from the destruction and body parts from the dead aliens flying through the air during this fight. The impact from them slamming into the rubble would send that stuff flying... so make these fights as gruesome as possible.

PANEL 1: Large panel: Nolan and the Viltrumite he tackled are slamming into a large chunk of a building, smashing it to bits, sending body parts flying.

1- SFX: GOOM!!

PANEL 2: Tall panel: Nolan is on top of the other Viltrumite, pummeling him. Shouting down at him as he does so. More rubble should be shooting up from the force of Nolan’s blows.

2- NOLAN: Who do you think you ARE?! You think you can get away with THIS?! THESE PEOPLE DID NOTHING TO DESERVE THIS!!

3- NOLAN: I was RULING them—they were ready to become a part of the VILTRUM EMPIRE!

4- NOLAN (large): WHY DID YOU DO THIS?!

5- SFX: WRAMM! WRAMM! WRAMM!!

PANEL 3: Tall panel: The Viltrumite is kicking Nolan off him, somehow, sending Nolan flying off him.

6- VILTRUMITE: TO PISS YOU OFF!

7- SFX: KRAK!

PANEL 4: Tall panel: The Viltrumite is up in the air, slamming into Nolan. He should be hitting him mid-air, with super speed, while Nolan flies away from the hit.

8- VILTRUMITE: The more pissed you are—the less you THINK. The less you think—the easier you’ll be to DEFEAT!

9- VILTRUMITE: Not that our victory here was EVER in question.

10- SFX: THROKK!

PANEL 5: Wide panel: Viltrumite is pushing Nolan into the ground, more impact, more debris, more bodies.

11- VILTRUMITE: I can assume that since Lucan is nowhere to be found—you’ve killed him.

12- VILTRUMITE: GOOD.

13- VILTRUMITE: I always KNEW he was weak. Soon, I’ll know you were weak, TOO.

14- SFX: CHOOM!!

PAGE 6: FIVE PANELS

PANEL 1: Wide panel: Mark is flying into the Viltrumite, knocking him off Nolan. He should be slamming into him, wrapping his arms around his shoulders, pinning the Viltrumite's arms down as he pushes him off Nolan.

1- MARK: GET OFF HIM!!

PANEL 2: Small panel: Close on the Viltrumite as he flexes his arms up, breaking Mark's hold on him—forcing Mark to let go.

2- VILTRUMITE: Foolish CHILD. You'll DIE soon enough!

PANEL 3: Small panel: The Viltrumite is punching Mark, sending him flying down toward the ground.

3- VILTRUMITE: No need to RUSH it!

4- SFX: POW!

PANEL 4: Small panel: The other Viltrumite's hand is on Mark's leg, grabbing him by the ankle.

PANEL 5: Wide panel: Mark is flying toward us in the foreground as we see the other viltrumite throwing him from the background. Past him, further in the background we should see Nolan and the bald Viltrumite, fighting—more rubble, more bodies flying about. Nolan should be standing now, meeting the Viltrumite as he flies down at him.

5- OTHER VILTRUMITE: THIS ONE IS MINE!!

KIRKMAN: "The more action you show, the slower the action moves. If I showed him reaching out the hand, grabbing the foot, swinging him around and throwing him, that'd be four panels instead of two, and it would take longer to look at. And it would slow the action down in your mind. I try to make everything quick. I was also trying to illustrate how fast the Viltrumites actually move. So you have the guy punching Mark in one panel, and then you see a hand grabbing his foot. And then you see that's a completely different Viltrumite that comes out of nowhere and grabs his foot after the other guy punched him. And as a writer, you've got to know that about 20 percent of the people are actually going to notice some of these things."

PAGE 7: SEVEN PANELS

PANEL 1: Wide panel: Viltrumite choking Mark. He should be on him, with super speed, catching him as he flies away from him... grabbing him by the throat.

1- VILTRUMITE: You know—some of us Viltrumites actually PREFER to dismember our victims. They think it leaves a better MESSAGE. When it gets down to it, I think they just like making a MESS.

2- VILTRUMITE: Me? I prefer to AVOID a mess. I like to see the look in a victim's eyes the SECOND they die—I want to experience the moment their body goes limp and their life ENDS. You can't do that if their eyes are already lying on the ground at their feet.

3- VILTRUMITE: I prefer things to be more PERSONAL.

PANEL 2: Wide panel: On top of Mark, choking, talking down to him. He should be pushing him down into the ground as he talks—still holding him by the neck. Mark should be clawing at his hand, trying to pry it off his neck.

4- VILTRUMITE: Weren't able to take a breath WERE you? You're SCARED aren't you? ADMIT it... you're TERRIFIED of ME. You're in WAY over your head here, child.

5- VILTRUMITE: Don't worry, though—it'll all be over SOON.

PANEL 3 (FIVE PANEL ROW): Small panel: Close on Mark, choking, can't breath—not doing to well.

6- VILTRUMITE (OFF PANEL): Very soon.

PANEL 4: Small panel: Show Mark grabbing at his hands, trying to pry them off him. He's not budging the Viltrumite.

PANEL 5: Small panel: Mark is punching the Viltrumite in the face, but he's weak—almost about to pass out.

7- SFX: KRAK!

PANEL 6: Small panel: The Viltrumite is unaffected. He continues to strangle Mark.

8- VILTRUMITE: I commend the EFFORT, I DO, but it will have NO effect. You are as good as DEAD.

PANEL 7: Small panel: Close on Mark, he's about to die... he should look terrified.

9- MARK (Shaky): ...

OTTLEY: "There's something fun about all this anger and violence, and this close-up shot of the Viltrumite just choking the crap out of him."

KIRKMAN: "Mark's getting choked, and the guy is like, 'You're totally going to die!' Everybody knows he's not going to die, but you turn the page, and Nolan saves the day. So that's a beat."

OTTLEY: "The biggest thing is getting the close-ups [like in panel two]. I think a close-up makes [the fight] more intense, when the guy has his hands on Mark's face...you have to feel the tension in his hands and fingers in a close-up like that."

KIRKMAN: "[When I'm working on a Marvel book] I just ignore the fact that ads exist. If there's something really, really important that I want to make sure that people will not be spoiled by it being on the right side of the page, I'll make it a two-page spread, or I'll make it one of those nifty two-page spreads that's basically two panel pages but the panels bleed over into the other page. And if there's an ad on the left-hand page and you're reading the right-hand page, it's still a surprise page."

PAGE 8: THREE PANELS

PANEL 1: Large panel: Bald Viltrumite is slamming into the one on top of Mark, pushing him off Mark—sending him flying toward us in the foreground. Nolan's costume should be more ripped up now.

1- SFX: CHOOM!!

PANEL 2: Wide panel: Nolan is flying at super speed, grabbing the two Viltrumites by their heads. In these panels, just make the backgrounds speed lines since they're moving so fast.

2- NOLAN: Did you know the empire was sending you to your DEATHS when they sent you here?

3- NOLAN: Or are you just starting to realize that NOW?

PANEL 3: Wide panel: Nolan is slamming the two Viltrumite's heads together. He's cracking the skull of the one that's not the bald one. He's not killing him, but he should have a big gash on his head from here on out—and there should be a little spurt of blood coming from the area where the two heads are impacting.

4- SFX: KRAK!

KIRKMAN: “[Here] I wanted to have a moment between Mark and his dad because, not to spoil the story or anything, but this is pretty much it for them...for now at least. So I wanted Nolan to kind of scold him for not being fast enough and have a little fatherly moment to show their relationship. When you're writing you have to have peaks and valleys, or you've got to have your exciting moments and your quiet moments. If it's all exciting moments, they lose their value. People get used to them, and there's nothing to build to. You've got to drop down for a second. And I like the idea of seeing the reflection of the Viltrumites in his eye.”

OTTLEY: “[The father-son moment in the heat of battle] is something we hadn't done before, and I thought it was such a good idea. It kept it intense. I think a good back and forth is always good. You're pretty far out in that last panel, and then it's an extreme close-up right there when Nolan says, ‘You better get ready.’” [Laughs]

KIRKMAN: “I always try to start my left-hand pages [with a big reveal]. If it was a right-hand page [like this set-up scene], you would see [the reveal], because when you turn the page it's just natural to glance at both pages. So I try not to put anything even remotely surprising [on right-hand pages]. When I plot, just to be mindful of when people are turning the pages.”

KIRKMAN: “I've written things before in *Walking Dead* where I've had to go, ‘Oh! That guy can't punch someone through a wall.’ That doesn't work in a comic where it's supposed to be realistic. But with *Invincible*, everything is so extreme with big guys flying around punching holes through walls and whatnot. You can do things that are kind of gruesome and comedic at the same time, and it doesn't take the reader out of the story too much.”

OTTLEY: “Yeah, [in panel three] I was thinking, ‘Bloody Three Stooges.’ It's fun to draw. I'm not a violent person or anything like that, but I enjoy drawing it. I turn on my hard music, grit my teeth while I'm drawing and go at it.”

KIRKMAN: “This isn't supposed to be a funny scene, but you've got to kind of toe the line—otherwise you'll pull people out of the story, and they'll start to notice other things that aren't necessarily funny but made them laugh in relation to the other thing that made them laugh.”

PAGE 9: FOUR PANELS

PANEL 1: Small panel: Mark is in the foreground, looking back at Nolan as he throws the two Viltrumites into the rubble past him. He should be holding his neck, sitting up in the rubble the Viltrumite had him pinned down to.

1- MARK (Shaky): >cough!<

2- MARK (Shaky): >cough!<

PANEL 2: Small panel: Mark's zipping up off the ground as Nolan—with super speed flies toward us, grabbing Mark as he zips by.

3- SFX: WHOOSH!

PANEL 3: Large panel: Mark is standing in the rubble now. Nolan has put him down next to him, and still has an arm on him from putting him down. Nolan should be looking at Mark, looking him over, making sure he's okay. They should both be partially in a fighting stance, ready to go back to fighting at any moment. This is the calm before the storm.

4- NOLAN: We've only got a second. Are you okay?

5- MARK: Think so. Yeah.

6- NOLAN: What are you DOING out there? You need to fight FAST. You can't give them a SECOND to anticipate your attack—you can't take the time to think. You just ACT and if you're lucky enough to land a blow—act AGAIN.

7- MARK: I can't—they're just TOO fast. I'm TRYING but I can't. I'm just not USED to this. I—I don't think I'm READY.

PANEL 4: Tall panel: This panel should be really thin. Close-up on Nolan, looking really serious. Maybe have the Viltrumites reflected in his pupil, coming at him—or ignore my panel direction all together and have Mark and Nolan in the foreground of this wide panel looking back at the attacking Viltrumites coming toward them. Or whatever.

8- NOLAN: You better GET ready.

PAGE 12 & 13: THIRTY TWO PANELS

- PANEL 1:** Nolan punched in the face.
- PANEL 2:** Viltrumite kicked in the nuts, Mark's boot.
- PANEL 3:** Mark kicked in face.
- PANEL 4:** Blood splatter in air.
- PANEL 5:** Nolan gritting teeth while fighting (tight close-up).
- PANEL 6:** Another punch, this time to Bald Viltrumite.
- PANEL 7:** More blood in the air.
- PANEL 8:** Elbow to head. Whoever.
- PANEL 9:** Knee to chin, whoever.
- PANEL 10:** Blood in air.
- PANEL 11:** Viltrumite screaming in pain.
- PANEL 12:** Mark punched, lense shattering.
- PANEL 13:** Punch in stomach, whoever.
- PANEL 14:** Head butt.
- PANEL 15:** More blood in air, maybe a tooth if you want.
- PANEL 16:** Another elbow to somewhere.
- PANEL 17:** Another punch to the face.
- PANEL 18:** Another kick to the head.
- PANEL 19:** More blood in air.
- PANEL 20:** A big punch to the back, whatever.

KIRKMAN: "We worked on [these scenes] quite a bit just to make sure everything was cool. I don't know if it goes all the way back to Jack Kirby, but I know Frank Miller, Walt Simonson and Eric Larson...they all do stuff like this all the time. And I think a writer/artist will do a different kind of shot than a writer will tell an artist to do just because it's kind of hard to describe this kind of stuff. And I think a lot of times an artists will come up with something totally visually stimulating on the page, but the writer may not be looking at the final product enough to come up with something like this. [For most of these scenes] I wanted to come up with something more artist-driven than writer-driven."

OTTLEY: "[In the first panel] I think I was going for, 'You ever seen a close-up where a boxer is punching a guy in the face, and the spit and sweat on the face kind of beads off in slow motion?' That's what I was going for. [Nolan] hits him so hard it kind of beads off."

KIRKMAN: "And I like making [colorist Bill Crabtree] color 5,000 little drops of blood. I used to letter the book myself up until issue #13. With issue #14, Russ Wooton took over, and so to make everything run smoothly, when I get the pages I sit down in Photoshop and run through the script doing little balloon places. I'll draw where the balloons should be on the actual page, and while I'm doing that I'll read over the script and make sure it still flows through the pages. I'll add some balloons here and there to explain some things a bit more for the reader. [Sometimes] I'll put it over a character's eye and the letterer will say, 'Whoa! Hey! Let's not put that there. Let's tuck it in between panels.'" [Laughs]

OTTLEY: "I like how [letterer Russ Wooton] did not cover up too much of the art. I probably should have left room for [the 'Mark!' scream], but other times I just feel like filling up the whole panel with the face and have him decide where he wants to put it. I like to make other people's jobs harder, you know?" [Laughs]

OTTLEY: "I didn't really follow Kirkman's script on this. I think I did a couple, but there's so many panels and not so much room in any of the panels. So I was just fitting whatever would fit. I did the panels first because of the panel borders, and then I drew the big guys over it, and then I added all the panel content. It took me like two days to pencil it. It was a cool idea he had, and I was happy to do it."

KIRKMAN: "I've only got 22 pages, and I wanted to make this fight scene seem like it takes a long time, so I wanted to have the two 16-panel page grids. If you'll notice, in panel one it's nighttime. And then as you read through the panels, the sky changes, and at the end it's daytime. And at the beginning of the issue, I think it's just starting to get dark. So you kind of get the sense they fought all through the night, and not it's getting to the day and there's still a couple of pages of fighting to go. So I wanted to show passage of time, and I wanted Ryan to show off."

PAGE 14: SIX PANELS

PANEL 1: Wide panel: Nolan is slamming both fists on his opponents head in a clapping motion. This should be knocking out the Viltrumite. We should see his eyes rolling into the back of his head.

1- SFX: GOOM!

PANEL 2: Small panel: Nolan is holding the Viltrumite up to his face by the collar—screaming in his unconscious face. He's spitting blood into his face as he screams.

2- NOLAN: Do you regret what you've done NOW?!

PANEL 3: Small panel: Closer on Nolan, screaming.

3- NOLAN (Huge): DO YOU?!

PANEL 4: Small panel: Pull back, make this panel look like panel two, only Nolan is looking over to the side now, at an off-panel Mark. He's still holding the Viltrumite up to him in the same position, maybe a little statting can be done? Maybe?

4- NOLAN: Son, have you—?

PANEL 5: Wide panel: The OTHER Viltrumite (I should have named these guys) is on top of Mark, wailing on him, battering him into the rubble... slowly. He, too is about to pass out, so he should look like he can barely lift his fist. He should have Mark by the neck, though, strangling him, while he shakily pulls his fist back to punch him. We should see Nolan dropping his Viltrumite into the rubble in the background.

5- MARK (Shaky): Son, have you—?

6- MARK (Shaky): Help.

PANEL 6: Wide panel: Close on Nolan, screaming with rage—he about to kill someone, dawg!

7- NOLAN (HUGE): MARK!

PAGE 15: SIX PANELS

PANEL 1: Wide panel: Nolan is bashing the Viltrumite on Mark in the back of the head with a fist, pushing him off Mark, into the rubble past him. We should see Nolan in the air, behind him, with his hand open, on the back of the Viltrumites head, pushing his face into the rubble... something like that.

1- NOLAN (HUGE): You'll DIE for THIS!!

2 SFX: SKROOM!!

PANEL 2: Small panel: Nolan grabs the Viltrumite's throat, crushing it as he grabs it. It should be clear that he's crushing the thing. We should see blood gushing out of the Viltrumite's mouth.

3- SFX: SCRUNK!

PANEL 3: Small panel: Nolan is still holding the Viltrumite by the throat, he's pulling him toward him and headbutting him in the face. We should see that this is crushing the Viltrumite's nose and ocular cavities back into his head. Oh, hell, have an eyeball popping out—that's fun.

4- SFX: GOOM!

PANEL 4: Small panel: Nolan is dropping the Viltrumite into the rubble in front of him, letting go of his neck. Really this could just be a close-up on his hand letting go if you want... whatever.

PANEL 5: Small panel: Close on Nolan, looking around at the destruction around him... he's injured, out of it, about to pass out.

PANEL 6: Tall panel: Pull back to show Nolan, hunched over, standing up in the rubble. In front of him we should see the dead Viltrumite. We should see Mark and Other Viltrumite in the rubble too, both unconscious. Nolan should look like he's completely spent... just out of it, about to fall over.

5- NOLAN (SHAKY): >huff<

6- NOLAN (SHAKY): >huff<

7- NOLAN (SHAKY): It's--

8- NOLAN (SHAKY): >huff<

9- NOLAN (SHAKY): --OVER.

OTTLEY: "The last panel was hard, because in the fight scene they weren't all that close to each other. In this last panel, they're kind of close together, but I really wanted to keep them all in the same panel. And I didn't want to back off too far. It's not completely realistic, but I think it's something where nobody really catches it. It still works."

PAGE 16 & 17:

The black Viltrumite is slamming into Nolan with one fist out. He should have his arm stretched out above him, but he's upside down, flying almost straight down into Nolan. Also, he has a hole punched through him, his intestine are dangling out—but most of them are being held in by his other arm—but have some just dangling behind him as he flies down. He should be pushing Nolan INTO the rubble, so much so that we can see Nolan bending in half, clearly his spine is breaking. Nolan should be almost vomiting blood out of his mouth while this happens. It should look like he's dying here, for sure. We should see Mark and the other two Viltrumites lying in the rubble, nearly passed out, nearly dead around him. Of course, the impact is sending some debris into the air—and stuff—just make it look cool.

1 SFX: CHOOM!! (can you put this being all the blood drops and stuff—but in front of the speed lines?)

2 SFX: SNAP!

PAGE 17: NINE PANELS

PANEL 1: Tall panel: Nolan is in the foreground in the crater—busted all to hell, bloody, looking dead... really. People should think he's DEAD here. The Black Viltrumite is standing over him, shakily, barely upright, holding his guts, as bloody if not bloodier than the rest of the people in this fight. He's about to fall over—but he's looking down at Nolan. Try to show the others in the rubble, passed out in the background... just so we see everyone in this panel. If you can't show all—no big deal.

1- VILTRUMITE: Next time you KILL someone—make sure they're DEAD.

PANEL 2: Small panel: Close on the Black Viltrumite—his eyes are rolling back into his head. We're close on his face, but we should see by the tilt of his head that he's falling over.

PANEL 3: Small panel: The Black Viltrumite is hitting the ground, out cold... show his intestine hanging out again—for fun.

2- SFX: THUD.

PANEL 4: Small panel: Close on Mark, out cold in the rubble.

PANEL 5: Small panel: Close on Red/White hair Viltrumite Mark fought, dead in the rubble.

PANEL 6: Small panel: Close on Nolan, out cold in the rubble. Make sure he's all bloody and sh— too.


PANEL 7: Small panel: Close on Other Viltrumite, the balding white one, half opening one eye as he barely hangs on to consciousness. He should be pulling his sleeve back—if he has one, (if he doesn't, let me know and we'll figure something out) to reveal a futuristic communicator watch, kind like the one the GotG have in ish 7. He's bringing it up to his mouth to talk.

PANEL 8: Small panel: Close on him again, talking into the watch... passing out as he does so.

3- VIL (SHAKY)(SMALL): It's--

4- VIL (SHAKY)(SMALL): --done.

PANEL 9: Small panel: Vil is totally passed out now. Out cold like the rest.

KIRKMAN: "I had the idea to break Nolan's back, and maybe he'll heal from that, maybe not. I just wanted to add another moment. I'm always writing scripts and thinking, 'Maybe I can throw something else in here to bump it up another level.' And I like the gore stuff. It has a lot of impact on a book like *Invincible*, where it's constantly switching back and forth between 'an 11-year-old could read this' and 'an 11-year-old could *not* read this.'" 

Writer Robert Kirkman and artist Ryan Ottley deliver unbeatable entertainment on their ongoing title *Invincible*.

FLASHBACKS BY BRUBAKER, EPTING & LARK



BRUBAKER

Sometimes the power of modern day storytelling is in the past, as with the flashback scene from Ed Brubaker and Steve Epting's *Captain America #4*, where Cap is attacked by Crossbones while recalling Baron Zemo's torture of Bucky in World War II.

To make the flashback pop, Epting had to split art duties within his pages with artist Michael Lark. "Ed had pretty much spelled out in the script which panels were flashbacks and where. Michael's panels had to equal half the page and mine did too," recalls Epting. Since

Lark completed his panels before Epting started laying his out, the pair set ground rules to ensure storytelling consistency. "We kind of agreed to do horizontal panels, and Steve would cut and paste them together to get some variety in the panel sizes," says Lark.

What resulted is one of the most memorable fight scenes in years, spanning several decades and two drawing tables. In this lesson, the entire creative team pitches tips on how to make a challenging flashback work for the artist as well as the reader.

SAMPLE FLASHBACKSCENE

THE SCRIPT: *Captain America #4*, scene five

THE SETUP: After visiting Arlington National Cemetery and investigating the desecrated tombstones of former Captain America stand-ins, Cap sets off on his bike in search of clues, only to run right into one—a former sparring partner, Crossbones. While battling Crossbones, Cap's memory starts playing tricks on him and flashes back to a torture scene involving Bucky in World War II.

BRUBAKER: "I had to establish this Cap moment. So you need the establishing shot, and then the closer shot. And then you go into the memory flash, where he's being assaulted by this memory."

EPTING: "As far as the establishing panel, the first shot on the motorcycle, that's sort of the most important part for the entire five or six pages. You need that shot before you move in for the close-up, and the close-up is just because he's going to be moving into flashback. You want a tight look on his face. Looking at it now, I'm wondering...I guess that it's almost the exact same size as the face below it, so it's sort of a good transition into the flashback."

"I think I may have toyed with the idea of using the exact same angle. Sometimes the repeating panels throw off the rhythm of the page. You look at the first panel, and you have a strong diagonal from top left to bottom right. Then the next one, it kind of counters that because he's leaning the other way so it gets a little more movement to it. Like the bike is moving. I think that's why I didn't want to repeat the same angle with Cap's face. And the page is a little more balanced that way."

LARK: "My first shot was kind of a close-up, so that was an easy one as well. We know Cap is there in chains, and from a shot like that it's real obvious to me."

"The next panel that Ed describes was that shot where we see Bucky being tortured, and we see Zemo. It's really clear that this has to be from Cap's point of view so we can see everybody. And it just kind of goes on from there."

"So a lot of the time what I have to do is just kind of go back and forth between a shot over Cap's shoulder and a shot over Zemo's shoulder. And that makes it real easy. [With this scene] I didn't have to quite follow that rule because I was being interspersed with Steve's panels."

CAPTAIN AMERICA SCRIPT • ISSUE FOUR

TOP HALF OF PAGE BY STEVE EPTING

PAGE 1-

1- Cap drives down a two-lane highway on a motorcycle, passing traffic. Kids in cars are looking at him, as are their parents.

NARRATION:

Desecrating graves... Who besides the Skull would go that low?

NARR:

Or is this just more of his final orders being carried out? Like London and Paris...

2- Close on him, his face tight in thought, frowning as he whips through traffic.

NARR:

No, if it was the Skull, they wouldn't have left Bucky's headstone alone... So, who—

BOTTOM HALF OF PAGE BY MICHAEL LARK

3- Flashback to a scene from Cap and Bucky held prisoner by Zemo. Steve's army uniform is shredded and his Cap shirt shows underneath. He's chained to a chair, straining to break free. The shadow of Zemo falls across the brick wall around him.

OFF:

—Who vill it be to die first, herr Captain?

4- And now we're behind Cap, looking over his shoulder, and we see Zemo standing over him, and in the background, Bucky is strung across a wall, and a big shirtless Nazi is whipping him right across his chest with a cat-of-nine-tails as he screams. They're in a dungeon of sorts. Bucky is nearly 21 here.

ZEMO:

I have something to tell you.

BUCKY:

Yhaaaauugg!

PAGE 2- BY STEVE EPTING

1- And he comes out of his memory flash dazed, close on him, as someone is shooting at him from off-panel.

NARR:

What's - what is that? Why would I -

SFX(off):

Blam blam

2- Biggest panel. The front tire of his motorcycle has been shot out, and the bike is in the process of wrecking, skidding out, and this is one of those panels where there's a few images of Cap leaping off of it and flipping in the air...

NARR:

Shots fired. Get it together, Rogers...

NARR:

Someone's setting you up...

3- To land on the highway in a perfect three-point stance, low, one hand on the ground, his other arm holding his shield up, ready. He's looking around, eyes tight.

NARR:

Where is he? Who -

4- And from his POV we see Crossbones striding toward him across the highway, cars swerving to avoid him. He's holding out his guns, firing.

NARR:

Crossbones...

SFX:

Blam blam blam

BRUBAKER: "I love the last panel [Steve drew] where the motorcycle is flying over him. You'll notice that's not in the script at all. Steve did that all on his own. It was so awesome. I always pictured the motorcycle getting shot out and Cap diving, and Steve just took that and choreographed this amazing thing where you see the motorcycle, because that's really what would happen. The front tire gets shot out as he's going 65 or 70 miles an hour. He leaps off, the motorcycle flips, and I love that Crossbones is just striding towards him. Meanwhile, the motorcycle is just flipping right over him! He doesn't even try to duck or anything."

EPTING: "I thought it'd be cool if the bike's flipping by. I don't know, it's just one of those things where you go, 'Wow! Wouldn't this look cool!' I guess it worked."

"And sometimes the writers will repeat certain things like, 'Cap lands in a crouch,' and if you've drawn that a couple of times already, even if it's in a different issue, you want to do something different. I guess he's still landing there in a crouch, but I think I may have even thrown in an extra panel to get the bike flipping around. It's one of those things where you can take what's there and just expand on it a little bit and make something even more dynamic out of it."

"It's more like when you're reading a scene like this—tire gets shot, bike slips, Cap lands in a crouch—you try and visualize it in your head, and I guess that's sort of more what I was thinking, and the logical progression is that the bike keeps flipping. It carries into the next panel."

BRUBAKER: "There were a lot of things that needed to be established here: Crossbones being a total badass, the alternate memory that Cap was having unlocked inside him about what really happened with him and Bucky. There were a lot of layers going on besides trying to make it a more cool and more interesting fight scene."

LARK: "It's all about choreography. Especially in an action sequence, the most important thing is getting everything choreographed properly. You know, if I have to draw people around a table talking, I have to figure out who's talking in what order for the whole scene and then kind of space the people around the table accordingly. The first person talking is always going to be on the left side of the panel, so that's going to determine my shots for me."

BRUBAKER: "And amazingly, they both thought that [the two-artist process] worked much faster because they each had to draw half a page and just put it together. So what's interesting to me is that as different as their styles are, you put them on the same page next to each other, and they really look well together. It's convenient that they're both two of the best storytellers in comics. [Laughs] I got really lucky there. But they communicated back and forth to make sure that the transition moments would work really well."

"[In this scene, the transition] was very tightly choreographed where he's screaming in one panel, and it cuts out to where Crossbones is like, 'What's wrong with you?' [Cap's] so distracted that he can barely defend himself against a guy who's such a formidable enemy. It's a two-pronged assault, and that's one of the reasons that it succeeds."

PAGE 3-

1- EPTING- Close on Cap with his shield up to deflect the bullets.

NARR:

...He did this?

2- LARK- Back in Cap's memory. Close on Zemo as he grabs Bucky's face, squeezing it a little, pulling his crestfallen head up for Cap to see.

ZEMO:

Or perhaps I will take zis one's eyes instead... Like you took mine face from me.

3- LARK- And we look past Zemo back across the room at Steve in the chair, screaming and straining to break his bonds. We see two Nazi guards behind him, snickering at him, one about to hit him in the back of his head with a rifle butt.

ZEMO:

Would you like to vatch zat?

4- EPTING- Back in reality, Cap is getting hit by Crossbones, who just wallops him with a wide swing. Cars are swerving wide to avoid them, but we don't need to see much of that, because they'll start staying far away soon, I'd think.

CAP:

-ooo!

FLASHBACKS

EPTING: "I think you can't over-think a lot of it. A lot of this just works out because everything is sort of standard left-to-right in each panel. Michael sets his up the same way. Zemo's on the left in every panel, Cap's on the right...except when you have a reverse shot. I'm doing the same thing with the Crossbones and Cap fight, so it all works together pretty well. I see in my panels it looks like I'm alternating between close-ups and then pulling back for a big shot pretty much all the way through. Michael is sort of doing the same thing with a close-up, pull back, close-up, pull back."

LARK: "And besides, it's Baron Zemo! You gotta draw Baron Zemo as much as possible if you're going to be given him in a script. A guy with a rag over his head and a crown, it doesn't get much better than that. When I got that script, I was like, 'Oh yeah! This is great!' It kind of just screamed out at me for that. It's kind of this weird juxtaposition of this ridiculous guy, and Ed kind of making him almost a little serious. But you really can't take him that seriously. It's fun. It's fun comic books."

BRUBAKER: "It's funny, because Zemo is such a ridiculous-looking character. Michael did the smartest thing you could do, which was take him back to the World War II version where he's not in the goofy costume. He's still got that weird crown on his head, but if you look closely, he's wearing like a Nazi uniform. He's not in some purple goofy outfit."

PAGE 4-

1- EPTING- Now Cap tumbles to dodge his next blow, holding his shield up to fend off the next attack after that. Crossbones smiles under his mask as his swing misses. Make this fight really exciting and dramatic.

NARR:

Stay here, Steve – Stay in this fight.

CROSSBONES

That's more like it!

2- LARK- Back in Cap's memory. Zemo takes the whip from the big sweaty Nazi as Bucky hangs on the wall, his head hung slack. Zemo is laughing. Steve is yelling.

ZEMO:

Ha ha ha ha ha ha!

STEVE:

Get the hell away from him, Zemo, you sick –

3- EPTING- And now Crossbones smashes a fist into Cap's shield, which he barely gets up in time to block the blow.

CAP:

Ah!

NARR:

What are these memories?

NARR:

Someone – someone's getting inside my head...

4- LARK- Cap's memory – Close on Zemo, laughing maniacally, his eyes crazed under his hood, sweat dripping past them as he swings the cat-of-nine-tails.

ZEMO:

Ah ha ha ha ha!

PAGE 5-

1- EPTING- More with Cap and Crossbones, Cap dodges but stumbles or something.

NARR:

Can't keep them... out...

2- LARK- Cap's memory – Steve struggles in his chair, starts to break free of his bonds.

STEVE:

Leave him alone!

3- EPTING- Again he barely deflects a heavy blow from Crossbones, scrambling away from him as cars screech past barely avoiding them.

NARR:

Never going to win this fight... Can't focus...

NARR:

Barely defending myself...

4- LARK- Cap's memory – one of the Nazis behind him smashes him over the head with a rifle butt, hard.

SFX:

KRAK

EPTING: "I think I'm fairly weak on action scenes. Other people tell me I'm not. I don't see it. I think that's one of my weak areas, but [in my version of panel three] the camera is a lot closer to the ground, like under the bumper of the car. And [panel one] where Crossbones is punching him, the camera is a little lower there too. It's sort of tilted at an angle. That's the kind of thing you can do just to keep a sense of movement. You've got to play with those camera angles, and move it around because it's easy to get trapped in these sort of static shots. You know: one figure on the left punching another on the right. If you move up or down, higher or lower than eye level—tilted to the side a little bit—that can add a lot to the dynamic flow."

LARK: "A lot of times I'll like to show those kind of impact panels [like panel four] pretty tight. Also, when you do a panel like that, the background can become distracting. There are times to use backgrounds and times not to. That's a case where that's a real abrupt moment. The panel before it is the exact same size, but it takes longer. There's dialogue in it, and then in the next panel, it's just 'Krak!' across the face. Weed out the background so the reader stops looking at it. It's kind of manipulating the reader a little bit.

"A lot of choices like that are less about drama, and sometimes it's purely a practical matter. Because Cap is sitting in a chair and there are two guys standing behind him [in panel two], I have to do a shot from lower down, otherwise all we'll see of the guys standing behind him is their stomachs. It's just a practical matter."

EPTING: "He's absolutely right. Sometimes you have to move the camera just to fit everything in there. And a lot of this stuff is just instinct, especially after you've been doing this for so long. You don't really think about it too much."

PAGE 6- BY STEVE EPTING

1- Back in reality, Cap is dazed and Crossbones is tearing into him as the cars drive past them on the highway, swerving wildly to get out of their way.

NARR:

No... What is that? That's not what happened... But...

NARR:

No. Don't let this -

2- And Crossbones lands a solid shot to the solar plexus, knocking Cap to his knees.

CAP:

Oooff!

3- Then he kicks Cap across the face, hard, sending him flying across the road a bit. He yells at him as he kicks him.

CROSSBONES:

This is pathetic...

CROSSBONES (LINKED):

You're pathetic!

4- Cap crawls on the pavement, blood trickling from his mouth.

CAP (WEAK):

...you're the coward... has to cheat...

CAP (WEAK-LINKED)

...has to... deface grave markers...

5- Crossbones kicks him in the side, kicks him so hard he lifts him off the ground a bit.

CROSSBONES:

What? What'd you just say to me?


CAP (WEAK-LINKED) Unh!

EPTING: "One thing I wanted to do with the whole scene with the flashback and all the horizontal panels was to continue the horizontal panels format. But it's sort of limiting in some ways, especially if you want to show full figures. So when Ed describes the panels as 'Cap on the ground struggling, and Crossbones coming to him,' there's just sort of one way to do it and have the formatting work, and that's the close-up of the feet."

BRUBAKER: "And then Crossbones just lays him out. He's just punching him and kicking him and kicking him. It's brutal. It's like if you have an acid flashback or suddenly you're drugged, and you're having a hard time telling the difference between reality and your nightmare."

EPTING: "Generally people who are newer to writing comics will sometimes go into all this overly descriptive stuff on how they want the panels laid out. If you were to write it all out that way and say you wanted to build up to 'slowly zooming in where you have close-ups of the ground and his feet,' it would almost be more restrictive that way because then the artist is sitting there just trying to figure out how to do that instead of it just working out naturally."

EPTING: "[The last panel] pretty much is a visual cue that that's the end of the scene to pull way back out. Working with Ed has always been a breeze. Everything the artist needs is there, and it's fun. Pretty much every issue, whether it's a different setting or whatever, there's always something interesting to draw. One thing I like about it is he'll generally have several different scene changes and locations in an issue. That makes it great because you're not drawing the same background over and over. That's more interesting for the reader as well."

LARK: "Obviously some of the credit for [the scene] has got to go to Ed. He planned out ahead of time what he wanted to show there, and the three of us working together...I don't think it could have come out any better." 

PAGE 7 BY STEVE EPTING

1- He looks down at Cap, yelling at him. Cap is in pain, dazed, and he spits out blood.

CROSSBONES:

Get it straight, star man. I'm here for one thing - Revenge!

CROSSBONES:

The Skull ain't here to take his own, so I gotta be his hands...

CAP:

...coward...

2- Crossbones yells, furious, and unsatisfied, and kicks Cap across the face, sending Cap flailing a bit.

CROSSBONES:

Ahh! Damn it!

CROSSBONES: Freakin' son of a %@\$#...

CAP: Unhh!

3- Close on Crossbones, pointing an angry finger at Cap, really pissed off now.

CROSSBONES:

I don't know what you're talkin' about. I didn't go to no graveyard...

CROSSBONES:

Some Russian guy just called and told me where I could find you today... But this - This is way too easy...

4- And then Crossbones backs away through the traffic jam around them, people in cars looking at him, shocked. Cap just lies on the ground, struggling to get his wind back.

CROSSBONES:

I ain't takin' you out like this...

CROSSBONES:

You tell that Russian, too...Tell him he messed with the wrong hombre.

5- And Cap struggles to his knees. Crossbones is nowhere to be seen.

6- Pull back a bit, Cap on his knees, weak, leaning back, with his head flopped forward, the cars around him stopped, and some people have gotten out of their cars now, worried about him. A woman approaches him carefully, like she wants to help him.

NARR: ...Russian...?

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